The Future of Israeli Haredi Society: Can The Written Word Offer Some Insight? (And Assorted Other Comments)

by Marc B. Shapiro

1. Months ago I was asked to write about the situation in Beit Shemesh that everyone was then focused on (and which will probably heat up again in the future). At the present, I don’t have anything to add to the discussion, and if I did it would be with reference to Jewish books, as this is, after all, a site devoted to seforim. While I have in the past given my views on various issues, it was in the context of Jewish books, and this case would be no different. This point was actually sorely missing in discussions of the Beit Shemesh situation and the haredi world in general. While what happens in real life does not always correspond to what appears in the books, knowledge of the latter is a great help in understanding what is going on in the community, at least with regard to the rabbinic elite. For example, if I were going to write something about the Neturei Karta faction that cozies up to Iran and Hamas, I would deal with how these people have tried to justify their actions from talmudic sources. They have even attempted to justify the sending of congratulations to Hamas after the latter succeeded in blowing up Jews in a terrorist attack.

I have also been asked a number of times to write about the more basic issue of haredi ideology and democracy, which is on many people’s minds. They are wondering if the Israeli haredi community really believes in democracy and allowing everyone the freedom to live as they see fit. More than one has asked me straight out if a haredi majority would mean the end of a democratic Israel.[1] I can’t speak about the haredi man on
the street, but examination of the writings of the haredi leadership – and in the haredi world that is what really matters – shows that time and again they have expressed opposition to democratic values as well as democracy as a governmental system.

From the haredi leadership’s perspective, while at the present time the haredi world is forced to take part in the democratic process, they assume that if haredim ever became a majority they would dismantle Israel’s democracy and institute a Torah state (i.e., a theocracy led by the haredi gedolim).[2] Since that is their goal, stated explicitly, we have to wonder what such a society would look like. To begin with, if haredim were ever the majority, funding for non-Orthodox (and perhaps even Religious Zionist/Modern Orthodox) schools would be halted. There would be massive decreases of funding for universities, with the humanities taking the biggest cuts, and money for the arts, culture, and institutions connected to Zionism would dry up. Freedom of the press would be abolished, artistic freedoms would be curbed, and organ transplants would almost entirely vanish. Public Shabbat observance and separate-sex public transportation would likely be required. There would also be restrictions on what forms of public entertainment and media are permissible and on public roles for women. Of course, women’s sporting events would no longer be televised and men would not be permitted to attend them. From the haredi perspective, these steps are all halakhic requirements, and no one who reads haredi literature can have any doubt that these sorts of things are intended when haredi writers refer to the time when it will be possible להעמיד הדת על תלה. How many non-haredim will be affected by this is questionable, because as soon as the haredi numbers come close to a majority, the non-religious and non-haredi Orthodox emigration will begin (followed no doubt by the yeridah of some haredim as well). No one who has lived in a Western style democracy will want to live in a society where cherished freedoms are taken away.

Everything I am saying now could change. It is indeed possible that the haredi leadership could do a complete turn-around and decide that it is not helpful to take the country in a direction which while more “pious” would end up destroying it at the same time. But this would take some incredible acts of courage by the haredi leadership. They would have to break
with a message that has been advocated for the last thirty years or so.
Here is what R. Shakh wrote about democracy (Mikhtavim u-Ma’amirim, vol. 5, p. 124):

“בל נחשוב, שהשיטה הנקראת "דמוקרטיה" היא דבר חיובי ... האמת היא שהיא אסון לעולם. היא נותנת הרגשה מדומה של "חירות" שחושם הוא פרק, ותו לא ... הדמוקרטיה היא דבר טרף, וכל כוונתם לעקור דרכה של עם ישראל ולהרסו.

On p. 127 he writes:

ואנו תפילה להרבינו של עולם, אנא פטור אותנו מקללת הדמוקרטיה הקשה שנשלחה לעולם, שהיא ממש כמו מחלת סרטן שנשלחה לעולם. כי רק התורה הקדושה היא הדמוקרטיה האמיתית.

If the “curse” and “cancer” of democracy is so bad, what would take its place in a haredi dominated society? The answer is obvious, namely, a theocratic state with a religiously sanctioned parliament along the models of Iran. Reading the history of Iran in the years prior to and immediately following the revolution provides great insight into how religious figures learned to make use of the mechanisms of power which they had never before had access to. Just like in Iran the theocracy is for the people’s “own good”, so too will be the case in a haredi theocracy. Here is R. Shakh again, offering the paternalistic explanation as to why people should be denied democratic freedoms, freedoms that are the only guarantee that different types of Orthodoxy can flourish (forgetting for a moment about the non-Orthodox[3]; p. 126):

האדם חייב לחיות בתוך מגבלות, לצורך אושרו וטובתו. ודוקא הדמוקרטיה ההורסת את המגבלות היא המחריבה את האנושות.

Do any American haredi leaders agree with these sentiments, that it is democracy that is destroying humanity? I highly doubt it. But by the same token, I don’t think there can be any doubt that the Israeli haredi political parties, if they ever achieved electoral success, would put R. Shakh’s vision into practice by dismantling Israeli society’s democratic protections. So yes, the non-haredi segment of Israel has plenty of reason to be worried about the growth of the haredi electorate, especially when they hear the haredi triumphalist assertions that the future will be theirs. If the comments one sees on Voz is Neias and elsewhere are any indication, there...
are also many in the haredi world who recognize that the haredi ideology is really only suited for a minority community, and that troubles begin when people attempt to impose this ideology on others, or insist that no matter how large the haredi community is, its young men should never have to go to the army or receive any vocational training. [4] It didn’t have to be this way, as there are plenty of precedents even in haredi writers for a different perspective. But those alternative views are entirely forgotten today. If anyone still has doubts that the future growth of the haredi parties will present a serious threat to Israeli democracy, here is a passage, from R. Yissachar Meir, that appeared in an official Degel ha-Torah publication, Ve-Zarah ha-Shemesh (Bnei Brak, 1990), p. 630 (emphasis added; many other similar passages could be cited). What will take the place of democracy in the haredi state is spelled out right here:

Meir could have used a little lesson in history, because just like the Islamic world never had a theocracy until the Iranian revolution, Jewish history also does not know of theocracies (and the closest example we had, with High Priests involved in rulership, did not bring good results). [5] The truth of the matter is that we get no honesty from haredi spokesmen in these matters. They go on about how the non-religious have such a negative view of them. Well, what about the reverse, namely, what the haredim think of the non-religious? One of the leaders of the extremist haredim is R. Moshe Sternbuch. Here is the first page of a responsum he wrote (Teshuvot ve-Hanhagot, vol. 1, no. 816) in which he states that if a non-religious store owner makes a monetary mistake (e.g., gives you too much money) there is no obligation to point out the error.
He even quotes a 19th-20th century authority (and one who has a fairly moderate reputation) that there is no obligation to save his life! If this is what a well known haredi posek is teaching his followers, by what right can one criticize the non-religious for what they think of the extremist haredim? Let me pose this question to Avi Shafran and the rest of the
apologists: How exactly should the non-religious feel about the extremist haredim when the latter are being taught that they don’t have to deal with the non-religious in an honest fashion, and that their lives are not important?

(Quite apart from his religious views, Sternbuch’s political views are perhaps even more distasteful. At the recent protest against haredim serving in the army, he said that “the Zionists expelled the Arabs from the Land of Israel.” See here).

Here is another responsum, by R. Israel David Harfenes, *Nishmat Shabbat*, vol. 5 no. 500:4.
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I know that people wouldn’t believe me without seeing with their own eyes. The author is asked if you can violate Shabbat to save the lives of irreligious Jews who came from the former Communist countries, that is, Jews who never had the benefit of a Jewish education. His answer is absolutely not, and he questions whether it is even permitted to save their lives during the week! Incredibly, he puts the Reform and
Conservative in a better position than the secular Russian Jews, seeing the former as brainwashed by a false ideology. There is thus a possible limud zekhut regarding them.

None of this makes any sense, as people can be under the influence of a secular or anti-religious ideology much like they are under the influence of a Reform or Conservative ideology. If you can apply the logic of tinok she-nishbah to one, there is no coherent reason not to apply it to the other. For good measure, Harfenes also throws in that one who doesn’t believe in the Rambam’s Thirteen Principles is among those who should be killed. Taking a line from the Inquisition, he adds that killing these people is actually good for their souls, not to mention a benefit to the community at large.

In a previous responsum, 400:1, he discusses the same question with regard to the typical secular Jew and concludes likewise that one cannot save them on Shabbat. The only heter he can find is that if the haredi doctors don’t save them, then the secular doctors will refuse to save haredi patients. But unbelievably, rather than seeing this as a natural reaction of the secular Jews upon learning how people like Harfenes don’t value their lives, and are even are prepared to let them die, Harfenes sees this as an example of anti-Orthodox hatred! You can’t make this stuff up.

Some might assume that this extremist Satmar outlook is not to be found in the non-hasidic yeshiva world. However, this is not the case. I can cite parallels to what we have just seen in non-hasidic authors as well. I will mention just one such text, as it happens to be among the most depressing, and extreme, of the books to appear in recent years. I refer to R. Menahem Adler’s Binah ve-Daat. Here is the title page.
This book engages in the most crude incitement of hatred for the non-religious that I have ever seen in a sefer, all packaged as a typical halakhic text. Are the views expressed in this book taught in any heders or yeshivot or held by any but the most extreme in Israel? Perhaps the fact that the standard haskamot from figures such as R. Elyashiv, R. Wosner, R. Scheinberg and others are missing is a sign that they didn’t agree with the author. It would take a complete post to cover this book properly (some aspects of the book were already discussed on Hyde Park here).

I will call attention to only some of the points Adler puts
forth as halakhah. When I read things like this I wonder, how big can the Orthodox tent really be? When are the various communities in Orthodoxy so much at odds with each other that we must speak of two entirely different communities, much like the Protestants are divided into various sects?

One of the main points of the book is to argue that contemporary non-Orthodox Jews are not to be regarded as *tinok she-nishbah*, and thus they are subject to all the disabilities of brazen Sabbath violators. This means that they do not need to be treated with any respect or dignity. Those who know the relevant halakhot know what I am referring to, but let me cite some examples that you might not have thought of and which are results of his position. These come from chapter 31 and are stated with reference to most contemporary non-religious Jews (since only very few of them qualify as a *tinok she-nishbah*).

How should the non-religious respond when they hear that this is what a rabbi is saying about them:

In other words, although he denies that contemporary non-religious are *tinok she-nishbah*, even if you want to argue that they are, you still can’t look at them.

And talking about humrot, how about this one?

When I saw this I thought of the following wonderful story recorded in R. Asher Anshel Yehudah Miller, *Olamo Shel Abba*, p. 415:

"[...]

On p. 408 Adler writes:
Is there anyone in the kiruv world who believes this? Would anyone ever become religious if he even had an inkling that there are rabbis who advocate this position about the future baal teshuvah’s parents?[8] Aren’t the many haredi hesed organizations that don’t distinguish between Jews’ levels of religiosity a good sign that the mainstream haredi world rejects the viewpoints of Adler and Sternbuch?

On p. 470 he says that it is forbidden to belong to an organization that has non-Orthodox members, and this even includes charitable organization. The reason given for this position is as follows:

So we see that it is problematic for an Orthodox Jew to have any dealings with the non-Orthodox. Although the author cites R. Samson Raphael Hirsch to justify this extreme position, this is a complete distortion. Hirsch opposed membership in organizations that were led by the non-Orthodox or even had organizational ties with non-Orthodox groups. He never said that individual non-Orthodox Jews would not be welcome to join with the Orthodox for the betterment of the Jewish community.

On p. 406 Adler tells us that one cannot sell or rent an apartment in a religious neighborhood to a non-religious person. Will the author then complain when the non-religious don’t want to sell or rent to haredim (especially if they think that these haredim might hold the same views as Adler)?

If it is OK for haredim not to want to live together with secular Jews because of the “atmosphere” the latter bring, why have the haredi Knesset members cried racism when secular residents don’t want an influx of haredim for exactly the same reason? In a democracy one can’t have it both ways.[9]

Adler is part of a growing trend in haredi writings not to see the secularists as tinok she-nishbah, with all the halakhic implications this entails. While Adler acknowledges the existence of tinok she-nishbah as a category, note what he puts in brackets which pretty much empties the category of any meaning (p. 31):

And for , the writer , the writer to the writer , the writer to the writer , is the “” and the , the writer to the writer , the writer to the writer , the writer to the writer to the writer to the writer to the writer
But when it comes to Shabbat, Adler states that it is absolutely forbidden to violate the Sabbath to save a non-religious person, even if he is a tinok she-nishbah! (p. 556). I realize that, with only some exceptions, Adler hasn’t made up any of the material in his book, and even the most extreme rulings can be found in earlier traditional sources. So what does it say about so much of contemporary Orthodoxy, be it haredi, Habad, or Modern Orthodox, that its adherents would never dream of relating to the non-Orthodox the way Adler prescribes?[10] The reason they wouldn’t dream of relating to the non-Orthodox this way is not because they can point to other halakhic sources that disagree with the ones Adler cites (although the scholars among them can indeed point to these sources). There is something much more basic at work, namely, the moral intuition of people which even when it comes into conflict with what appears in halakhic texts does not agree to simply be pushed aside. Most Orthodox Jews of all stripes refuse to believe that what Adler is advocating is what God wants. It is impossible for them to accept that the Judaism they know and cherish, which has been taught to them by great figures, would have such a negative outlook, and all the halakhic texts in the world won’t be able to change their minds.

Since we are dealing with Adler, let me also note that he gives us advice on how to create anti-Semitism in the world and reinforce the stereotype of the “cheap Jew” (p. 415):

On p. 417 he writes (emphasis added):

As the source for the underlined halakhah he cites Sefer ha-Hinukh no. 232. To begin with, there is the methodological problem of recording something as halakhah because it is found in the Sefer ha-Hinukh when it is not found in the Shulhan Arukh or any of the classic responsa volumes. This is what I
call cherry picking halakhah, and is quite common today. People write books on the most arcane topics and in order to fill the pages they cite opinions from any book ever written, and record all the opinions they find as if they are halakhah. In this case, however, the halakhah cited here does not explicitly appear in the *Sefer ha-Hinukh*. All the *Sefer ha-Hinukh* states is that there is a biblical prohibition to give bad advice to a fellow Jew. But who says that this means that it is permitted when dealing with a non-Jew? It could still be forbidden for a variety of other reasons (perhaps even rabbinic), just not from this particular verse. Even if the *Sefer ha-Hinukh* does mean what Adler says (and the *Minhat Hinukh* also assumes that this is the meaning), only in the note does Adler reveal that the *Minhat Hinukh* explicitly holds an opposing position. This is the general trend in the book. He puts extreme positions in the text itself, which are on some occasions based on his own understanding, while only in the notes does he reveal the authorities who disagree.

(R. Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg defends the *Minhat Hinukh*‘s position in his *Mishmeret Hayyim*, vol. 1, pp. 125-126. But it still makes for uncomfortable reading as he writes:

> אין לאו דגזל שייך גבי גוי
> וכן באיסור רציחה דהאיסור הוא דנוטל נשמתו וgatsby גוי דלא חשוב
> נשמתו כל-כך לא שייך לאו זה

It would be pretty hard to be an *Or la-Goyim* while at the same time following Adler’s prescriptions. In a previous post I already mentioned that there is no Modern Orthodox synagogue in the country that would hire someone who had his perspective, and this shows a real cultural divide between at least some haredim and the Modern Orthodox. (I say “some haredim” because I believe that in this matter many, and perhaps most, haredim share the Modern Orthodox perspective.)[11]

At the end of the section in which Adler records what I quoted from him about tipping waiters or cab drivers, he adds:

> מפני דרכי שלום מותר

I would like someone to explain to me how it could ever *not* be *darkhei shalom*?[12] Adler is speaking to people who wear black suits and hats, the sort that everyone
recognizes as Jewish. So by definition if you stiff the cab driver or the waiter it is an immediate hillul ha-shem? Therefore, what sense does it make to even quote the halakhah mentioned above? Isn’t it irresponsible to allow yeshiva students on their own to determine when their actions will cause a hillul ha-shem and when not?

Since this post has dealt with how to relate to the non-religious and non-Jews, let me now turn once again to something relevant in Artscroll. Originally I thought that the example I will now point to was an intentional falsehood, because the Hebrew Artscroll gets it right. However, based upon the note to the passage that we will see, I am now no longer sure. It is one thing to translate a censored passage in the name of good relations, but it is hard to imagine that people who know the truth would go so far as to insert a false note. As thousands of people doing daf yomi have been misled as to the meaning of the talmudic passage we will see, if the distortion is intentional this would seem to be a classic case of ziyuf ha-Torah. When authors added a note at the beginning of their books stating that all references to non-Jews referred to those pagans in China and India, everyone knew it wasn’t to be taken seriously, so there was no ziyuf ha-Torah. Yet people who reads the Artscroll translation and note assume that they are getting the Torah truth. As such, I am more inclined to think that what we will now see is a simple error, rather than a “tactical” mistake.

Avodah Zarah 26a-b reads:

Avodah Zarah 26a-b reads:

העובדי כוכבים ורועי בהמה דקה לא מעלין ולא מורידין אבל המינין והמסורות והמומרים היו מורידין ולא מעלין

Avodah Zarah 26a-b reads:

Artscroll translates: “Idol worshipers and shepherds of small animals, the law is that we neither raise them up from a pit nor lower them into a pit. But as for the minin, the informers and the renegades, they would lower them into pits and not raise them up.”

This is, indeed, a proper translation of what appears in the Talmud. Yet in every edition of the Talmud before the Vilna Shas of 1883 the text states אבל המינין והמסורות והמומרים היו מורידין ולא מעלין. That is, the word היו, which makes the passage past tense (and thus no longer relevant), is not authentic but was added to avoid problems with the censor. The
Oz ve-Hadar edition of the Talmud points out that the word היו was only recently added. Soncino and Steinsaltz also recognize this. What is particularly noteworthy is that the Hebrew Artscroll also knows this, and tells the reader that the word היו is not authentic.

In its note on the passage in both the Hebrew and English editions, Artscroll quotes the Hazon Ish, Yoreh Deah 2:16, that the type of actions referred to in the Talmud are no longer applicable. Why then didn’t Artscroll mention in the English edition that the word היו is not authentic? Furthermore, Artscroll’s citation of the Hazon Ish is mistaken, although as mentioned, I am not sure whether it is an intentional falsification. Contrary to what Artscroll states, the Hazon Ish’s comment was only made with reference to heretics. His “liberal” judgment was never stated with regard to informers.

In its note, Artscroll states: “It goes without saying that the law never applied in places where government regulations would prohibit such an act.” Once again, I am not sure whether Artscroll really believes that this is true. As a historical statement it is false. Here is a page from R. Reuven Margaliyot’s Margaliyot ha-Yam, vol 1, p. 91b (to Sanhedrin 46a), that shows how even in the not-so-distant past an informer could be killed.
In this post I mentioned the outrageous accusation, based on nothing at all, that the telegram from Kobe was actually sent by the Chief Rabbinate in order to be able to pressure other rabbis to accept the Chief Rabbinate’s position on the dateline issue. Dr. Dov Zakheim sent me the following valuable email:

I noted in your recent blog you point out that some charedim are asserting there was never a telegram from Kobe. There was. My father zt”l sent it. He had been the legal counsel of the Jewish community of Vilna (as well as a musmach of Ramailes) and also Reb Chaim Ozer zt”l’s personal assistant and legal advisor (see his introduction...
to his sefer Zvi ha-Sanhedrin). He escaped from Vilna in 1941 and managed the Mirer Yeshiva's legal affairs (where my uncle zt"l was a talmid) when they left Vilna, on the trans-Siberian, in Kobe and then in Shanghai.

Also in the post I referred to the letter published by R. Kasher in which lots of great rabbis refer to the State of Israel as the beginning of the redemption. I noted how Zvi Weinman has shown that this is a religious Zionist forgery, as at least some of the rabbis never signed such a letter. I mentioned that we don’t know if Kasher was responsible for the forgery (as Weinman appears to think) or someone else. Sholom Licht was kind enough to call my attention to this source from where we see that the letter Kasher published already appeared in Ha-Tzofeh many years prior, so Kasher clearly had nothing to do with the forgery.

3. In the last few posts I have dealt with Artscroll a good deal, as is only proper since Artscroll is the most significant Jewish publishing phenomenon of our time. I still have a lot more to say, but let me now turn to R. Jonathan Sacks’ siddur, and give an example where Sacks gets it wrong while Artscroll gets it right.

The blessing to be recited upon lightning and Birkat ha-Hamah is עושה מעשה בראשית. This goes back to Mishnah Berakhot 9:2. Although the standard version of the Mishnah omits the word מעשה, it is recorded in various medieval texts and this is how the blessing has come down to us.

What does עושה מעשה בראשית mean? The first thing we must do is figure out if there is a segol or a tzeirei under the shin in עושה. Looking at the siddurim in my house that have English translations, I found that Sacks, Birnbaum, Sim Shalom, and Artscroll, have a segol. This is also what appears in the Kaufmann Mishnah. See here. However, the Metsudah siddur and the Blackman Mishnayot have a tzeirei.

What is the difference between the vocalizations? If there is a segol than the words עושה מעשה בראשית should be translated in the English present, as עושה is a verb. If there is a tzeirei then עושה is a noun, as in the words of Hallel (from Ps.115:15): עושה שמים וארץ, which means “Maker of heaven and earth.” Let us see if the translations follow this rule. Artscroll, which has a segol, translates: “Who makes the work of Creation.” This translation is correct, although I don’t
know why the C in creation is capitalized. This translation implies the continuing work of creation, as reflected in the words of the prayer: בֵּית הָאָגוֹל יִפְלֹגְּמְיוּ נִפְגָּלְמָיוּ בְּאֹתוֹת בְּדֶבַּשׁ בְּדֶבַּשָּׁהְבִּי
Birnbaum translates עֹזֶב ראשֵת בְּרֵאשִׁית as: “Who didst create the universe.” This is incorrect, as the passage is not in the past tense. Sacks, who also has a segol, translates: “Author of creation.” This too is incorrect, as עָשָׂה with a segol is a verb, not a noun. Sim Shalom, also with a segol, translates: “Source of Creation.” This too is incorrect.

Now for the texts that have a tzeirei: Blackman translates: “the author of the work of the creation”, which is a correct rendering. Metsudah, on the other hand, translates: “Who makes the work of Creation.” Leaving aside the capital “C”, this is a mistaken translation. While Metsudah has עָשָׂה with a tzeirei under the shin, it translates as if there was a segol.[14]

Artscroll, while being correct when it comes to this blessing, does not get a pass when it comes to the word עָשָׂה. In the Artscroll siddur, pesukei de-zimra, p. 70, we find the words עָשָׂה שָׁם וּאֱלֹקִים. This comes from Psalm 146:6. There is a segol under the shin which means that it is a participle and should be translated here with the English present tense, as are all the other verbs in this Psalm. Yet Artscroll translates עָשָׂה שָׁם וּאֱלֹקִים as “Maker of heaven and earth”, which is incorrect. Sacks follows many other translations by rendering the words: “who made heaven and earth”. Yet this too is not correct and doesn’t follow the model of the Psalm, which has a series of participles that are to be translated as the present tense:

עָשָׂה שָׁם וּאֱלֹקִים
הַשָּׁם אֱלֹקִים
עָשָׂה מְשָׁפֵת לֶאָשֶׁר
עָשָׂה מְשָׁפֵת לֶאָשֶׁר
הוֹשֵׁב אִם לְדֹרַת עוֹלָם
וַהוֹשֵׁב אִם לְדֹרַת עוֹלָם
עָשָׂה לְיַעֲקֹב אָבֵי
עָשָׂה לְיַעֲקֹב אָבֵי
עָשָׂה לְיַעֲקֹב אָבֵי

What about the word בֹּנָה in the blessing בֹּנָה יִרְאוּץ? There is a tzeirei under the nun in בֹּנָה which means that it is not a verb. Artscroll correctly translates the phrase as “Builder
of Jerusalem”. Birnbaum and Metsudah also get it right. However Sacks (and also De Sola Pool and Sim Shalom) are mistaken in their translation. Sacks renders בונה ירושלים as if the nun had a segol: “Who builds Jerusalem.”

Since בונה ישראל must be translated as “Builder of Jerusalem”, and all translations are in agreement that גואל ישראל means “Redeemer of Israel”, does this mean that the conclusion of all the blessings of the Amidah should follow this model? What about חונן הדעת? Artscroll translates: “Giver of wisdom”, seeing חונן as a noun. Birnbaum and Metsudah do likewise. However, Sacks assumes חננ is a verb and translates: “who graciously grants knowledge.” This rendering (which I think is in error) is also found in De Sola Pool and Sim Shalom.

How about מחיה המתים? Is the word מחיה a verb? Artscroll assumes yes and translates: “Who resuscitates the dead.” Sacks agrees with this, but Metsudah, striving for consistency, translates: “Resurrector of the dead.” Metsudah is, in fact, the only siddur that as a rule translates the concluding blessings of the Amidah along this model, while the other translations alternate between verb and noun. Here are some of Metsudah’s translations:

– רופא חולי עמו ישראל – Healer of the sick of His people Israel
– מברך השנים – Blesser of the years
– מקבץ נדחי עמו ישראל – Gatherer of the dispersed of His people Israel
– שובר אויבים ומכניע זדים – Crusher of enemies and subduer of the insolent

Although Metsudah follows this rule, for every rule there are exceptions, and even Metsudah translates שומע תפלה as “Who hears prayers”. Yet perhaps this is not an exception, and even here Metsudah intended “The hearer of prayers”, but since this doesn’t sound so good in English they came up with a more felicitous wording. It is true that the underlined words of the blessings שכינתו לציון and ואת עמו ישראל המברך have to be seen as verbs, and Metsudah translates them as such. But I think that these are a different type of blessings than the ones in the middle of the Amidah.

The question to be asked is must we assume that there is a consistency of form in a prayer like the Amidah? If the answer is yes, then Metsudah is the only translation to get it right, and they must be recognized as having picked up on something
that eluded all their predecessors and successors. Finally, let me return to the blessing מחיה המתים. I asked if the word מחיה is a verb, and noted that Artscroll and Sacks indeed translated it this way. However, they are both incorrect for the simple reason that in their siddurim there is a tzeirei under the yud of מחיה. There are siddurim, such as Tehilat ha-Shem, that have a segol under the yud. In such a case, the word should be translated as a verb. However, when there is a tzeirei it must be translated as a noun. Metsudah once again gets it right, translating “Resurrector of the dead.” [15] Right before this, we find the words מלך ומחיה ממית. Here there is a segol under the yud, meaning that it is a verb and is to be translated as “Who causes death and restores life.”

Artscroll and Sacks also err in their translation of מלך ומחיה ממית in Magen Avot in the Friday night service. There is a tzeirei under the yud meaning that it must be translated as “Resurrector of the dead with His utterance.” Artscroll mistakenly renders: “Who resuscitates the dead with His utterance,” using the same translation from the Amidah for the words מחיה המתים. I can’t figure out Sacks’ method here. In the Amidah he translates מחיה מתים as: “who revives the dead”, but in Magen Avot he translates: “By his promise, He will revive the dead.” This is incorrect, as it turns the sentence into the future tense, which it is not. Furthermore, if it was to be translated as such, why not do so in the Amidah as well, as the words are identical? Indeed, Magen Avot is nothing but an abridged version of the Amidah, so by definition the translation must be the same.[16] Translating במאמרו as “By His promise”, which I assume means “in accordance with His promise,”[17] is also incorrect, as the passage refers to God’s word, or better yet, the power of God’s word, not any promise.[18]

3. I want to briefly call attention to three books that have recently appeared and which I hope to discuss in future posts. The first is Gil Perl’s The Pillar of Volozhin: Rabbi Naftali Zvi Judah Berlin and the World of 19th Century Lithuanian Torah Scholarship. The second is Eugene Korn and Alon Goshen-Gottstein, ed., Jewish Theology and World Religions. The third is Ben Zion Katz, A Journey Through Torah: A Critique of the
Documentary Hypothesis. I know that there are many Seforim Blog readers who will find these books worth reading.

4. Those who want to post (or read) comments, please access the Seforim Blog site by going to http://seforim.blogspot.com/ncr Only by doing this will you be taken to the main site (and not have a country code in the URL). We have recently learnt that readers outside the United States do not have access to the comments posted and in the U.S. We don’t know why this is, or how to fix it, but the above instruction fixes the matter.

[1] As a result of these discussions, which led to investigations of haredi literature and discussions with haredi friends, another point became ever more obvious to me. It appears – and I welcome being corrected – that once someone has been crowned a gadol in the haredi world, it is almost impossible for him to lose this status, no matter what he says (and we have seen examples of this time after time). If, for instance, a recognized gadol expresses racist or misanthropic sentiments, or declares that a known and continuing sexual abuser or wife abuser must not be turned over to the authorities, even that would not be sufficient to “defrock” him. In other words, the “immunity” given to haredi (and hardal) gedolim is much more far-reaching than anything that could be imagined in the Modern Orthodox world.

[2] A January 2012 Avi Chai poll found that 7 percent of the Israeli population defines itself as haredi, 15 percent as dati, and 32 percent as traditional. Only 3 percent defines themselves as secular anti-religious. However, approximately 20 percent of primary school students are haredi, which shows the direction the future is going.

[3] It was actually the Religious Zionists who were responsible for creating the undemocratic situation in which Israel is perhaps the only country in the world in which Jews are not free to be married by the rabbi of their choice. I would like someone to show me where, in the entire history of halakhic literature, it is stated that people who are not observant must be forced, or even encouraged, to have a halakhic marriage. The current situation means that when secular Israelis leave Israel and then get divorced, being that they are secular most will simply get a secular divorce.
Thus, any future marriage will be halakhically adulterous and the children will be mamzerim. Outside of Israel this is almost never an issue since non-Orthodox people generally don’t get married by Orthodox rabbis, which means that in the event of a divorce we can assume that the first marriage was not halakhically binding. But in Israel, where everyone gets married halakhically, it opens the doors to mamzerut on a massive scale. This was actually recognized by R. Eliyahu Bakshi Doron when he was chief rabbi. He created a big controversy when he revealed that it is a practice among some rabbis that when they perform weddings for the non-religious, they make sure that the marriage is not halakhically binding, precisely in order to prevent future mamzerut. Just this week R. Yaakov Yosef publicly advocated this position. See here.


The sheer ignorance of what democracy means is beyond comprehension. Do people like Pinchasi have so little knowledge of basic history that they do not know that it is only democracy that ensures protections for Jews around the world? Does he want the world to go back to the era of dictators when Jews suffered so terribly? Presumably yes, as he feels democracy is destroying the world.. I can easily provide parallels to the language used by Pinchasi in the writings of communists and fascists, especially from Weimar Germany. I was also shocked to read what R. Elhanan Wasserman writes in his Ikveta di-Meshiha, par. 2, published on the eve of the Holocaust.

[5] I have many other sources regarding democracy, including
traditional sources very much in favor of it (especially in pre-messianic times). I hope to provide them on a future occasion. Reading the haredi attacks on democracy, I can’t help but be reminded of Pius IX’s 1864 Syllabus of Errors and the later silencing of John Courtney Murray. The Church identified certain doctrines as false, yet now recognizes that its position in these matters was mistaken. I mention these examples because I am convinced that the American haredi world also rejects the anti-democratic sentiments that I have quoted, seeing them as out of step with where their world is. It is worth contrasting the anti-democratic sentiments of haredi leaders with the response of the Church, which fortunately was able to examine its own long history of anti-democratic abuses and come to the conclusion (much later than it should have) that in modern times democracy is the only viable system. As Pope Benedict put it (see here), democracy “alone can guarantee equality and rights to everyone.” He continues with the following valuable words:

   Indeed, there is a sort of reciprocal dependence between democracy and justice that impels everyone to work responsibly to safeguard each person’s rights, especially those of the weak and marginalized. This being said, it should not be forgotten that the search for truth is at the same time the condition for the possibility of a real and not only apparent democracy: “As history demonstrates, a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism” (Centesimus Annus, n. 46).

[6] R. Asher Anshel Yehudah Miller, Olamo shel Abba (Jerusalem, 1984), p. 308, reports that the Satmar Rav, R Yoel Teitelbaum, once declared that there were 50,000 Jews in the world. When asked how he could give such a figure when there were many millions of Jews, he replied:

   ... בפנינו יהודים הם רק יהודים ששומרים תורה ומצוות כמוני או שיחזרו בתשובה, או שצריך להוציא אותם מכלל [שאר היהודים] ישראל.

[7] I will deal with Torat ha-Melekh in a future post.

[8] Alan Brill, Judaism and Other Religions: Models of Understanding (New York, 2010), p. 255 n. 43, has recently noted that since many laws stated with reference to non-Jews
apply equally to heretical Jews: “the main problem is the fundamental use of a double ethic as described by Max Weber in his description of an ethnic economy.”

[9] Interestingly, R. Avraham Yosef has recently spoken of the spiritual advantages of living together with the non-religious. See here.

For Israeli haredim, there is now a mindset that they can only live among other haredim, and this is why they create exclusively haredi neighborhoods and towns. Such a concept is entirely new, and not only did it not exist in Europe but didn’t even exist in Israel in the first decades of the State. Many readers probably recall the time when hasidic rebbes lived in Tel Aviv.

[10] I have to admit, however, that one sometimes does find even moderate haredim who seem to have sympathy with Adler’s approach. R. Moshe Eisemann, who used to have a great deal of influence in the moderate haredi camp, wrote as follows with reference to the Jerusalem fanatics who throw stones at passing cars (not knowing, of course, if the drivers are Jewish or Arab): “If it is true that he who hurls a stone were well-advised to be pretty sure that he is doing the right thing, I believe that the one who feels no urge to do so, must engage in even deeper soul-searching.” Tradition 26 (Winter 1992), p. 34. Maybe I was absent that day in yeshiva, but I was never taught that it is normal to have an urge to throw a stone at a fellow Jew (which of course could kill him, as we have seen with the Palestinian stone-throwers). On the contrary, I was taught that I should have an urge to show the non-religious Jew about the beauty of Shabbat, which an invitation to a Shabbat table will accomplish much better than a rock in his windshield.

[11] What is one to make of R. Shmuel Baruch Genot, Va-Yomer Shmuel (Elad, 2008), no. 84, that it is forbidden for Jews to oppose the death penalty in places where Jews are not affected (unless done for reasons of darkhei shalom): דאסור להציל גוף נכרי. This is the sort of pesak (and I can cite many similar examples) that in the Modern Orthodox world is regarded not simply as wrong, but as deeply immoral (especially since during the Holocaust so many non-Jews adopted Genot’s position vis-à-vis the Jews!).
While at least since Jacob Katz’s *Exclusiveness and Tolerance* scholars are now no longer deterred from studying the medieval Jewish view of “the other”, there is still great reluctance to examine contemporary views, for fear of how this might play into the hands of anti-Semites. I am curious to hear what readers think about this. How long can we keep all of this “under the carpet,” and should we even be attempting to do that?

Ruth Langer has discussed the medieval tradition in her new book *Cursing the Christians? A History of the Birkat HaMinim* (Oxford, 2012), p. 12:

> For Jews engaged in dialogue, it has been much easier to identify the problems within Christianity than to turn that scrutiny back on our own heritage. Jews, after all, were very much the victims, not just of the Holocaust, but also of centuries of Christian anti-Jewish venom and oppression. Consequently, traditions developed among those studying Judaism in the *wissenschaftlich* mode to obscure embarrassing elements of the tradition rather than to confront them. . . . Christian anti-Judaism in its many expressions led to Jewish responses and attitudes that were equally vicious; the power relationships between the two communities prevented Jews from expressing this with physical violence, but Jews still lacked respect for their neighbors. . . . In our time, Jewish publishers are restoring uncensored versions of many texts, reclaiming a difficult heritage. While from an academic perspective, this has merit, there has been all too little discussion about its impact on the Jewish community.

I would, however, dispute the use of the expression “equally vicious.” Once Langer assumes that it was Christian anti-Judaism (and I would add “anti-Semitism”) that led to the Jewish responses and attitudes, then I don’t think it is correct to portray them as “equally vicious.” The one who is responding to widespread murder of his coreligionists, and responding only through the pen, cannot be regarded as “equally vicious.” Furthermore, considering the oppression that Jews suffered in medieval times, all the anti-Gentile sentiments found in texts from this period are completely understandable.

[12] I have often heard people pronounce דרכי as *darkei*. This
is incorrect. There is no dagesh in the kaf.

[13] The Artscroll Talmud also has a segol but the Artscroll Mishnah has a tzeirei.

[14] There are times in the Bible where the word עָשָׂה with a tzeirei is to be translated as if it has a segol, but these are exceptions. When it comes to vocalizing a text, one should certainly not insert a tzeirei if one is going to translate the word as a verb. The exceptions, where we find a tzeirei under the shin, are Ex. 15:11: עָשָׂה פָּלא, which appears to mean “doing wonders”, although, as R. Mazuz pointed out to me, it could also be translated as “doer of wonders”= עָשָׂה-פָּלא-ים. Amos 5:8: עָשָׂה כַּמֶּה וּכְסִיל, and Ps. 14:1, 3, 53:2, 4: עָשָׂה עָשָׂה, could perhaps also be read in this way. However, in Jer. 51:15: עָשָׂה עָשָׂה פָּלא, the word appears to be a verb.


[16] See Abudarham ha-Shalem (Jerusalem, 1963), p. 148:


[18] See Abudarham ha-Shalem, p. 148: וְהָיָה אָנִי פֹּתַחַת בְּקֵבָרְךָ בַּעֲלַבּוֹתֵיכָם אַחֲרֵי דַּעֲרֵי נָחָל הַיְּבַשָּׁה, וְאִנֶּה בְּקֵבָרְךָ בְּקֵבָרְךָ בַּעֲלַבּוֹתֵיכָם אַחֲרֵי דַּעֲרֵי נָחָל הַיְּבַשָּׁה" הַיַּעַל (עָשָׂה הַיַּעַל).