

**7 SEPTEMBER 2008**  
**SUNDAY AFTERNOON**  
**RABBINIC SIYYUM**  
STARTS AT 2.00PM  
**AN AFTERNOON**  
**OF JEWISH STUDY**  
**PRESENTED BY NINE**  
**RABBINIC COLLEAGUES**  
**OF RABBI DR ANDREW GOLDSTEIN**  
**ON THE SUBJECT OF**  
**"THE HISTORICAL JEWISH FIGURE WHO MOST INSPIRED ME"**  
THERE WILL BE NO PARKING AT NPLS, USE GREEN LANE CAR PARK.



## A Rabbinic Siyyum

to mark the retirement of  
Rabbi Dr Andrew Goldstein

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Organised by  
Richard Conradi  
and  
Rabbi Dr Charles Middleburgh

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Chaired by  
Rabbi Dr Charles Middleburgh

Mincha: Rabbi Nancy Morris

7<sup>th</sup> September 2008

7<sup>th</sup> Elul 5768

## Siyyum

Rabbi Jonah Sievers

Rabbi Rachel Benjamin

Rabbi Dr Tom Kucera

Rabbi Aaron Goldstein

*Tea will be served in the Marquee*

Rabbi Mark Goldsmith

Rabbi Misha Kapustin

Rabbi Pete Tobias

Rabbi Frank Dabba Smith

Dr Eric Friedland

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## 1. Rabbi Jonah Sievers

### “Rav Ovadia Josef – The courage to be lenient”<sup>1</sup>

It is a pleasure and an honour to be invited to speak on this occasion. You, Sharon and by extension this holy congregation have been my home for most of my studies at Leo Baeck College. A place to which I return now more than six years after our Ordination party took place here six years ago.

I still remember some of the words you told me during the Semicha-service and they have some connection to the person I am about to speak about, albeit in a very strange way.

I am probably one of the few liberal rabbis who has anything good to say about the person under discussion. There is no doubt that the historic figure, a person of our day and age, is one of the most influential rabbis of our time, a rabbi, who will influence the halachic behaviour of a whole section of the Jewish people beyond his own lifetime. Whereas the Pesakim of important rabbis like Moses Feinstein and Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, are being reversed by today's rabbinic establishment<sup>2</sup>, I think that Dr. Marc Shapiro's assessment is right, that this rabbi's influence will outlive him. However the person under discussion is known to liberal circles mainly for his outrageous and shocking comments. But there is another side to this rabbi, aspects which I frankly find admirable and which we can also respect, even when we are not part of his peer group.

This person was born 1920 just two days after Yom Kippur to a to a working class Baghdadi family with no yichus whatsoever. And now it should be clear about whom I am speaking: Rabbi Ovadiah Josef.

When he was four years old, the family moved to Jerusalem where he was educated mainly at the more or less only Sephardi Yeshiva of any standing at Porat Josef in the old city.

Ovadiah was an outsider. He was an outsider as a Sephardi Jew in a Ashkenazi-dominated environment and he was also an outsider at Porat Josef where a lot of the students came either from great rabbinic families or had parents that had succeeded in business. Ovadiah Josef's father's plan for his son was not for him to become a rabbi, but to help him running the small family business. Only due to the intervention of the Porat Yosef Rosh Yeshiva did his father allow him to pursue his rabbinic studies.

Already during his time at Porat Yosef he gave a lecture in a small Persian community where he was able to connect to the simple people. He can speak, if he wants to, the language of the shuk.

On of his character traits also became apparent at this time: the willingness (and stubbornness) to go against the majority opinion. So Ovadiah Josef was at war with his own Iraqi community. In Ovadiah's opinion Joseph Karo, the author of the Shulchan Aruch, is the rabbi in the land of Israel, i.e. one has to follow the rulings of Karo, even if they are in conflict with long-standing customs. In his lectures Rabbi Ovadiah went against “Ben Ish Chai” THE authority of the Iraqi community whenever his opinion was in conflict with the Shulchan Aruch. Such a chutzpah from a 17 year old was not well received and later when he published a book containing his opinion, it was publicly burned by some.

Rabbi Ovadiah's strength is his phenomenal memory. His responsa are a wonderful resource on any given halachic subject. Unlike the Ashkenazi approach to the study of Talmud which favours theoretical study, Rabbi Ovadiah holds that the Sephardi approach to the Talmud is to decide halachah l'maaseh, practical halachic rulings. In addition, as we shall see, he denounces the Ashkenazi tendency to pile stringencies upon stringencies and holds that one has to rule leniently whenever possible.

In 1944 he married Margalit, a woman of Syrian descent with whom he had several children, most

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1 This talk is based upon the sources cited in the bibliography.

2 Shapiro, Marc “Mi-Yosef ad Yosef Lo Kam ke-Yosef” in: Meorot 6:1, p. 8

of whom continue their fathers work.

After his studies in Jerusalem he became Dayyan in Cairo in 1947, but he left there in conflict with the rabbinic establishment about the standard of kashrut in Cairo. Upon his return to Jerusalem he served as a Dayyan in Jerusalem, Petach Tikva before he became chief rabbi of Tel Aviv in 1968 and chief rabbi of Israel in 1973-1983.

Already as a Dayyan in Petach Tikvah he started to fight for the recognition Sephardi customs in an Ashkenazi-dominated rabbinical court system. When he was in a position of power he in fact implemented several Sephardi customs, thus he allowed marriages during the three weeks up to the 1<sup>st</sup> of Av. He also annulled the Takana of the chief rabbinate which favoured, following Ashkenazi custom, chalitzah over levirate marriage<sup>3</sup>.

This struggle against Ashkenazi dominance also came to the fore in 1990, when the Shas party, whose spiritual leader he was, broke away from the Ashkenazi ultra-orthodox parties, as at the beginning Shas was the brainchild of Rabbi Eliezer Shach of Bnei Brak, the leader of the Ashkenazi charedim. From this time onwards he was a persona non-grata to the Ashkenazi charedi establishment. He was able to reach out to Sephardi society, even to those who are not orthodox, and several of his responsa show his concern for the wider Israeli public. Thus, for instance, he ruled that a restaurant could receive a kashrut certificate that the meat sold at this restaurant was kosher, even though they were serving also dairy products right after a fleischig dish<sup>4</sup>.

In addition he was to influence the Sephardi community at large to follow his rulings, thus for instance most Sephardi women today say the benediction before they light the Shabbat candles<sup>5</sup>. His sons Yitzchaks book *Yalkut Yosef*, which contain his fathers rulings, became the halakhic code for the Sephardic world and also his prayerbook became the standard.

During his rabbinic career he worked only for those batei din that are connected to the chief rabbinate even though he was offered a position at an ultra orthodox Bet Din. In regard to the state of Israel his complex personality is apparent. On the one hand he has compared Arabs to snakes, but on the other he always agreed to give up land in return for (real) peace<sup>6</sup>. He has upheld this position, even though his electorate is predominantly hawkish. Though he has ruled that one can say Hallel on Yom HaAtzmaut only without a benediction<sup>7</sup>, he has preached about Israel when he was in Cairo after 1948, something which did not endear him to the Egyptian state.

In another famous ruling he has shown great courage and responsibility for he has declared the Beita Jisrael, the Ethiopian Jews, to be *Jews l'chol dawar*, in every aspect and do not need a *Giur l'chumra*<sup>8</sup>. He also allowed marriages with the Karaites<sup>9</sup>.

But one decision of his has, in my opinion, assured him his place in olam haba, the world to come as well as my eternal respect. During the Jom Kippur war there were about 1000 KIA where the widows needed an acceptable confirmation of their husband's death in order to remarry. New answers had to be given. Does a dog tag act as sufficient for identification, or is a shred of clothing enough to establish the death of the husband. Rav Ovadia dealt with every one of these cases and allowed all widows to remarry, not one Agunah remained<sup>10</sup>.

You might say: Well we liberals are not interested in all this as it is against egalitarianism. Maybe, but Israeli society for the time being (and to our dismay), assigned all question of personal status to the chief rabbinate. Rav Ovadia took up the responsibility as the Sephardi Chief rabbi to deal

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3 Yabia Omer 6, EH §14

4 Yabia Omer 4, JD §7

5 Yabia Omer 2, OH §16

6 "Ceding Territory of the Land of Israel in Order to Save Lives", *Tehumim* Vol. 10 (1989), p. 34-47

7 Yabia Omer 6, OH §11

8 Yabia Omer 8, EH §11

9 Yabia Omer 8, EH §12

10 Yabia Omer 6, EH §3

with the problems of Israeli society at large. Many of his contemporary Ashkenazi charedi rabbis only speak to their society. The problems of Jews that do not belong to their group is of no interest to them.

I am fascinated by his willingness to rule leniently whenever possible. Of course I know, that he does not accept non-orthodox Judaism as valid but this does not prevent me from acknowledging the good things he did.

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## 2. Rabbi Rachel Benjamin

### 'The Historical Jewish Figure Who Most Inspired Me': Joe Benjamin, The Man of My Dreams

My story begins with a little girl who grew up in a normal family, and who had a happy childhood. Sometimes, in her dreams, the figure of a man would appear, a faceless figure who never spoke. He didn't scare her, though - the figure was benign, warm, comforting and familiar. A figure she knew and loved, even though she had never met him. A figure whose presence stayed with her, though it was many years before she came to understand the influence that he had on her life. That little girl was me, and the figure was my paternal grandfather, Joe Benjamin.

Sadly, my grandfather died before I was born, but I came to know him through stories told by my parents, other family members and friends. What struck me most was the look on their faces, the light, love and respect in their eyes, when they talked about him.

Joe Benjamin was born in 1883, the son of Portsmouth tailor, Hirsch Israel Benjamin, and his wife, Kate, both originally from Poland. My grandfather was a teacher, by profession, and a lay leader of his community, dedicated to the transmission of the Jewish tradition and heritage that he loved. He was a kind, good man, who led by example, and strived for the benefit of others.

His wife, Ray (after whom I was named), bore him two sons – my uncle, Herschell, and father, Alec. Both remember their father with great fondness and love – and it was my privilege recently to 'interview' them together, while my uncle, who lives in Jerusalem and is now the ripe old age of 95, was visiting my parents.

Grandpa died at the age of 70, in 1953, just before my parents married.

Knowing that my grandfather was Orthodox, I asked my father what he would have thought about one of his granddaughters becoming a Rabbi. He assured me, as did my uncle, that Grandpa would have been pleased and proud.

What was my grandfather's Jewish influence on me? Some of what, to me, are Judaism's most important teachings were exemplified in my grandfather's life. I have narrowed them down to seven principles, or values:

#### **One: Importance of Family and *Kavod*, 'Respect'**

Grandpa was a loving and devoted father and husband. His family meant everything to him. My grandfather's relationship to his two boys was very close and my uncle Herschell wrote down a moving anecdote about how his father helped him deal with his fear of the dark.

He began, 'Dad understood my fears and... suggested that after my informal, short, night-time prayers, which centred on the family, I should repeat the last lines of Adon Olam in Hebrew or English. "Into Thy hands I commend my spirit, when I sleep and when I wake; and with my spirit, my body also. The Lord is with me and I will not fear." The words seemed to personalise my relationship with God; the fact that I said "my body" perhaps gave me a relaxed feeling of relinquishing responsibility – sort of "over to you for the next tour of duty, God, old chap". I've always remembered this. And I was never ever afraid of the dark after that.' (p. 18)

#### **Two: *Talmud Torah*, 'The Study of Torah'**

Grandpa was a teacher. He was a master at the Jews' Free Central School in the East End of London, teaching Maths, Science and Swimming, as well as Jewish History, Hebrew Translation and Melodies. He taught Hebrew and Pitman's shorthand at evening classes, as well as Cheder classes at home, and classes on Sunday afternoons at the Norwood Orphanage.

He had a quiet sense of humour, and endless patience. Some of you may know Dr. Alex Knapp, Research Associate at SOAS's Department of Music. He attended Cheder at my grandfather's home, and recalls him being kindly, benevolent and patient.

In researching the history of the JFS, I came across the memories of an ex-pupil, Jack Griffiths. In listing the names of the teachers he remembered, he concluded with this comment, 'and my favourite Mr Benjamin who made both Physics and Shakespeare come alive for me; a fantastic teacher who wielded a heavy cane!'

### **Three: Building Community**

After moving to Morden, Surrey, in 1927, my grandfather was instrumental in founding the South Wimbledon Synagogue.

As well as regular Shabbat services and teaching, Grandpa led the High Holy Days services there, and my father recalled that, one Yom Kippur, the lights needed to be switched on in *shul*, and there was much consternation about who could do that. Someone even went out to see if they could get hold of a passer-by to do it for them. When my grandfather arrived, he went and switched on the lights himself!

He was a progressive thinker, and a liberal-minded man, believing that the stories in the Torah are not to be understood literally, but as allegories. God was not remote, or to be feared, but rather One with whom one could have a discussion, or even an argument – like Tevye, in *Fiddler on the Roof*. He believed that the good deeds we perform in our lives constitute our immortality. He was very proud of his Jewish heritage and tradition, and passed it on lovingly to others.

### **Four: *Ohev et ha'Br'iot*, 'Loving all creatures' / *Tikkun Olam*, 'Repairing the world'**

Grandpa loved animals, and always had dogs and cats. He tended his garden at home and had a vast knowledge of flora and fauna. He enjoyed taking the kids, and students, to London and Whipsnade Zoos, to instil in them a respect for animals, and a sense of responsibility for them. He had an affinity with the natural world, and the creatures in it, and had their welfare at heart.

### **Five: *Lev tov*, 'Good-heartedness'**

Kindness, humility, compassion and thoughtfulness were clearly hallmarks of my grandfather's character, as demonstrated in one of my favourite anecdotes about him. Every year at Passover, before leading the Seder, my grandfather would spill some red wine on the tablecloth, so that no one else would be worried if they accidentally did that themselves.

### **Six: *Mipnay darkhay shalom*, 'For the sake of peace' / *Shalom bayit*, 'Peace in the home'**

My uncle recalled how close-knit my grandfather's large family was. However, inevitably, frictions arose. He remembers his father being called on to make peace between family members and, most times, Grandpa was able to ensure that relations were restored between those involved in a dispute.

### **Seven: *Tzedek tzedek tirdof*, 'Justice, justice shall you pursue'**

My grandfather was a lover of music and especially classical music, which was not easily accessible to many people in the East End of London. He was a member of the United Synagogue Committee and, from 1910 on, he organised free Sunday evening concerts at the Jewish Institute in Mulberry Street, in the East End, which continued till the early 1950's.

My uncle recalls that, 'The JI concert hall was on the first floor of the building that housed the Beit Din. On concert evenings I remember standing in the hall at 7:00pm when the doorman opened the doors. A seething crowd that had climbed the stone stairs poured into the hall eager to find a good seat. They were the poorest of the poor. ... they lapped up the classical music and occasional folk music which, of course, included Yiddish compositions.'

These concerts were a beacon of light to those who attended, and gave an enormous amount of enjoyment and pleasure, contributing to the well being of many people, who would otherwise not have been able to experience such music.

These seven points represent aspects of my grandfather that have touched and inspired me – and those who knew him and were taught by him.

Joe Benjamin was not a famous man, not a philosopher, sage or prophet. He did not leave a great legacy of writings or thoughts. But he was, to my mind, a great man, and an important link in the chain of Jewish continuity. He lived and loved his Jewish heritage and tradition, which he passed down to me through his sons and my mother, and set the standard for me in my own practice and transmission of Judaism, and in the daily struggle to be a good and decent human being. I am grateful to Andrew for the opportunity to learn more about him myself, to put a face to the figure of my dreams, and to introduce him to you.

### 3. Rabbi Dr Tom Kucera

I would like to speak about a Rabbi with the monogram AG. He was a Rabbi who contributed essentially to the development of the liberal Judaism. He stressed the educational aspects of our tradition. He published the siddur both for the weekdays and the High Holy Days. He entered actively the interreligious territory. He was a skilled speaker and an able diplomat in dealing with the tension inside the Jewish community. His courage never failed him, his devotion to his rabbinate was always obvious. He was appreciated far beyond the city he was living in. The past motivates the presence and both of them are interconnected.

Rabbi AG- Rabbi Avraham Geiger.

He belonged to a Jewish family in Frankfurt, tracing its past to the 16th century. As a child, he received the cheder education. At the age of three he read the Torah, at the age of six the Talmud. His Bar Mitzvah speech was in Hebrew- about the understanding of Rambam. What can be a more optimal way! Nevertheless, he spoke of a lifestyle based on „don't think- just do it“. Thus, instead of the advanced Talmud studies, he decided for the Oriental philology and then the Jewish studies at the Royal Prussian University of Bonn. Here he met Samson Rafael Hirsch for the first time and was actually quite impressed by him. Geiger was keen on discovering the Judaism within Judaism. I very much empathise with his perception of the gap between the honorable past and the palpable presence. In order to bridge this gap, he delved into the historical critical thinking. Not in order to destroy the honorable past, but in order to embrace the palpable presence while still being in the frame of the tradition. We surely believe as well that Judaism is not old, but very new.

Rabbi Avraham Geiger is a splendid example for refutation of the prejudices against the Progressive Judaism nowadays. He criticised sharply another liberal leaders of his time (e.g. Samuel Holdheim in Berlin) and wrote: „I am against every blind Reform striving, which leaves the inside cold and empty.“

Being Rabbi in the city of Wiesbaden, he managed to keep the liberal and orthodox Jews for decades together. I am quite impressed by this achievement, as well as by his not wanting to see the split of the Jewish world, which at that time, in the same way as today, represented just a small part of the society.

When he was invited to Breslau, his coming was hindered by Rabbi Titkin who claimed: the one who has a university degree, mustn't be a Rabbi. Titkin did everything in order to hinder the coming of Geiger. Later he skipped all the weddings and dinners which Geiger attended as well. At one funeral he even cut him off with angry inventions against his colleague. This incident was embarrassing and noticed by the chief of police.

When Rabbi Titkin died, Rabbi Geiger spoke so kindly and sincerely about the deceased talmudic scholar that even the local newspaper wrote about it. We are sure moved by his pure humanity, which is not able to bear grudge and accepts the life with all its impediments as a natural way to grow and to demonstrate the independent strength.

Despite all his strivings for the harmony, Avraham Geiger had to cope with deep blows. He was an acknowledged expert and an experienced congregational Rabbi. Nevertheless, he was not given the position at the JTS, Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau, which he hoped for very, very much. He had to deal with this deep disappointment for many years.

After more than two decades of serving the community in Breslau, he decided to take the position in Frankfurt. Here he continued his scientific work and started to think about the liturgical changes. He believed that the traditional texts have to be presented in a form, which could reach the heart and the mind as well. Are we the chosen ones? Do I wait for the Maschiach? Do we need the second day of the chagim? Will I be resurrected? Until this day we continue to ask ourselves the same or similar questions.

After six years in Frankfurt, Avraham Geiger decides to take a position in Berlin. Here he realized his life dream. The foundation of the University for the Science of Judaism. His strivings to present Judaism as a religion of the reason was crowned.

I admit that I would be quite critical towards some of his attitude. But I know that we all are influenced by our nature and our nurture and always reflect the historical frame we live in.

Why do I think that Rabbi Avraham Geiger is motivating for my rabbinical path? For four reasons:

- His active connection to the tradition and his using the traditional words while filling them with new content, corresponding to the modern times
- His caution in doing new steps, thinking of how far can he go and when to say no
- His elementary humanism, even towards his enemies
- His inward strength despite all the impediments and misunderstandings.

As he wrote to Leopold Zunz in March 1841:

“Rifts such as these have ever been liberating forces in world history, for while they abolish the material integrity of one entity, they lay foundations for the ideal unification of whole world.”

#### 4. Rabbi Aaron Goldstein

##### **Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman – Thinking about the core of our being – “Not just for clergy!”**

How difficult for a son, asked to speak about the person who most influenced his rabbinate, in honour of his father the Rabbi, without being allowed to cite him. Dad *is* the most influential person on my rabbinate! Fortunately, his influence led me to meet the person who is the subject of this paper, who I am sure will not mind being relegated to second best at this *siyyum*!

One of my father's most significant experiences of *his* earlier rabbinical years was in the USA. A four month job exchange as a Temple educator in San Jose, California, produced 12 years of Kadimah Summer Schools, numerous education programmes still in use today and the UK's best creative service writer. Little wonder so many of us are delivering papers to honour him today. Unsurprisingly, I followed my father Stateside: A year of my rabbinical studies in New York, for me, the Golden Medina for Progressive Jewry.

Apart from the rich practical experiences, I attended Hebrew Union College- Jewish Institute for Religion. To study with Eugene Borowitz, Norman Cohen, Leonard Kravitz and Bernard Mehlman was an honour but the teacher that provided the greatest influence on my style of rabbinate was and remains, Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman - Professor of Liturgy, Worship and Ritual, prolific author and a founder of Synagogue 2000, a “pioneering experiment that reconceptualised synagogue life,” its success encapsulated in the change of nomenclature to, Synagogue 3000.

Lawrence Hoffman's work has integrity in two solid foundations. The first is academic. His studies on the history of Jewish liturgy are important to my father in creating contemporary liturgies to maintain Liberal Judaism at the forefront of Progressive liturgical output. Liturgy is at his core but Hoffman leads the field. He writes in, 'Beyond the Text: A Holistic Approach to Liturgy:' “In the field of liturgy, it is still rare to find recognised experts even referring to anthropological studies of religious experience, or the sociology of space...One crosses the boundaries of separate categories only with great difficulty.” (Beyond the Text, 21-22.) Hoffman, as the expansion of his title from Professor of Liturgy to included Worship and Ritual indicates, has successfully and persuasively redefined the field to embrace everything connected to the application of liturgy in the worship experience.

Lawrence Hoffman also inspires me because he has learnt through the *experience* of working towards the transformation of hundreds of American synagogues and churches, thereby testing his own thinking. So his suggestions hold real authority and he motivates me to think about that which we take for granted but that are at the core of our being as individuals and communities.

Liturgy - his starting-point - encourages us to think about our relationship with God, the Jewish People, Torah and study, our families and humanity, ethics, and the Land and State of Israel. These relationships form some of the chapters of his book, 'The Journey Home: Discovering the Deep Spiritual Wisdom of the Jewish Tradition,' they do not cover the mechanics but the spirituality of these relationships. By nature, these relationships are deeply personal, emotional and sometimes problematic for they are essential to our identity and those of our communities.

Traditionally, therefore, we might seek calm and order in our lives, shying away from thinking about spirituality. However, in our generation - one defined by choice not age - he posits that thinking spiritually is at the heart of our concern. Fundamentally, we are 'spirit-seekers.' The ever increasing interest in yoga, alternative healing, and mysticism indicate to me that we *are* becoming more spiritually aware.

Indeed, religious communities that are successful in the UK are defined by spiritual thinking. The appeal of Evangelical Churches and the Church of England's Alpha project are perhaps mirrored in the Jewish Community by Aish ha'Torah, the Jewish Learning Exchange, and the Kabbalah Centre.

We may be concerned at their approach but they undoubtedly address spiritual questions that matter to people. The London School of Jewish Studies, the success of Assif and Minyan Chadash in Masorti, tent: the meeting place and non-denominational groups such as the Wandering Jew and Moishe House all support spiritual thinking that leads to, in Hoffman's words, 'Sacred Community.' Sacred, because they are concerned with what really matters.

A criticism often levelled at those concerned with spirituality, sacredness, worship, meditation and healing as Hoffman is, is that it is too far removed from rational thought. In 'The Journey Home,' Hoffman reassures us that, "Reasonable Spirituality," is an "authentic Jewish spirituality [that] is real, not just rhetoric, and is not anti intellectual." (The Journey Home, p189). It is not a spirituality that denies fact or argues against science. Rather, "spiritual thinking is the attempt to say more about the universe than science can, without saying anything that science cannot at least grant as possible and maybe even probable. It is consistent with ancient thought, but couched in the language of today. It connects us with our past, but speaks to our present. It is intellectually sophisticated, but not academically distant from what matters most to us." (p.159)

Hoffman makes it clear that the Jewish institution best placed to be a platform for spiritual thinking is the Synagogue. His thought does not criticise any individual, whether they be employed by the organisation, regular attendees or marginal to it. Nor is it a criticism of how things have been done in the past. Rather, it is dictated by love for an institution that has not adapted appropriately to a new environment.

Hoffman understands synagogues now, as 'limited liability organisations' aimed at providing 'must-have' services, a Bar Mitzvah or a Wedding. They are not integral to a person's life because individual stories are not heard, shared and supported. For synagogues to transform themselves, not just now but in each generation, what he identifies as being required is implicit thinking: "Synagogues change the conversation when they move from programme (what we do) to ideas (why we do it); from pragmatics (what works) to theology (what counts); from regulative rule (tinkering with the surface) to constitutive rules (building a deep foundation); and from additive changes (programme changes that reacts to the newest perceived need) to transformative change (structural change that responds to the deepest theological considerations)." (Rethinking Synagogues, p.40)

Hoffman is so accessible because one senses that, his learning *is* his own spiritual journey, an emotional honesty coupled with scholastic integrity which I find completely engaging.

For example, his identification of the term, 'spiritual restlessness': (The Journey Home, pp.16-17) This occurs when a synagogue does not speak in a 'compelling voice' to its congregants and they stop 'coming to Shul.' Hoffman is astute, relevant and speaks from experience that reflects Synagogue 3000 and, one suspects, much personal observation.

Hoffman helps us to think and act on things that we, who are integral to our religious communities, find it difficult to see or accept.

My father, Charles and Eric are better placed to comment on Hoffman's achievements concerning liturgy but for me his greatest achievement is that, once he has developed his thought academically, he then makes that accessible to all. His series, 'My People's Prayer Book,' and 'The Art of Public Prayer: Not for Clergy Only,' and 'Rethinking Synagogues: A New Vocabulary for Congregational Life,' encourages both professionals and laity to explore together how synagogues can provide, "authentic Jewish experiences that appeal to those in search of identity."

Lawrence Hoffman speaks to me because his writing reflects his own spirit-seeking. It helps me with mine and it helps me to think about how we might also achieve synagogue transformation to create authentic, wholly Jewish, Sacred Communities.

## 5. Rabbi Mark Goldsmith

### Rashi – Rabbi Solomon Yitzchaki – A Mission to Explain and Engage

#### Prologue

Before I begin to speak about a Rabbi who lived close on a thousand years ago, a few hundred miles away from here, I would like to share with you my earliest memories of Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue and Rabbi Andrew Goldstein, because I think that it has quite a bit to do with why Rabbi Solomon Yitzchaki (1040-1105) is the Jewish historical figure who has most inspired me.

There I am sitting towards the back of the old NPLS at family service (Service Number 5 of the old Service of the Heart). I am about seven years old and my family is about to join the shul for the first time. Up front the Rabbi is reading the Torah portion, translating and explaining phrase by phrase, as I believe he still does, and I certainly do, following his example. He is asking the children in the shul questions about the portion, to engage their interest, to make them curious about the portion, to inform them, to draw out from them their own ideas. I am responding with enthusiasm, putting my hand up asking and answering questions – the Torah brought to life by Rabbi Andrew Goldstein – a small part of what I have experienced as his mission to make Judaism explicable and engaging for all generations.

#### Life of Rashi

Rabbi Solomon Yitzchaki, known by the acronym Rashi from the initials of Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzchak, was born in 1040 in Troyes, a town in Northern France, 100 miles to the South East of Paris. It's a beautiful town with a perfectly preserved medieval square and extensive quarter, where relations between the Jews and Christians of the town were cordial and positive until the terror of the Crusades which blighted the final years of Rashi's life. Rashi died in Troyes on the 13<sup>th</sup> July 1105.

His father Isaac was probably something of a scholar, Rashi mentions Isaac's teaching in his own writings (eg on Avodah Zarah 75a). His mother was from a scholarly family, Rashi's uncle Rabbi Simeon ben Isaac was known for his work in liturgy. Legend has it that Rashi was destined for great things. In Troyes there is to this day a niche in a wall which they say opened up to protect Rashi's pregnant mother when she was charged by a horse! Rashi married early and with his wife bore two daughters, Miriam and Yochabed.

Rashi received his deep Jewish education in Worms, 300 miles to the East of Troyes where he studied under some of the great sages of his time. He returned to Troyes, at the age of twenty five, as Dayan (Jewish judge for the local area) started his own academy and there began his great work, supported by his ownership of a vineyard and later the economic activity of his family as cattle farmers and tax agents.

He was a practical man. A passage in the Mishnah (Avodah Zarah 1:6) prohibits Jews from buying and selling cattle from non-Jews, due to idolatrous practices in the ancient middle East involving cows. Rashi wrote "at present when we are a minority in the midst of our neighbours we cannot conform to so disastrous a measure". He doesn't mention there that it's the family business....

#### His Achievement

Rashi's contribution to our lives as Jews is there to be seen every time we open up a Chumash, the book of interpretation of the Torah portions, or read a Bible translation, and, as you will hear later, not only Jewish ones. It is there every time you observe a mitzvah or learn a piece of Jewish history from the Talmud. In his sixty five years of life he made the Bible understandable and opened up the Talmud for study by people of regular intellect.

He must have been the most talented teacher. The achievements of his students testify to that. In

the spirit of the Pirke Avot he was truly an exemplar of the saying “Find yourself a teacher; get yourself a friend; judge everyone by their merits” (Mishnah Avot 1:6)

So much did his students become his friends that both his daughters married students of Rashi, Judah Ben Nathan, and Meir ben Samuel. His sons in law and grandsons Yomtov, Samuel, Isaac, Jacob and Solomon, all became great scholars in their own right founding their own academies, leaving writings which have lasted a millennium, including completing the projects that Rashi was not able to get to before he died. Some grandfathers hope to raise a football team, Rashi raised a Rabbinic academy. Sadly we have no records of what he taught to his daughters and granddaughters.

What did Rashi do? Just this –he wrote a verse by verse commentary on the entire Bible which is the ultimate model of conciseness, clarity, and accessibility, including two thousand words of medieval French, because that was the language his students best knew. The only books he didn’t get to in his life time were the books of Chronicles (and possibly he was not the author of the commentary attributed to him on Ezra and Nehemiah and Job). Whilst engaged on this task he wrote a commentary phrase by often complicated phrase on the whole of the Talmud, his grandson Samuel completed it. While he was doing this work he wrote several other books, a Siddur and 350 recorded detailed responses to Jewish questions.

Rashi’s Bible Commentary is the basic source for the Chumash that you use in Shul. It is the first quoted in every Mikrao’t G’dolot (the Bible together with interpretations and commentaries down the centuries which is the basic toolkit of Jewish bible study), it has the distinction of having been the first Hebrew book ever printed – in 1475 in Reggio in Italy.

Why is it so seminal? It is because what Rashi set out to do was to ask of every phrase in the bible what does this mean? When you read it is as if he anticipates the questions that you might have – and you don’t read it as one – you are reading a bit of the Bible, just wondering what this or that might mean and if you look in Rashi’s Bible Commentary you will get a clear, short answer – as he wrote himself (Commentary on Genesis 3:8) “There are many Midrashic explanations for the Bible (interpretations which draw out meaning by adding in additional stories, relating one episode to another, often fancifully) – and our teachers have already collected them in appropriate places in the books of Midrashim such as Bereshit Rabbah. I however am only concerned with the plain sense of Scripture and will quote such Midrashim that explain the words of Scripture in a manner that truly fits in with them.”

Move onto the next verse and you can see a great example of this. The verse is “And the Eternal God called to Adam [in the Garden of Eden] and said to him “Where are you?”” What might we ask ourselves of this verse? How could God be all seeing and knowing and not know where Adam is in His own Garden? Rashi comments “God knew where Adam was but he asked this in order to open up a conversation with him ... just as in the case of Cain [whose brother Abel was lying dead in front of him] God said to him “Where is Abel your brother? (Genesis 4:9)”

Without Rashi’s commentary on the Talmud – always printed to the right hand side of the Talmud text in every edition since the very first Talmudim were printed - it is quite possible that the Talmud and its whole method of discussion and argument without needing to reach the one inviolable conclusion, might have been neglected in favour of simple codifications of Jewish law. That is because with Rashi’s phrase by phrase commentary in Hebrew, the language of the Talmud, compiled mostly in Aramaic not Hebrew, the density of the arguments presented, the cross references made which need the encyclopaedic knowledge of a Rashi to make sense of, is too complex for the average student to make sense of. I am at best the average student and generations like me cannot get far in the Talmud without Rashi. With his help we can truly join in to the debate of our ancient Rabbis.

His Influence and Style

Rashi was a liberal Jew (with a small !). As he wrote “The authority of those who prohibit things without cause means little; for anyone can hand down a prohibition even in matters that are permissible” (Ad loc Betzah 2b) and, commenting on Leviticus 19:15 “In righteousness shall you judge your fellow” he wrote, “This means with balance as the word Tzedek implies, and judge your fellow by giving him the benefit of the doubt”. He was dedicated to peaceful relationships with the Jewish community and with their Christian neighbours. He had the courage to admit his challenges – on Zechariah 11:13 his comment was “I have read many interpretations of this prophecy which I cannot understand”

In 1095 the Crusades rampaged through the Rhine valley. Many thousands of Jews were killed, though Troyes itself was spared. The events are reflected and mentioned in Rashi’s commentaries on the Psalms of supplication. It is typical of Rashi that his response to Jews who had been forced to convert to Christianity and now wanted to come back to Judaism was “Let us beware of alienating those who have returned to us by repulsing them. They became Christians only through fear of death and soon as the danger disappeared returned to their faith.”

His fame spread far and wide – during and after his lifetime. His Bible commentary was not read only by Jews. The Franciscan monk Nicholas de Lyra working in Paris in the Thirteenth century, did a Rashi style clear commentary on the Bible and often within it writes “Rabbis Salomon hoc posit” – this is how Rashi explained it. Martin Luther the founder of Christian reformation was deeply influenced by Nicholas de Lyra’s work on making the bible explicable in his own translation. As Rabbi Chaim Pearl quotes in his excellent book on Rashi (London 1988) “sic Lyra non lyrasset, Lutherius non saltasset” – If Lyra had not played Luther could not have danced.

So you could say that without Rashi the Methodist Church next to Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue might not have existed. Making Judaism explainable and straightforward to engage in is truly a holy task in which Rashi and Rabbi Andrew Goldstein have been among the community’s experts.

## 6. Rabbi Misha Kapustin

### Boris Kapustin – the man who made me who I am.

The historical Jewish figure who most inspired me; is there one or possibly a bunch of such people? Andrew is certainly the one who inspired me a lot, who was and still is my teacher and my rabbi. However the condition of this great gathering is rather not to speak about him. The law is the law, even Ukrainians, like me, sometimes obey the law. Then I could possibly speak of another great historical Jewish figure Sharon. But would it be fear? Speaking about Sharon I would again speak about Andrew and speaking about Andrew I would speak about her, simply because they are a great couple, an excellent sample of a Jewish family.

Who else shall I speak about? It could be Moses – who is traditionally regarded as an example of a Jewish leader, Amos – who is my favorite prophet, Maimonides, Leo Baeck or somebody else, but it wouldn't be sincere, it would not be personal. None of these great figures inspired me that much in my rabbinic journey.

So I am presenting a great man who in fact made me who I am. His life story, his destiny helped me a lot to choose to become a rabbi and gave me strength while I was a student-rabbi. His name is Boris Kapustin and I am privileged to be his son.

My father was born in 1936 in Gomel, Byelorussia, into a very traditional family. His mother took care of six children, and his father was a Shochet. The war started in June 1941, and the German troops were successful in occupying Byelorussia within seven days. My father's family were lucky to be evacuated on one of the last trains to the East. But my grandfather stayed in Byelorussia and joined the army – although he was already over 50. So my dad's family were evacuated to the Urals and then to Kazakhstan. As far as the Soviet army managed moving west, liberating new and new territories, my dad's family started moving West as well. First to Krasnodar, and finally to the Crimea in 1944.

In 1952 my father started working in a railway depot as an ordinary employee – at that time he was just 15. He also liked boxing – firstly as a street-fighter, and then as one of the young leading boxers in the Crimea. He even managed to become an Ukrainian junior champion when he was 17. He also achieved success at work as he became an assistant manager in his department of the depot. He didn't want to start studying at that time, simply because his salary was big enough to provide for his parents and younger sister. His father couldn't work full time since he had been wounded in the war. But his manager in the railway depot was insistent that he needs to study to become an engineer, as he believed my dad was a bright kid who needed an education. So my dad applied to the Railway University – but he failed his first exam. Once I asked him, "Why did you fail – was the exam too difficult?" He said, "No, I knew the answers to the questions. However another applicant was cheating and asked me to help him." And then my father got caught.

So when he came back home, he met his boxing manager - Pedro Saes Benidicto, the only thing I know about him is that he was a Spaniard who won an Olympic title for his country and fought against Franco before escaping to the USSR where he settled in the Crimea. So he asked my dad about his plans for the future – my dad wasn't sure. So he insisted that my father needs to study and to get a degree. That day my father became a student – training to be a sports instructor in the Crimean Educational Institute. It wasn't a big deal for a Spanish Civil War Hero, an Olympic Champion and a famous boxing manager in the USSR to help my father to enter that institute, even without exams! But my dad didn't like studying there, so he left and wrote a report to the recruiting office that he is not a student anymore and asked to register him for the army. So several weeks later he was called up to the Navy as the recruiting office thought he was ready to serve there.

He was sent to Sebastopol to a study group which prepared professionals at finding and keeping up the rations of the submarines. As far as he knew there were no Jews in that group. Once he

remembers there was a session on a new rifle, and of his fellow seamen called him a dirty Jew. So he had to defend his honor, and he struck him once. The man fell down and, as a result, could not continue his military service. So my father was sent to a military gaol where he spent two weeks. For some reason my dad was not sentenced, but he had to leave his study group and join another one that prepared helmsmen.

Just before he finished his military service he was recommended by his officer to enter the Soviet Naval Academy in Leningrad. Finally my dad became a Cadet of that Academy – at the age of 21. He finished the Academy in 1961 as a Lieutenant. He continued his service in Sevastopol, the Baltic Sea, before moving to the North and the Pacific. He attained different ranks and took part in nuclear weapons tests on an island called “Newland”, which is in the north of the Soviet Union.

He also once mentioned that he was once asked to come to the airport in Simferopol fully prepared for battle. At that time there was the Yom Kippur War in Israel and Simferopol was the closest Soviet airport to the action. It is strange that he was invited – for he was a Jew. But their flight, thank God, was cancelled. In 1983 he left military service as the Captain of the second rank, and then he formally became the Captain of the first rank; by that time I was already born.

My family moved to the Crimea, Kerch from Georgia in 1991 as civil war had broken out. At that time there was no Jewish community and the Jews preferred to keep their identity in secret. Most of them were assimilated and were not interested in Judaism. But there was a small group of people which was not afraid to be Jews and wanted to know about Jewish heritage. However nobody could organize them into community.

My father was a new man in this town and he did not know much about Jews in Kerch, but he asked himself, “Why there is no community in our town?” The only response he could find was to take responsibility by himself. By the time he retired from Jewish professional life over a year ago, there was a community of several hundred people and a nice synagogue!!! By the time he started the community I was 17. I was an ordinary Crimean boy, who knew nothing about Judaism, except for the fact that my parents were Jewish and that my father is crazy about creating Jewish life in town. Could it not influence me?

I was thinking how to finish his life story. So I decided not to finish it, but rather let my father take the last word. So we will quote several lines of his letter to me, while I was a student at Leo Baeck:

“I should say that from my childhood I have dreamt to become a seaman – and my dream came true. Obviously I would have achieved more success in my career if I hadn’t been Jewish. Several times I was invited to a so-called special committee, and was strongly recommended to write a report saying that I am not a Jew, but a Russian. But I kept refusing, saying that all identities are equal. I met many different Jewish officers in the Navy, but almost all of them were formally documented as Russians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians. Of course there was a policy – don’t let the Jews achieve success in their careers. That was the state policy. In 1996 I made a decision, to establish a Jewish community. My aim was to do everything within my power to save Jewish culture and identity, and simply help the Jews to survive in the time of chaos in Ukraine. I have partly achieved success, and I hope that my son will continue my task”.

## 7. Rabbi Pete Tobias

### JEROBOAM – A REBEL WITHOUT A CHANCE.

Who was Jeroboam? Jewish history has singled him out as the personification of evil: the king who took ten of the Israelite tribes away from the House of David and set up golden calves for those Israelites to worship. Every subsequent monarch who didn't strictly follow the laws of Israel's God was described as 'following in' or 'not turning away from' the sins of Jeroboam.<sup>11</sup> The biggest threat to be levelled against any king of Israel who was not fulfilling his obligations was that his royal house would meet the same fate as that of Jeroboam son of Nebat - that is, be completely wiped out.<sup>12</sup> Subsequent Jewish commentators continued to heap fury on the man who established a northern kingdom independent of Jerusalem's rule: he was frequently attacked in the Talmud, while in *midrash* his name turns up in a list of the all-time bad guys that includes Esau, Amalek and Haman.

Basically Jeroboam was a troublemaker – my kind of hero. When I was twelve, I frequently found myself ejected from my *cheder* classroom at Kenton United synagogue because I didn't like the oh-so-perfect biblical heroes I was being taught about. They were always doing the right thing and receiving God's reward for doing so – and I objected. Or maybe I was just bored...

I think it was the idea of the do-gooders receiving God's reward – and the bad guys getting punished – that really put me off religion when I was twelve. And it was the fate of the Egyptians in the Exodus story that troubled me the most. Okay they were mean taskmasters, but did they deserve to suffer such awful divine punishments? And how come all the plagues managed to avoid the Israelites or pass them by? It was the darkness that did it for me. How could the whole of Egypt be shrouded in darkness yet light the bit in which the Israelites lived be bathed in light? In that Sunday class I expressed my doubt that this could really be true – and found myself outside the classroom again – basking in the light of liberation in that corridor while my classmates remained trapped in the darkness of that classroom.

Jeroboam got himself thrown out as well – not of his *cheder* class, as far as I know – but from the city of Jerusalem in the days when Solomon ruled there. Another goody-goody that Solomon – held up as the paragon of wisdom and virtue in all of Jewish tradition. Solomon was regarded as the author of such books as Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes and considered to be Israel's wisest king – a reputation that still prevails throughout Jewish tradition.

But this is a man who inherited a massive kingdom from his father David and bequeathed to his son Rehoboam just the area occupied by the city of Jerusalem and the tribe of Judah. This is a man whose commitment to his God was so great that he married out a thousand times, who alienated a large majority of his own people to the point where they declined to be ruled by his successor. In Joseph Heller's book, 'God Knows', which is about King David, a young and clearly naïve Solomon enthusiastically explains to his father that he will one day demonstrate his great wisdom by threatening to cut a baby in half.

It was King David who was truly wise, successfully combining the rival northern and southern tribes by appointing religious and military leaders from each in the city of Jerusalem, which belonged to neither of them. But as David's potential successors lined up to challenge for his crown, they chose either northern or southern personnel to back them. To cut a long story short (most of the second book of Samuel to be precise) Solomon, who sided with the southerners got the crown thanks to Bathsheba's input, and the northern tribes were ruthlessly exploited to finance and construct his building projects.

One of Solomon's acts as king was to put Jeroboam in charge of a team of labourers from the tribe

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<sup>11</sup> e.g. I Kings 15:34; 2 Kings 10:29

<sup>12</sup> e.g. I Kings, 16:3

of Ephraim doing building works on Jerusalem's walls. Jeroboam himself was from the tribe of Ephraim, the mightiest of the northern tribes who had unwillingly found themselves subjected to Solomon's rule following David's death. The Ephraimites were not a happy bunch - and putting a northerner in charge of a group of northern workers who were effectively working as Solomon's slaves was another indication that Solomon's wisdom was somewhat exaggerated...

Jeroboam had clearly realised that Solomon was not a good or particularly wise king, but when he chose to verbalise this, he found himself ejected from Jerusalem as Solomon sought to kill him. I suppose I should be grateful that such threats were not issued to me when I was asked to leave my classroom, though had my teacher, the late Rabbi Cyril Harris, known what I would eventually become, he might have considered the possibility...

No great vision or manifestation of a biblical prophet came to me as I stood in the corridor on those Sunday mornings. But Jeroboam was met on his way out of Jerusalem by the prophet Ahijah, who hailed from Shiloh. A quick word about Shiloh: it was the place where the Ark of the Covenant - which now sat in Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem - had resided for many years. It was a shrine in Benjamin, in the north, that had been a major - if not the major - centre for the early Israelite cult. And the prophets who operated there deeply resented Jerusalem and the Temple and anything to do with David and his descendants - or, indeed, any king.

Immediately prior to the appointment of Saul as the first king of Israel, words of warning about how a king would treat the people are placed into the mouth of the prophet Samuel (who was based at Shiloh).<sup>13</sup> In fact, these words, warning of exploitation, forced labour and heavy taxation, offer a pretty accurate description of life for the northern tribes under Solomon's rule. So the prophets of Shiloh saw in Jeroboam an opportunity to wrest power from Jerusalem and return it to Shiloh.

The scene was set. As Solomon's life ended, several groups had expectations of Jeroboam. The northern tribes wanted him to liberate them from the House of David, the prophets at Shiloh wanted him to restore their shrine to its former glory. Helped by the fact that Solomon's son had even less wisdom than his father, Jeroboam found himself in charge of ten of the twelve Israelite tribes and established the separate kingdom of Israel which would last for two centuries and achieve wealth and status that far exceeded that of its southern cousin Judah.

But history is written by the winners, and history decreed that the successful northern kingdom would be removed from the map by the Assyrians almost a century and a half before tiny Judah met the same fate at the hands of the Babylonians. And by the time that history was being written - in the books of Samuel and Kings but also in what would eventually be called the Torah - an explanation was needed for the fact that ten of the tribes of Israel had simply disappeared. And the explanation was Jeroboam.

His decision to build golden calves at the shrines he established in Dan, and particularly in Beth-el, just twelve miles north of Jerusalem, was cited as the reason for his - and Israel's - downfall. But theologically there was no difference between the graven image of a cow or bull, upon which rode the invisible Israelite God, and the two cherubim on the Ark in Jerusalem, above whom that same God was believed to hover. Indeed, the bull had been a part of Israelite and Canaanite worship long before the cherubim appeared atop the Ark of the Covenant. But this act - a purely practical one to prevent his people continuing to worship at Jerusalem's Temple that was entirely consonant with long-established Israelite tradition - was recorded and repeated in the Judahite version of history, finding a place in the Golden Calf episode in Exodus chapter 32 as well as the chronicles of Israel's kings.

The fact that Jeroboam didn't establish a ruling family on a par with that of David was seized upon by Judah's historians as further evidence of his evil actions being punished by God. In the book of

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<sup>13</sup> I Samuel 8: 10-18

Kings,<sup>14</sup> the deaths of his two sons are predicted by the aging prophet Ahijah in Shiloh and these are echoed in the incident in Leviticus chapter 10, where two of Aaron's sons with identical names to those of Jeroboam's, meet a fiery fate in the presence of the ark. But prior to David there was no tradition of hereditary dynasty in Israel; the leadership model was that of the Judges: charismatic leaders emerging to resolve a specific national crisis – exactly the role that was assigned to Jeroboam.

So why have I chosen Jeroboam as my source of inspiration? I suppose there's something about the fact that he was so misunderstood and his reputation deliberately tarnished by biased historians and authors with a particular perspective. Perhaps that resonates with my encounters with traditional Judaism, both as a twelve year-old in the corridor of United Synagogue *cheder* and today, when fielding criticisms and accusations of non-authenticity from similar sources. And Jeroboam's skilful application of Israelite traditions that pre-dated the establishment of Jerusalem's temple and the worship enshrined in the Torah as being the only way of communicating with Israel's God encourage me to assert that every element of Jewish tradition needs to be challenged and questioned. For all of Jewish tradition is built around the words of Judah's sages and scribes who were, among other things, determined to find someone to blame for the destruction of their Israelite neighbours. Jeroboam represents for me the embodiment of challenge to authority and tradition: the feelings that I harboured and nurtured while sitting in my *cheder* classroom – and standing just outside it. By resisting the authority of both Jerusalem and Shiloh, Jeroboam was able to draw on an uncorrupted version of his tradition to establish something that was authentic, practical and which genuinely addressed the needs of his people. And that'll do for me.

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<sup>14</sup> I Kings chapter 14

## 8. Rabbi Frank Dabba Smith

### Albert Einstein's Values

Andrew, for once, I'm not going to talk about Ernst Leitz II, the camera maker and rescuer of persecuted people during the Holocaust. I have chosen, instead, to speak about Albert Einstein partly because both Leitz and Einstein lived by deeply held universalistic humanitarian values, despite their very different backgrounds and experiences.<sup>15</sup>

My decision to speak about Albert Einstein has also to do with something rather more personal and peculiar: it is initially a kind of exploration involving a photograph and, perhaps, the sorts of mysterious experiences or coincidences that are found in the writings of W.G. Sebald, the author of the novel *Austerlitz*.

And, so, I start with a story. I had not long graduated from UC Berkeley and was freelancing as a photographer. I was also attending art school and working part-time at a camera shop located very close to the Berkeley campus. On Saturday, 12 April 1980, a petite, elderly woman walked into the camera shop wanting to purchase a compact 35mm camera. I immediately recognized the name on her cheque as that of a Jewish photographer who practiced in Berlin in the 1920s and '30s: Lotte Jacobi.

'I know who you are!', I said excitedly. Lotte Jacobi beamed in response. She reached into her large bag and pulled out some small, hand-made black and white prints. Among them was a photograph of Albert Einstein. I recalled that Jacobi and Einstein had known each other in Berlin and both had emigrated to the East Coast of America in the mid-1930s. This portrait was made in 1938 in Einstein's home in Princeton, New Jersey. It was the result of a commission by *Life* magazine but, since it was deemed too informal, too private, it was not accepted by that publication. But Einstein had only agreed to do a project for *Life* on condition that Lotte Jacobi would be the photographer.

In the photograph, Einstein is slumped in his chair, wearing a wrinkled leather jacket and his very frizzy white hair looks electrically charged. He holds a pen over a page of mathematical calculations that rests on his lap. In the background of this tightly cropped image, there are out-of-focus hints of books on shelves and papers on a desk or table. The photographer's viewpoint is high and somewhat to the side but very near to the subject; a recorded moment that is the result of a collaboration between two friends.

Lotte Jacobi offers me the portrait as a gift. I am stunned. I ask her to sign the print and she also writes in the margin, 'To Frank' and the date, '12 April 1980'. By now her daughter has returned to take her somewhere else. The daughter seems irritated by her mother's sense of stubborn independence and prolonged conversation with a stranger.

I should mention I found out much later that 12 April 1980 was exactly the twenty-fifth anniversary of Einstein's death according to the Hebrew date, 26 Nissan. So, this encounter took place on his Yahrzeit. In certain forms of religious thought and even artistic practice there may be no such thing as coincidence but, for Albert Einstein, giving attention to such phenomena would probably be regarded simply as indulging in superstition.

According to Lotte Jacobi's biographers Marion Beckers and Elisabeth Moortgat, she shared with Einstein the experience of emigration and the hope that President Roosevelt would find a way to halt Nazi persecutions against the Jews. Beyond these obvious concerns, they held '...similar conceptions of a society guided by humanitarian principles and made up of free and self-

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<sup>15</sup>Although they were both born in Germany in the 1870s and died in the 1950s, I have no evidence that they had any contact or direct influence upon each other, however.

determined individuals'.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the pair '...both had a pronounced aversion to empty social conventions and a shared tendency toward self-effacement. They also shared a type of reverence that determined their world view far beyond any institutionalized practice of the Jewish faith'.<sup>17</sup>

Certainly, many highly educated German-Jewish émigrés broadly shared these kinds of political and social approaches to life. Is it possible, however, to ascertain more precisely what Albert Einstein may have had in mind by such a 'reverence' that apparently defied conventionally organized Jewish practice?

As someone who felt deeply the mystery of existence, Einstein regarded himself as a religious person. But his 'cosmic religious feeling' was to be distinguished from religion based on fear which he regarded as anthropomorphic and as dogmatic cultural construction. Not for Einstein were images of a god as omnipotent father or mother who protects or punishes, who comforts or loves a particular individual or tribe. Nor should organized religion exploit the hopes and fears of people to create a privileged class. He felt that it should be the place of art and science to serve to awaken and communicate human awareness of, '...[the] sublimity and marvellous order which are revealed [by] nature and in the world of thought'.<sup>18</sup>

For Einstein, morality, although having its origins in human convention, is a potential for goodness in the world. Rather than living by the whims of instinct and emotion, it is better to live by principles to inspire decent conduct and the fostering of opportunities for individuals to be able to develop their own creative and intellectual gifts. Again, for Einstein, there are no fixed, dogmatic rules. Rather, morality should generate a constant critical questioning with the aim of seeking justice, encouraging individual freedom and welcoming diversity.

Einstein was proud of being Jewish in that its moral focus is the serving of humanity not personal gratification. For him, the essence of the Jewish point of view,

'...seems to lie in an affirmative attitude to the life of all creation. The life of an individual has meaning only in so far as it aids in making the life of every living thing nobler and more beautiful. Life is sacred—that is to say, it is the supreme value, to which all other values are subordinate.'<sup>19</sup>

So, what implications might there be for life in our synagogue communities from Einstein's point of view? Let's try to set aside two negative points: my understanding is that he had no interest in being part of a formal Jewish community based around a synagogue and, second, he personally grew less and less gregarious as he grew older. But he did write concerning the subject of 'community' in its broadest sense:<sup>20</sup>

'What an extraordinary situation is that of us mortals! Each of us is here for a brief sojourn; for what purpose he knows not, though sometimes he feels it. But from the point of view of daily life, without going deeper, we exist for our fellow men—in the first place for those whose smiles and welfare all our happiness depends, and next for all those unknown to us personally with whose destinies we are bound up with the tie of sympathy. A hundred times every day I remind myself that my inner and outer life depend on the labours of other men, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give in the same measure as I have received and am still receiving.'

This paragraph appears in an altered form on page 216 of *Siddur Lev Chadash* as part of the study theme concerning 'Community'. The endnotes acknowledge that it was edited by Rabbi Chaim

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<sup>16</sup> Marion Beckers and Elisabeth Moortgat, *Lotte Jacobi, Berlin and New York* (Berlin: Nicolai, 1998), p. 152.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Albert Einstein, *The World as I See It* (New York: Citadel Press Books, 2006), pp. 28-29. On page 186 of *Siddur Lev Chadash*, Einstein is quoted concerning awe-inspiring mystery: 'The fairest thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science'.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, pp. 103-4.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.3.

Stern. Our prayerbook text is gender-neutral and some of the archaic flourishes have been thankfully subdued but, on the other hand, perhaps some of the force of its moral demand has been lost. Instead of reminding ourselves a 'hundred times a day' how we are so dependent on others, we have the rather bland 'Many times a day'. Amid the pain and difficulties of life, not to mention the cravings of the ego, it is a never-ending discipline to cultivate gratitude and respect for others. In addition, the last portion of the paragraph in which Einstein expresses his nowadays unfashionable preferences for plain living, not to mention his socialist outlook, has been eliminated.

At a time when Anglo-Jewry is sharply declining, some of us are especially concerned for the survival of a Judaism that includes at its heart universalistic humanitarian values and reason rather than emphasizing tribalism. Our communities can be places where we both care for each other pastorally as well as being open to creative exploration and intellectual discovery. And our activities could be still more open to people of all backgrounds or faiths/no faith, so that they, too, might find ways to experience Einstein's sense of the 'mysterious' and Judaism's reverence for life.

## 9. Professor Eric L. Friedland

### Isaac S. Moses: Originator of the American Union Prayer Book

This past summer I worked on an unexpectedly engrossing project given to me by the Director of the American Jewish Archives, Dr. Gary Zola, for the upcoming Festschrift on the occasion of its sixtieth anniversary. The Archives is located on the Cincinnati campus of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. The subject of my research was to be the nineteenth-century architect of the *Union Prayer Book*, Rabbi Isaac S. Moses. As you may be aware, the *Union Prayer Book* was the standard liturgy in use by Reform congregations throughout America for over three-quarters of a century. It went through three editions until it was supplanted in the 1970s by *Gates of Prayer*, based in part on English Liberal Judaism's *Service of the Heart*, with which I haven't a doubt a goodly number here have many warm associations. The *Gates of Prayer* was edited by the late Chaim Stern, whom some of you may remember fondly from his brief sojourn in England.

Now what, in a nutshell, did Isaac S. Moses do that was so special in fashioning the long-dominant *Union Prayer Book* that first came out in 1892? A little background first. Decades earlier there was a large wave of immigration to America of Jews from Central Europe, who brought with them their German cultural baggage and the idea of Reform. Congregations sprang up across the land, several of which had new prayerbooks designed for them reflecting various degrees of Reform, from the moderate traditionalism of Isaac Mayer Wise, Leo Merzbacher and Benjamin Szold to the radical strand of David Einhorn. In the majority of these newly-formed congregations the languages of worship were Hebrew and German. Bilingual as he was, Moses readily acknowledged the growing need of the succeeding generation for a *siddur* in the American idiom. It was no less a matter of great urgency for him that a prayerbook be provided which spoke to the heart and which enabled the contemporary worshipper to pray *be-tom levav*, with religious sincerity and intellectual honesty. On his own and for the individual congregations he served, he experimented in prayerbooks of his making by amalgamating the best features of the rituals then circulating in non-Orthodox synagogues across the United States, by translating into English the outstanding German hymns set to Jewish melodies by Leopold Stein of Frankfurt am Main and the stirring meditations from the liturgy of the *Reformgemeinde* in Berlin, and by soliciting the help of an American Unitarian clergyman-friend for questions pertaining to linguistic style. When the Reform Central Conference of American Rabbis initially met, one of the first items placed on its agenda was the formation of a single rite, in effect to put a stop to the confusion caused by a multiplicity of prayerbooks. When Isaac S. Moses notified his rabbinic colleagues what he had been in precisely this direction, the Conference adopted his *siddur* as a working draft. With a modification here and there, it ultimately became the famed *Union Prayer Book*, the ritual of the American Reform movement for nearly a century.

As I considered what our beloved Rabbi Andrew Goldstein accomplished as prayerbook editor in comparison with what Isaac S. Moses did in his day, I am keenly aware their working styles couldn't be more different. All the same, there is a key similarity. While there is no denying the crucial part played by Liberal Judaism Andrew was reared in, over the years his appreciation and love for richness of the multifaceted Jewish tradition has increased; and he shares his enthusiasm of continual discovery with one and all. By contrast, Moses was almost singleminded in making Judaism up-to-the-minute and palatable, it must be admitted, by a certain reductionism. The less, the better! For a variety of reasons we won't go in to at this time, Moses' *modus operandi* was that of a loner. On the principle of *li-lemod ule-lammed* (learning in to order to teach – and vice versa), Andrew has long cultivated the art of recruiting and exciting others to join in an imaginative enterprise, whether it's a building a *shul*, embarking on a new educational venture or reviving decimated Jewish communities on the Continent - or refashioning a *siddur* or *machzor*. Given their very dissimilar styles and quite different understandings of Judaism, Isaac S. Moses and our Andrew Goldstein succeeded in providing the fit too for Jews of his age to pray in sincerity and wholeness of heart, *be-tom levav*.

