Eitan Abramovitch

The Institution for the Advancement of Rav Shagar's Writings

"'Dispute for the sake of heaven': Dissent and Multiplicity in Rav Shagar's thought"

Rav Shagar (Shimon Gershon Rosenberg, 1949-2007) was one of the most original thinkers in modern Orthodoxy. His thought has had a deep influence in Israel, and in the past few years it has begun to be known also in the modern Orthodox community in the US.

The central place that Rav Shagar gives to concepts like dissent, dispute, and multiplicity is one of the innovative elements of his thought. Modern Orthodoxy in Israel was shaped under the influence of Rav Kook, whose thought was constantly striving for the creation of harmony and synthesis between different world views. Rav Shagar turns the other way: instead of striving for harmony he prefers multiplicity and even dissent, and he connects this attitude to the central place of multiplicity in postmodern philosophy.

The influence of this fundamental change of perspective can be demonstrated in two different fields: existential and political. First, Rav Shagar claims that modern Orthodox identity must include within itself multiple and conflicting world views; he sees this schizophrenic situation as a source of creativity and a higher religious perspective. Second, he claims that the ability to live with multiplicity, rather than striving for the common ground, can open new ways for the coexistence of Jews and Palestinians in Israel.

Shlomo Abramovich
University of Nebraska, Lincoln

"Limiting the Authority of the Country: Disobedience in the IDF (Israel Defense Forces)"

Despite the demand for total obedience to the military authorities, the history of Israel is full of examples of disobedience and refusal of soldiers motivated morally and ideologically. In recent years, the background of these situations is mostly the continuous Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which caused incidents of refusals to serve in the West Bank, from the left side of the political map, and to participate in the evacuations of settlements, from the right.

This paper will focus on the latter. These refusals are discussed every time a new plan for a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians is presented. During the withdrawal from Gaza, in 2005, discussions about refusals caused major debate in Israel, especially among Religious Zionists.

As we will see, this discussion deals with some of the most fundamental questions of modern Judaism in Israel: What is the importance of the State of Israel and what are the limitations of its authority? What happens when there is a contradiction between the country and its institutions (the government or the army) and Jewish values? How can modern nationality and subordination to the country coexist with absolute commitment to religion?

- Theodore Albrecht
- Kent State University

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- “Thumbing Mendelssohn’s Nose at the Nazis: Hans Pfitzner’s Symphony in C, Op. 46 (1940)”
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• Paul Cossmann (1869-1942) and Hans Pfitzner (1869-1949) grew up as friends in Frankfurt, Germany. Cossmann, the son of the Jewish cello professor at the city’s Conservatory, had literary and political leanings. Pfitzner, the son of the Lutheran concertmaster at the city’s Opera, entered the Frankfurt Conservatory and became one of Germany’s most promising young composers. Along the way, Pfitzner fell in love with the half-Jewish Mimi Kwast; when her father disapproved, Cossmann helped engineer the couple’s elopement.

• When the Nazis came to power in 1933, Cossmann was arrested for his writings. Pfitzner wrote a letter to the aging President Hindenburg to intercede with Hitler on Cossmann’s behalf. Miraculously, Cossmann was released in 1934. As retaliation, the Nazi’s removed Pfitzner from his position, which he called “a companion to the swift kick that the Bishop of Salzburg gave to Mozart.”

• When the Nazis asked Pfitzner for new music to Shakespeare’s popular “Midsummer Night’s Dream,” he replied that he could never improve upon that written by the Jewish Mendelssohn. Defying Hitler’s prohibition of any celebration of the composer’s 70th birthday in 1939, Frankfurt held a Pfitzner Festival Week. In gratitude, he wrote a Symphony in C in 1940, using a disguised theme from Mendelssohn’s beloved Italian Symphony as a defiant gesture against the Nazi regime.

Joan S. Friedman
College of Wooster

"When Authority Is a Form of Dissent: Postwar Guides to Reform Ritual Observance"

Reform Judaism's perpetual paradox is that a Jewish movement rooted in rejection of halachic authority nevertheless requires some modes of communal religious behavior, as well as some agreed-upon method of determining what those behaviors should be. The movement's history reveals the ever-present tension between desire for authoritative determinations of "correct" Reform practice, on the one hand, and desire for individual autonomy (whether for rabbis or for all congregants) on the other.

The quarter century after World War II brought the publication of the first books on Reform practice: *Reform Jewish Practice and its Rabbinic Background* (Freehof, 1944 & 1952), *Guide for Reform Jews* (Doppelt & Polish, 1957), and *Liberal Judaism at Home* (1971). While the Reform rabbinate yet remained collectively opposed to offering such guidance, each of these rabbinic authors sought not only to offer ritual guidance to Reform Jews, but also to establish the theoretical basis upon which such guidance could be offered and to what extent it could be "authoritative" within the Reform context. Each book's author(s) staked out a distinctive position on the Reform authority/autonomy continuum while also responding to the larger issues of religious vs. ethnic identity that played out in the postwar American Jewish community.

Joel Gereboff
Arizona State University

"When the Memory of David Is Not Enough to Authenticate the Temple in Jerusalem"

The connection of King David to the actual building of the Temple in Jerusalem is described somewhat differently already in biblical texts. Although traditions in the Deuteronomistic History (2 Sam 7, I Kgs 8) make clear that Solomon was fully responsible for the construction of the Temple, several traditions in the Chronicler give David credit for having procured some of the building materials. Rabbinic sources assign in varying ways a greater role to David. In one version, when Solomon sought to bring the ark into the Temple, he was unable to do so as the gates of the Temple would not open. This midrash relates that the gates opened upon invoking *chasdei david*, God's mercies for David.

Other midrashim on Psalms often serve to more closely connect the Temple in Jerusalem with David. Some specifically assert that this connection was effectual only when David was actually present in the Temple either by bringing in his coffin or through his revival. Thus, the invoking of David's memory alone was not seen as sufficient. In my paper I explore the background behind this. I will correlate these traditions with developments in the Byzantine era, when the documents were written in which these sources appear. My goal is to clarify how authenticating the Temple of Solomon with David's actual presence connects with concerns and religious views of the era of the expression of these traditions.

Gil Graff

Builders of Jewish Education

"Jewish Law and the Law of the State: The Impact of Modernity and Its Echoes in the United States" [keynote]

From Talmudic times, the principle "the law of the kingdom is the law" framed the relationship of Jews and Judaism to the ruling power. For centuries, the principle served not only as one of accommodation but also as the basis for resistance to arbitrary demands. For example, "the law of the kingdom" was interpreted as a limitation against illegal confiscations.

With the onset of modernity, state jurisdiction extended to matters long left to religious authorities. Napoleon brought the issue of defining church-state relationships to a head. In the case of his Jewish subjects, Napoleon convened an Assembly of Jewish Notables to address the matter. The responses of the Assembly recognized that Jews and Judaism were, now, part of a very different political and social order than that of the preceding 1500 years.

The modern era gave rise to fundamental questions about the very nature and expression of Judaism. The "law of the kingdom is the law" was variously invoked, as Jews charted divergent paths. The claims of religion and state and, later, loyalty to the state and concomitant commitment to Zionism were, as elsewhere, extensively discussed in the American environment. Echoes of nineteenth and twentieth century debates reverberate today.

Lindsey Jackson
Concordia University

"Ritual Rebellion, Non-Circumcision Jews, and the Creation of Non-Cutting Covenantal Ceremonies"

The debate about male circumcision has garnered increased attention and has permeated public discourse in recent years. San Francisco contemplated banning the practice in 2011, and more recently legislation criminalizing circumcision has started to gain traction in Iceland. Jewish anti-circumcision activist groups, such as *Jews Against Circumcision* and online forums such as *Beyond the Bris*, provide evidence that dissention toward circumcision has begun to permeate the Jewish community and has propelled some Jews to action. This action manifests itself in different ways, with some Jews publicly advocating for and supporting legislation against circumcision, while others are creating and choosing non-cutting rituals as alternatives to *brit milah*.

Focusing on Jews in Canada and the US, my research consists of an ethnographic study of Jewish parents and their engagement with, adaptation, or rejection of *brit milah*. Using non-circumcision Jews as the focus of this analysis, I argue that ritual functions to challenge the status quo, defy authority, and serves as a site of activism and protest. Ritual is inextricably linked to power and authority, and non-circumcision Jews are challenging authority, reclaiming power, and demanding change by opting out of *brit milah* and creating alternative rituals that are better suited to their ethical concerns about circumcision and unique understandings of Judaism.

Mary Julia Jett
St. Francis College, Brooklyn, New York

“The Trial of Joshua: Reestablishment and Reconciliation of Authority (Zechariah 3)”

Zechariah’s retelling of the return from the exile is strange. Horses of different colors gallop symbolically through the reestablishment of the people, angels stretch out, shape and reshape boundaries, and in chapter 3 Joshua is accused by the Accuser: “And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan [or the Accuser] standing at his right hand to accuse him [Joshua]” (Zec 3:1). The Lord rebukes Satan, clean garments replace the filthy, and through a series of declarations and actions, Zechariah 3 explains the re- establishment of an accepted High Priesthood and Temple cult.

However, Zechariah's text is vague and unclear in almost every way. What happened, what changed, or even Joshua's wrongdoings are all unspecified in the pericope. Through looking at the portion in the broader scriptural context as well as subsequent translations and interpretations, generations of Jewish views of conflict and authority emerge. A comparison of other scriptural interpretations of the return, translations and formulations through the Targums and early texts, as well as early rabbinic traditions, shows different ways that authority is established, clarified, and reconciled.

Victoria Khiterer
Millersville University

“Not So Silent: Jewish Religious Life in Kiev, 1945-1970s”

Elie Wiesel visited the Soviet Union in the fall 1965. He wrote about Antisemitism and suppression of Jewish life in the Soviet Union in his book *The Jews of Silence*. Jewish scholarly, educational, and cultural organizations were closed by the Soviet authorities in the second half of the 1930s-1940s. However, in spite all effort of the authorities, Jewish religious life was never completely suppressed in the Soviet Union.

Official Soviet reports show that a significant percentage of Kievan Jews continued to attend synagogue or clandestine minyanim after the Second World War and celebrated Jewish religious holidays. In 1951, and in 1956-58, about 30,000 Jews (approximately one quarter of all Kievan Jews) attended synagogue on Yom Kippur. The authorities deprived accreditations of several Kiev rabbis, but religious life continued even without a rabbi in Kiev. The officials explained their failure to suppress ongoing Jewish religious life in Kiev by the stubbornness of observant Jews.

So, the Kiev synagogue became the place of dissent and spiritual resistance against Soviet state Antisemitism and assimilation policy. The authorities understood this well and attempted to break Jewish resistance by discrediting and attacking Judaism and Jewish religious life.

Chen (Chaim Natan) Marx
The Max Stern Yezreel Valley College

“Figurative Language of Authority and Rebellion in the Story of the Death of Rabbi Yehuda Ben-Baba”

In my essay I will examine the martyrological tale of Rabbi Yehuda Ben-Baba, who was brutally murdered by the Romans after the Bar-Kokhba revolt (136 CE) as punishment for ordaining five of his disciples as Rabbis, an action that preserved the Jewish faith.

The tales of Ben-Baba deal with how his memory should be preserved and emphasize the reverse ratio between visible reality (the failed rebellion) and religious utopic ideology. This discrepancy is manifested in the sophisticated use of figurative language. On the one hand, Ben-Baba describes himself after his future death as a "rock that cannot be moved" (meaning a huge, opaque, and immovable object). On the other, after his death Ben-Baba's body is described from the perspective of his pursuers (who stabbed him numerous times) as being "as full of holes as a sieve" (as such mobile, transparent, and perforated).

Later, Ben-Baba's five disciples meet and nail five iron nails into a rock they find there. This creates a physical, political, lingual, and symbolical realization, combining the figurative language with the world of action.

In my essay I will examine the ways rabbinic literature makes language a monument and makes a monument out of language; the ways figurative language represents ideological struggles; and the ways the Jewish religion faces rebellion, failure, and victory, and interprets them.

Menahem Mor

University of Haifa

"The Jews and the Pax Romana"

During the course of Roman expansion in the Eastern Mediterranean, Eretz Israel was conquered by Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus in 63 BCE. Jerusalem was occupied and the Temple in Jerusalem was desecrated by Pompey. These events denoted the end of the Hasmonean Kingdom and the loss of political independence.

Roman rule in the Land of Israel continued in different forms until 641 CE. Our lecture will focus on the years from 4 BCE until 136 CE, which are part of the extended epoch (27 BCE - 180 CE) known as the Pax Romana. The Pax Romana, in regard to the internal issues of the Roman Empire, was based on cooperation between the Roman rulers and the conquered peoples subject to them.

Our lecture will review four major confrontations in which the Jewish population in the Roman Empire violated the Pax Romana:

1. The Polemos of Varus in 4 BCE after the death of Herod the Great
2. The Great Revolt of 66-73 CE
3. The Diaspora Revolt, 115-117 CE
4. The Bar Kokhba Revolt, 132-136 CE.

We will focus our discussion on the question of why, during those 140 years, the Jewish population rejected the protection offered to them by the Romans and why they refused to cooperate with the Romans. Instead of adapting and integrating with the Pax Romana policy, they revolted four times against the Roman government. Four revolts that turned into major catastrophes in ancient Jewish history.

Zachary B. Smith

Creighton. University

“Authority, Dissent, and Social Formation in Late Antiquity”

In this paper, I explore some of the issues of written dissent in Greek, Roman, and Christian texts in the classical and late antique periods. Writing, an expensive enterprise, served to convey important information, persuade others to the writer’s viewpoint, or excite the emotions of the

reader. Persuasive literature was the primary vehicle of elite social formation by guiding the ideas and actions of influential individuals, who in turn tried to influence non-elite persons. Important in this process of social formation (text to elites, elites to hoi polloi) is the role of dissent literature.

While not a genre per se, dissent literature is a subset of persuasive literature that attempts to mitigate the effects of authoritative literature on the process of social formation. Dissent literature employed a variety of tactics, from overt argument to hidden protreptic, from ad hominem attacks to intellectual disputes. The kind of persuasion used in dissent literature can tell us something about the conditions, positions, and dispositions of the authoritative and dissenting parties.

Ori Z. Soltes
Georgetown University

"From Spinoza to Arendt and Laurence to Aylon: Verbiage and Visual Art as Instruments of Dissent in Modern Jewish Thought"

Rabbinic literature offered multiple perspectives on any given issue. Discussion, disagreement, and dissent were part of the framework defining Jewish authority. One consequence of this pattern was that the concept of "heresy" did not functionally exist within Judaism.

This changed as the medieval world began shifting toward modernity. The first notable instances of accusations of heresy may be seen in seventeenth century Amsterdam, in cases against Uriel Acosta and Baruch (Benedict) Spinoza. But what exactly did Spinoza think, say, write, or do that dissented so strongly from rabbinic authority that he would actually be excommunicated? How was he consistent with and different from rabbinical discussants in the preceding centuries? How is his story or his thought "Jewish" and not merely "modern"?

Three centuries later, the small-scale trauma for Spinoza's community exploded into the Holocaust, a trauma for the entire Jewish world. How have the writings of Hannah Arendt and one painting by Geoff Laurence embodied a specifically Spinoza-like mode of dissent from the accepted understanding of the Holocaust trauma?

How does the work of artist Helene Aylon, in her installation, "All Rise," address the very concept of dissent against traditionally-conceived rabbinic authority? How does Aylon's work further the insistent push toward "modernity" that began with Spinoza, offering universal yet very specific Jewish implications?

Mark Trencher

Nishma Research

"Leaving the Fold: Dissent from Communal Authority in the Orthodox World?"

Quantitative research has been lacking about those who have left the American Orthodox community. While there have been memoirs written by some who have left Orthodoxy, the anecdotes have not provided a consistent sense as to why people are leaving.

The research objective was to understand why people are leaving Orthodoxy and to explore the extent to which such leaving represents dissent from community authority figures and/or normative behaviors.

The research drew upon an original field survey of 885 people who have left Orthodoxy (including the Chasidic, Habad, Yeshivish and Modern Orthodox segments). The survey explored why people leave Orthodoxy: the extent to which people have been lured out by the external world (and, if so, by what aspect of the outside world) versus their leaving being precipitated by intolerable or objectionable communal authority figures or behaviors. In the latter case, does this represent a form of dissent—and dissent from what?

The survey showed a wide range of factors that cause people to leave Orthodoxy. On the question of whether leaving Orthodoxy represents dissent, we found that for every 10 responses citing outside societal attractions as a "luring factor," there were 17 responses citing a communal element from which the departed were dissenting as a "repelling factor." For the American Orthodox population, departure is ultimately how they often manifest dissent.

- Azzan Yadin-Israel
- Rutgers University

"Midrash, Oral Law, and the Question of Rabbinic Authority"

i. Mishnah Avot 5:22 "Ben Bag Bag would say, 'Examine [Torah] continuously, as everything is contained within it'"

ii. Mishnah Avot 1:1 "Moses received [the Oral] Torah at Sinai, and handed it down to Joshua; Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets, and the prophets to the men of the Great Assembly."

The early rabbis are characterized in two ways: they are both masters of midrash and they are adherents of the Oral Law, a tradition handed down from master to disciple that stretches, according to some sources, back to Moses himself. Each of these views is represented in the above statements: the centrality of Scripture in Ben Bag Bag's statement in Mishnah Avot 5, of the Oral Law in Mishnah Avot 1. What is generally overlooked is the potential incommensurability of these claims to authority: each implies a different model of religious authority. In one, rabbinic authority is grounded in intimate familiarity with the Torah and its interpretive canons; in the other, in the rabbi's position in a chain of extra-scriptural transmission—he is the disciple of a recognized master, who was himself the disciple of a recognized master, and so on. As a result, there can be territorial disputes between the two models: is a particular teaching learned by way of scriptural interpretation, or is it a received tradition? My talk traces the contours of this foundational struggle over authority in the rabbinic sources and the ultimate triumph of midrash and decline of Oral Law as a source of authority.

Motti Zalkin

Ben-Gurion University

"'The Terrible Animal Known as the Masses': The Status and Authority of the Community Rabbi at the End of Nineteenth Century Europe"

The status of the community rabbi and his relations with various elements in his community, in the Middle Ages and to a limited extent in modern times, have been discussed extensively in historical research. However, this discussion has usually focused on various aspects of tension and cooperation between the rabbi and the local political, intellectual, and economic elites. These historians perceived the local Jewish masses as a passive group that was not involved in this discourse and accepted unreservedly the rabbi's authority both in halachic questions and in questions of public, educational, economic significance. This situation changed dramatically with the rise of "the politics of the masses" in the second half of the nineteenth century Europe.

The transformation of the consciousness of the masses, which expressed itself primarily in the demand for active involvement in the political process, had an inevitable impact in the internal Jewish sphere. In a relatively rapid process, the traditional elites lost their exclusive status, and the voice of the middle classes, and sometimes even of the lower strata of society, was heard regarding questions that were at the center of public discourse. In my lecture I will examine the impact of this process on the public status of the community rabbi, both as the local halachic authority and as the spiritual leader of his community.