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Amidst the war unfolding in Israel, we have decided to go forward and continue publishing a variety of articles to provide meaningful opportunities for our readership to engage in Torah during these difficult times.

THE END OF CONTRADICTION: RESOLVING THE MYSTERIES OF THE GUIDE TO THE PERPLEXED

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Review of Lenn E. Goodman, *A Guide to* The Guide to the Perplexed*: A Reader's Companion to Maimonides Masterwork* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2024); and Moses Maimonides, *The Guide to the Perplexed: A New Translation*, translation and commentary by Lenn E. Goodman and Phillip I. Lieberman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2024).

Growing up, I had always known of *The Guide to the Perplexed* but had little sense of what it was. Yes, I am sure I had memorized for a test that it was a book Rambam wrote about philosophy, but that was all I knew. There were rumors and whispers of course. "It is actually a book of mysticism." "It is heretical." "So-and-so read it when he was young, and that's why he went off the *derekh*." "*The Guide* says that there won't be sacrifices in the Third *Beit Ha-Mikdash*." But, on the other hand, it was written by Rambam. Or maybe it wasn't. Everything was whispers and rumors, but all I knew for certain was that it was a big deal.

It was not until my fourth year in *yeshiva* that I got to encounter the book. Every year, R. Hillel Rachmani led a *haburah* in *The Guide* for the students returning from the army. Like *The Guide* itself, everyone knew this class existed, but most knew little of what was actually taught.

The very first class surprised me. We opened the book, at the beginning, with Rambam's introduction. I was expecting a book that would be heavy, dense, and formal. Instead, I discovered a light, second-person, conversational tone. As the author laid out the key problem that needed to be addressed—the seeming contradictions between Torah and Reason—and presented a plan for how he would answer it, it felt as if he were in the room, talking to me, directly. That's what Rambam does in *The Guide*. He speaks right to you, entices you, traps you, and then moves headlong into the lexicographical chapters.

For the next 30 chapters, *The Guide* is a slog. Rambam goes word by word through the Bible showing that every anthropomorphic phrase attributed to God can be read metaphorically. In our *haburah*, those first chapters took their toll on attendance, and from the dozens who started, only a few were left. I don't know why I kept going—but there was something in Rambam's voice that had me hooked. As we progressed slowly through those opening chapters, R. Rachmani, seeing that I was caught, gave me some extra-credit work to do: The Open University's two-semester course on Greek Philosophy. All of the material was in the *yeshiva* library, and he told me that if I wanted to understand *The Guide*, I needed to start there. So, for the next few months, while Abaye and Rava spoke to me in the morning, my afternoons were spent in conversation with Plato and Aristotle.

That is the challenge of *The Guide*. Despite its age, it remains one of the most relevant books to contemporary Jewish thinkers. It is well organized, composed in an engaging, second-person format and published in vernacular. However, at the same time, it is nearly impenetrable. It demands knowledge of Greek and medieval philosophy, along with a strong background in rabbinic texts. Oh, and that vernacular—it is an archaic Judeo-Arabic that leaves most readers (this reviewer included) at the mercy of translators.

This spring*, The Guide to the Perplexed* has been made significantly more accessible to English readers with two new volumes. The first is a new translation from Arabic to English by Lenn E. Goodman and Phillip Lieberman. Being incapable of reading *The Guide* in Arabic, I cannot comment on the quality or fidelity of the translation, but I can remark on the experience of reading their work. Every translator is beset with the dilemma of choosing between the individual words of a text or its overall meaning, and such choices in rendering *The Guide* have led to significantly different translations that invite meaningfully different readings. That challenge is compounded when translating *The Guide* because of its light, almost casual tone. For some readers, the tone of the book is incidental, and what matters most is fidelity to the rigid philosophical concepts that are discussed. However, Goodman and Lieberman see the conversational style as essential to Rambam's pedagogical project. Therefore, they made preserving the fluidity and emotional register of the book a priority in their translation (*A New Translation*, lxxiii). The result is a text that is a pleasure to read while containing ample

citations and commentary to ensure that the careful student does not venture far from the author's original intent.

The second book is a thin companion volume by Lenn E. Goodman titled *A Guide to The Guide to the Perplexed*. This book promises the English reader the framework and insight necessary to appreciate the depths of *The Guide*. In this short work, divided into three sections, Goodman explores who Rambam is and what *The Guide* is about, and he proposes a scaffolding and direction for students to follow as they explore Rambam's instruction.

Goodman's first section is a concise biography of Rambam. Goodman draws on the work of other recent biographers including Moshe Halbertal and Joel Kraemer,[1] and he combines them with a political and intellectual history of the time. Brought together, we get a sharp portrait of Maimonides, set in his own time and place.

On the one hand, Goodman explains why a Jew, who calls himself "The Spaniard," living outside of Cairo in the 12th century, should write a book in Arabic combining Greek and Hebrew traditions that were already over 1,500 years old. At the same time, he enables us to see a single person who would be capable and motivated to write in the myriad different styles and formats that Rambam engaged. It can be challenging to reconcile the Rambam that wrote *The Guide* with the Rambam that wrote the *Mishneh Torah*, but in Goodman's description, these two people meld. He does not accomplish this by simplifying, but by complicating. By walking us through his life and introducing us to his writings that escape the *yeshiva*, we see a fuller and more complex person than the one we usually encounter.

When, as a *yeshiva* student, I met the Rambam of *The Guide*, I felt intellectually liberated. I had so many questions and so many doubts that were taboo: questions about the divinity of the Torah, about Providence, about sacred history, and more—all questions that I was afraid to ask. But Rambam was a teacher who was willing to ask all of these questions and more. However, when I discussed this with some of my teachers, they chided me for being anachronistic. There is no way, they argued, that a medieval thinker could have imagined a world without God, or a human Torah. Rambam, they were certain, was not entertaining these ideas seriously; he was only justifying what he knew already to be true. Goodman clearly shows that Rambam read and considered all these heretical ideas and more. Goodman also plainly accepts the evidence that Rambam lived as a Muslim for a number of years. Many options, including Judaism, various strains of Islam, and secular philosophy, were all present before Rambam, just as they were before the Khazar king. Goodman's Rambam is a free thinker, completely relatable today.

Here, however, I must provide a warning. Professor Goodman's *Guide to the Guide* is not for the faint of heart. While he tries mightily to introduce each actor we encounter, his focus is on

[1] See Moshe Halbertal, *Maimonides: Life and Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); Joel L. Kraemer, *Maimonides: The Life and World of One of Civilization's Greatest Minds* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).

brevity. He cannot write a full introduction to medieval Islamic society, politics, or thought, and he takes for granted that the reader carries a fair amount of cultural background, along with knowledge of rabbinic thought and texts. Without that background, and much patience, this first section can quickly become a jumble of rabbis, princes, and Muslim theologians.

The core of this book is its second section. Here, Goodman walks the reader through the greatest hits of *The Guide*. Will versus Wisdom, the Garden of Eden, Job, Emanation, Miracles—the hot topics are laid out alongside each other. However, this is not a survey of the literature. Rather, Goodman presents his take on each of these controversial elements and weaves them together into a coherent image of what Rambam intends to communicate.

In his introduction to *The Guide*, Rambam catalogs the various types of errors and contradictions that books may contain. He clarifies that most of them will be absent from *The Guide*, but that readers should be on the lookout for contradictions of the seventh type:

> Sometimes, with the deepest subjects, certain ideas may have to be suppressed and others revealed. A certain premise may be needed for the sake of the argument in one context; its contradictory, in another. The ordinary reader should not sense the discrepancy at all, and an author might use all sorts of devices to conceal it. (*A New Translation*, 17)

Spotting, and explaining, these Type VII contradictions is the sport of *The Guide*. Readers can be split into two camps. The first are the Harmonists that seek to maintain both sides of the contradiction. They will argue either that the seeming contradiction is superficial and that a deeper understanding reveals a way for both sides to be true, or that the truth lies beyond the contradiction and that both premises are only means to a third, undescribed truth. At the other pole stand the Esotericists. These readers believe that one side represents the true, hidden meaning of *The Guide*, while the other is meant to obfuscate.

In the centuries since *The Guide*'s publication, there have been many Esotericists who claimed to know its true meaning. R. Yaakov Emden was so convinced that the opinions of *The Guide*, hidden by the Type VII contradictions, were heretical that he proclaimed *The Guide* to be a forgery—lest it impugn on Rambam's mighty reputation.[2] On the other hand, R. Michael Rosensweig has argued to me that the true reading of *The Guide* is quite banal and Orthodox, and the more challenging chapters and comments are there to appease

[2] See R. Gavin Michal, "R. Yaakov Emden's 'Cognitive Dissonance' with Regard to Maimonides," *Kotzk Blog*, September 8, 2019, https://www.kotzkblog.com/2019/09/242-r-yaakov-emdens-cognitive_8.html.

would-be philosophers and keep them in the fold.

Against this backdrop, Goodman's readings dazzle. Just as he plumbed complexity to bring us a holistic image of Rambam, he does the same for *The Guide*. One by one, he touches on the topics and contradictions of *The Guide*, briefly presents his reading, and weaves them together into a compelling whole. He even shows how the seemingly dull lexicographical chapters are full of enchantment and wisdom, when read carefully and harmonistically. Here, however, I do take issue. Goodman places I:15, in which Jacob's dream of the ladder is described, as the crux of these earlier chapters. While this is one of my favorite chapters of *The Guide*, my teacher R. Rachmani focused on the chapter's brief end, describing Moses's vision of the 13 Attributes as the section's center of gravity.

My only disappointment is that Goodman barely discusses Chapter III:51. This chapter is a flowing narrative, full of metaphors, describing how a person can enter into God's presence and possibly even see God. It is warm, mystical, and stands in sharp contrast to the colder, intellectual, negative theology that dominates the rest of the book. How to read that chapter and make sense of its place within *The Guide* is something I struggle with, and I wish Goodman would have shared his thoughts.

In the third section of the book, Goodman names his antagonist: Leo Strauss. Strauss was a giant of 20th-century political thought. One of the many German Jewish intellectuals who found refuge at the New School, he eventually made his career at the University of Chicago. While he wrote about political theory and the contemporary world, he was inspired by many medieval thinkers, including Rambam. He produced Shlomo Pines's English translation of *The Guide* and attached a long, influential introduction to the beginning.[3] Here, he staked a claim as the greatest of the Esotericists. Strauss argued that Rambam's writing was proscribed by the religious orthodoxies of his time. Wherever Rambam agreed with prevalent beliefs, we should discount his words as being written to ameliorate the masses and those in power. Rather, to find out what Rambam truly believed, we need to hunt down riddles in asides, in Type VII contradictions, and in his exposition of alternative theories which he ostensibly rejects.

The Rambam that emerges from Strauss is a cold, calculating atheist who lived decades of his life, wrote myriad books, led his community, and served in the Egyptian court, all out of fear of his would-be inquisitors. Rambam becomes Strauss's paradigm for persecuted writers in authoritarian societies across the globe and history. To put it mildly, Goodman disagrees.

In a telling moment of speculation, Goodman suggests that Strauss's approach may be driven by Rambam's discussion of the celestial spheres. Rambam spends many chapters explaining how these supposed spheres surrounding the earth, with the stars and planets embedded within

[3] Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, translated and with introduction and notes by Shlomo Pines, introductory essay by Leo Strauss (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

them, constituted the mechanism that transmits God's will and wisdom into our world through a process called Emanation. Rambam identifies these spheres as the Bible's angels, carefully parsing Ezekiel's vision of the Chariot (Ezekiel 1) to reflect this astronomical model. The problem for Strauss and all modern readers is that Rambam was wrong—there are no spheres. Given that the seemingly central tenet of *The Guide* is patently false, it may leave the rest of the book in shambles. This is the position that Goodman attributes to Strauss. With the philosophy of *The Guide* wrecked, Strauss opts to salvage the book with a political reading.

In contrast, Goodman is able to read *The Guide* in spite of the spheres. In the second section of the book, which was dedicated to integrating and harmonizing so many of *The Guide*'s seeming contradictions, Goodman reserved a significant portion to rejecting Rambam's analysis of the spheres. He argues that Rambam himself saw his work on the spheres as being speculative, and that his theory of emanation, the flow from the divine to our material world, was not dependent on understanding the precise mechanism by which it functions. Goodman offers an analogy to the Mind-Body problem. Just because we have not—or perhaps cannot—identify the mechanics that join the mind and body does not mean that they are not connected. We can continue to study both parts and assert their relationship, even if the technical aspect has not been worked out. So, in amputating Rambam's discussion of the spheres, Goodman preserves the rest of *The Guide* as a meaningful, compelling work for the contemporary reader. And while we can still appreciate Rambam's understanding of *Ma'aseh Merkavah* abstractly, the first chapter of Ezekiel remains a mystery (*Guide to the Guide*, 154-155).

Even a dedicated Harmonist like Goodman must engage with the challenges of the Esotericists. After all, it is Rambam himself who repeatedly warns against revealing too much information to ordinary people and intimates that there exists a deeper reading of *The Guide* for those in the know. Goodman solves this by splitting between what he calls hermetic, or occult, and esoteric. Hermetic or occult teachings are secret, hidden away, and accessible only to a select few. When Rambam writes of a deeper meaning, or of hiding knowledge away from the untrained, this is not what Goodman believes he is doing.

Rather, Goodman leans on Lucian, a second-century satirist who first introduced the term esoteric to describe some of Aristotle's teachings. Most of Aristotle's surviving works are based on public, outdoor lectures he gave—his exoteric teaching. These lectures were open to the public and designed to be accessible to any intelligent person. However, for students in the Lyceum itself, he gave different, indoor lectures. These esoteric lectures were not secret, nor did they contradict his outdoor work, but they were more technical and went deeper, as only advanced students with previous philosophical training were present.

This second understanding is key for Goodman in reading *The Guide*. Yes, the untrained reader will learn that God cannot be physical and that the Torah's account of creation is reasonable. They

will read about how God's grace emanates into the world through the motion of the spheres and about the multiple ways the commandments affect us and society. All of this is in the book and reflects what Rambam truly believes. But, to understand the significance of each line, to realize the implications of each argument and riposte, and to appreciate this book as a transformational, spiritual work that it is, a reader needs three things. They need a background in the Bible and rabbinic literature, a basic understanding of classical and medieval philosophy, and a patient, wise teacher like Lenn E. Goodman to serve as their *Guide to the Guide to the Perplexed*.

In Search of an Exiled Past: A Review of Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin's Toda'at Mishnah, Toda'at Mikra

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> *"Do not write a history except of your wounds. Do not write a history except that of your exile." – Mahmoud Darwish*[1]
>
> *"Sparks of divinity… have been trapped by the forces of evil, and that is the purpose of the Jewish people's exile across many lands and to the ends of the earth." – R. Hayyim David Azulai*[2]

Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin's *Toda'at Mishnah, Toda'at Mikra: Tzefat Ve-HaTarbut Ha-Tzionit* (*Biblical Consciousness, Mishnah Consciousness: Safed and Zionist Culture*) is an act of recollection. At the center of the book stands the 16th-century Kabbalistic community of Safed, with its poets, mystics, hermits, and halakhists. In Raz-Krakotzkin's telling, historic Safed offers an alternative vision of Jewish living and flourishing in the land of Israel to that historically proposed by Zionism, shedding critical light on the cultural, moral, and political choices that Zionism has made.

The Kabbalists of Safed, Raz-Krakotzkin argues, saw their primary mission as connecting to and reenacting the experience of *galut* (exile). For them, *galut* did not merely signify the Jews' absence from or lack of sovereignty in *Eretz Yisrael*. Rather, they saw Jews' particular, physical *galut* as part of a broader web of "exiles": the broken state of the world at large, and even a certain brokenness within God Himself.

The Kabbalists of Safed believed that the particular redemption of the Jewish people could only come about by way of a redemption of the entire world and of God, too. Their rituals—visiting the graves of deceased masters, mourning God's brokenness, wandering the land in order to be closer to the *Shekhinah* (the "exiled" part of God), reciting mystical formulations—were all designed to allow them to experience the totality of those interwoven exiles.

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[1] Mahmoud Darwish, *Journal of an Ordinary Grief*, trans. Ibrahim Muhawi (Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago Books, 2010), 26.

[2] Hayyim Yosef David Azulai, *Marit Ha-Ayin* (Livorno, 1805), 10b. All translations from Hebrew are my own.

Ironically, for the Kabbalists of Safed, to be in *Eretz Yisrael* was the most potent way of experiencing exile. "Going up to *Eretz Yisrael,*" writes Raz-Krakotzkin, "was not conceived of as a return to the homeland but rather as a way of connecting to *galut* and the experience of *galut*."[3] He adds that, from their perspective, "settling in *Eretz Yisrael* grants an experience of redemption… specifically because it allows one to experience the fullness of *galut*."[4] Deepening their consciousness of exile, paradoxically, had a redemptive function: the yearning for redemption provoked by feeling the full weight of *galut* was itself a key part of bringing about redemption. As Raz-Krakotzkin explains, "*Galut* and redemption do not cancel each other out [for the Kabbalists]. Rather, they are interwoven such that *galut* is a precondition for redemption."[5]

Raz-Krakotzkin emphasizes how Safedian ritual and culture drew from its Ottoman milieu. Though the community included both Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews, its members participated in a complex cultural exchange with surrounding Islamic communities in which ritual, law, mysticism, and poetry were freely blended. It was this fusion that laid the basis for Safed's rich ritual and cultural world: halakhic practices were invested with mystical and redemptive significance while poets crafted liturgy describing erotic longing for the *Shekhinah*.

Early political Zionism, by contrast, grounded itself firmly in Europe. Eschewing the interwoven cultural tradition suggested by Safed, Zionism sought to sever Jewishness from those aspects it considered "eastern" and therefore outmoded, particularly Jewish law and mysticism. *Galut*, too, was cut off from its rich symbolic context. For early Zionism, Raz-Krakotzkin argues, *galut* was a mere political status to be abolished by building a Jewish polity in *Eretz Yisrael*, nevermind the exile of the rest of the world or the cosmos. The idea of deepening one's consciousness of *galut* was anathema to Zionism—*galut* was something to be overcome, not reenacted. If the Kabbalists of Safed saw exile as the foundation of Jewishness, many leading Zionists saw the 2,000-year interlude between the Roman exile and their own project as an embarrassing and unfortunate episode to be excised from their history.

Underlying the differences in the way the early Zionists and the Kabbalists conceived of *galut* were two divergent relationships to Jewish text and history. The Kabbalists of Safed saw themselves as reenacting the period of the Mishnah, mediated through the *Zohar* (which claims to be from the Mishnaic period). Just as the rabbinic fellowship of the *Zohar* wandered around the land of Israel searching for the *Shekhinah,* they too saw their task as building a dedicated cohort whose wanderings and theurgic actions would repair the rift within God.

For the Zionists, the *Tanakh*, rather than the Mishnah, was their primary text. It offered a model of conquest and power: the forceful

[3] Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, *Toda'at Mishnah, Toda'at Mikra: Tsfat Ve-HaTarbut Ha-Tzionit*, (Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute Press/Hakibutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2022), 104.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

elimination of *galut* rather than its accentuation. with the local Palestinian population either absent or—during the 1948 war—sometimes mapped onto the Canaanite nations.[6] Simultaneously, for Zionists, reading the *Tanakh* unmediated by the vast traditional textual corpus was a way of divorcing Jewishness from the rabbinic (and exilic) tradition. The inspiration for such a move came, ironically, from Protestantism, which advocated for engaging the Bible directly without intermediaries. Accordingly, as Raz-Krakotzkin puts it, "The return to the *Tanakh* [was]… also a return to the West."[7]

Raz-Krakotzkin's critique takes place on the levels of both history and historiography. Safed was one of the key cultural centers of Judaism. Its residents included Rabbi Yosef Karo, who authored the authoritative Jewish legal guide, the *Shulkhan Arukh*; Rabbi Moshe Cordovero and Rabbi Yitzhak Luria, each of whom founded new Kabbalistic systems that soon became foundational throughout the Jewish world (though the latter eventually eclipsed the former);[8] and R. Shlomo Alkabetz, best known for writing *Lekhah Dodi*. But despite its central role in Jewish history, Raz-Krakotzkin notes that Safed has largely been ignored in Zionist curricula and histories. And even though some Zionist historians have addressed Safed, they have done so in implicitly orientalist terms, cutting it off from its Ottoman background and assessing its contributions to law, Kabbalah, and poetry separately, rather than as a whole. Gershom Scholem, for instance, was fascinated by the Safedian Kabbalists' theosophical speculations, but he neglected their literary and legal output and the ways in which the three overlapped. This tendency toward compartmentalizing, Raz-Krakotzkin suggests, stems from adopting European frameworks that dismissed the value of the rabbinic tradition.[9] Similarly, he argues that ignoring Safed's Ottoman context reflects Zionist historians' desire to see themselves and *Eretz Yisrael* as part of Europe.

Though *Toda'at Mishnah, Toda'at Mikra* is a stand-alone work, it can best be understood in the context of Raz-Krakotzkin's seminal two-part essay "*Galut Betokh Ribonut*" ("Exile Within Sovereignty"). There, Raz-Krakotzkin argues that the notion of *shelilat ha-galut* ("the negation of exile") stands at the heart of Zionist consciousness and practice. The Zionist interpretation of this phrase did not simply mean negating the physical *galut.* As Raz-Krakotzkin argues in *Toda'at Mishnah, Toda'at Mikra,* Zionism sought to negate the multifaceted web of symbols with which *galut* was associated and to denude it of all connotations except the lack of political sovereignty. But, he argues, the broader symbolic structure of *galut* "is not just one

[6] Ibid., 68 n. 26, 142-144, 147.

[7] Ibid., 62.

[8] On the persistence of Cordoveran Kabbalah, see Moshe Idel, "Major Currents in Italian Kabbalah between 1560-1660," *Italia Judaica* 2 (1986): 243-262; reprinted in David B. Ruderman, ed., *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 345-368.

[9] Raz-Krakotzkin, *Toda'at Mishnah, Toda'at Mikra*, 21-22.

foundation of Jewish existence—it is the central foundation of its definition."[10] If *galut* is the essential component of Jewishness, then to "negate" *galut* is to negate Jewishness itself.

In reassessing the histories of *galut* and Zionism's negation of it, Raz-Krakotzkin grounds himself in Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History." In one of the "theses" that Raz-Krakotzkin cites, Benjamin writes, "Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins."[11] In other words, history's victors will enlist the past in service of their own narrative, in which their victory—no matter how brutal—was the inevitable and desirable outcome of historical progress. The very idea of "progress" itself is part of the problem for Benjamin. In one of the most oft-cited "theses," he describes an "angel of history" flying backwards:

> Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet… [A] storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.[12]

We see "a chain of events": the "progress" that has brought us to our present state. The angel, by contrast, "sees one single catastrophe": he sees all of the horrific death and destruction that such a state necessitated. As Raz-Krakotzkin explains, "The term 'progress,' with all of its meanings, and with all of the concrete uses to which it is put, reflects the consciousness of the rulers and nullifies the voices of the oppressed of the past."[13] The task of the historian, accordingly, is to recall the past in such a way as to offer hope for alternative, redemptive futures and to highlight the contingency of the present. In doing so, the historian redeems the past, too.

For Raz-Krakotzkin, in negating *galut*, Zionism has embraced a "history of the victors."[14] The Jewish past is seen as necessarily leading to the triumphant foundation of a Jewish state, without regard for the voices of those Jews who insisted on the meaningfulness of *galut* or Middle Eastern Jews who did not fit Zionism's Eurocentrism, and Zionism's success is seen as "progress" without regard for their marginalization in Israeli society. Understanding Zionism solely as a narrative of progress, Raz-Krakotzkin insists, also means "the denial of the Palestinian tragedy that

[10] Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "Galut Betokh Ribonut: Le-Bikoret 'Shelilat Ha-Galut' Be-Tarbut Ha-Yisraelit," *Te'oriah Ve-Bikoret* 4 (Fall 1993): 27.

[11] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 255. Italics in the original.

[12] Ibid., 257-258.

[13] Raz-Krakotzkin, "Galut Betokh Ribonut," 36.

[14] Ibid., 39.

accompanied the establishment of the State of Israel" and ignoring "the dispossession of Arabs from their lands… and the creation of the refugee problem."[15]

In enlisting Jewish history solely in the service of the nation-state, Zionism strips that history of the critical possibilities it might offer for challenging the status quo. But recentering the notion of *galut,* Raz-Krakotzkin argues, would allow for alternative forms of Israeli-Jewish identity that in turn could offer new possibilities for peace between Israelis and Palestinians. An Israeli Jewishness that highlighted the exiled voices of Mizrahi Jews would no longer solely see itself as part of a European West in opposition to an orientalized East.[16] And an Israeli Jewishness that saw its own exile as bound up with the fate of the world and the cosmos' exile would be forced to reckon with the Palestinian exile upon which Zionism's success was predicated.[17]

Critically, Raz-Krakotzkin emphasizes that his goal in highlighting the *galut* is not to "return to the past, and certainly not an idealization of the historical reality of exile."[18] But rather, his goal is to "to *give back* to the present that past whose denial is a part of that present."[19] In concrete terms, this means using *galut* as a way of critiquing the present in the service of an egalitarian and binational future in Israel/Palestine.[20]

Benjamin appears only rarely in *Toda'at Mishnah, Toda'at Mikra*, but the book must be seen as Raz-Krakotzkin's attempt at fulfilling the task he set in "*Galut Betokh Ribonut*": to resuscitate *galut* as part of, in Benjamin's terms, "[t]he tradition of the oppressed." Safed offers a way of relating to Jewish history, *Eretz Yisrael*, Mizrahi identity, exile, and redemption that eschews Zionism's narrative of progress and challenges its turn to the West. In one of the few explicit references to Benjamin, Raz-Krakotzkin uses the "theses" to frame the difference between Zionist and Safedian relationships to history and practices of remembrance:

> Zionist archeological reconstruction is designed to achieve control, conquest, and justification of the present… [it] is

[15] Ibid., 47. Though Raz-Krakotzkin lauds the developing conversation in Israeli society about Palestinian refugees that was taking place at the time in response to the work of the "New Historians," he laments that critiques of their work focused on questions of responsibility and intentionality: "This does not allow for relating to the Palestinian tragedy as a central fact in the history of the land and Zionist settlement. The question of guilt is a question that guides 'a history of the victors'" (ibid.).

[16] See Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "Galut Betokh Ribonut: Le-Bikoret 'Sh'lilat Ha-Galut' Be-Tarbut Ha-Yisraelit II," *Te'oriah Ve-Bikoret* 5 (Fall 1994): 128.

[17] Raz-Krakotzkin, "Galut Betokh Ribonut," 49-51.

[18] Ibid., m. 26.

[19] Ibid, 49.

[20] For more on egalitarian binationalism, see Bashir Bashir, "The Strengths and Weaknesses of Integrative Solutions for the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," *Middle East Journal* 70, no. 4 (Autumn 2016).

> a practice of penetration, sometimes violent, that was not infrequently based upon the destruction of later [archeological] layers, i.e., Muslim ones. In Safed, by contrast, connecting to the historical moment of the *Tannaim* is not conducted by way of lord-like penetration of the land but rather by searching for the revelation that the spirit of their time continues to dwell in a place, by connecting to the exiled *Shekhinah* who sanctifies the land and is exiled within it. In the language of Walter Benjamin, the past appears "a breath of the air that pervaded earlier days [that] caress[es] us as well."[21]

In Raz-Krakotzkin's understanding, Zionism violently (metaphorically and literally) seized the biblical past in order to legitimate a present conquest. The Kabbalists of Safed, on the other hand, used mystical techniques to reconnect to a Mishnaic-Kabbalistic past that underscored the brokenness of the present. Such Benjamin-esque acts of recollection allowed them to experience the fullness of exile and thereby recommit to the work of cosmic redemption.

Are we meant, then, to simply return to Safed? Just as he makes clear in "*Galut Betokh Ribonut*" that he offers *galut* not as an alternative but instead as a standpoint from which to critique the present, in *Toda'at Mishnah, Toda'at Mikra*, too, he states that his goal is "not [to present] a historical alternative but rather an alternative discourse," one which recognizes "the possibilities that exist within the present."[22] Citing Benjamin, he concludes that "we may return consciousness of the exiled *Shekhinah* into the reality of our lives, and thereby return *galut* consciousness to the discussion about political sovereignty." Safed and *galut* are not intended as a replacement for Israel's social structure but rather as cultural and political possibilities that may yet exist within it. What would an Israeli political-religious consciousness that recentered *galut* look like? How would it relate to the exiled voices of Palestinians and Mizrahi Jews? Perhaps *galut* is more important now than ever. This "one single catastrophe" might force all of us to reckon with the interwovenness of our exiles—Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, Palestinian, and divine—and thereby reawaken the possibility of redemption.

[21] Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, *Toda'at Mishnah, Toda'at Mikra*, 148-149. The translation of Benjamin is from Michael Löwy, *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's "On the Concept of History,"* trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso Books, 2016), 29-30.

[22] Ibid., 218.