LEHRHAUS Over Shabbat

Shoftim

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THE GRAND CONVERSATION: BRINGING JEWISH IDEAS TO THE LITERATURE CLASSROOM

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The Jewish Day School, like Modern Orthodoxy generally, extols the values of the halakhic world along with many values of the secular world. The ideal establishment's aim is to provide students with a grounded Jewish education in Torah, Talmud, Hebrew language, Jewish philosophy, *tefilah*, Israel education, and Jewish history while also offering as strong an education in the natural and social sciences and humanities as students would receive in any of the best schools in the country. To achieve this lofty goal, students attend school for more hours a day than students in secular schools and engage in a "dual curriculum" that, in its finest iterations, does not cut corners from either of its two curricula.

On a practical level, this ideal may not always be achieved, but it is the implicit or stated aim of today's high-achieving day schools. One aspect of this education that is often less clearly articulated, though, is the bridge between the two halves of the school. The most famous theoretical approach to this work is "*Torah u-Madda*," but that much debated "u" leaves room for a wide range of interpretations. Rabbi Norman Lamm documented the different views in his seminal text on the topic, exploring a variety of Jewish philosophers and thinkers for definitions, including a side-by-side co-existence of secular knowledge and Torah; a synthesis between the two; and – Rabbi Lamm's preference – a symbiotic relationship in which Torah and secular knowledge build on and reinforce each other. There are, of course, other models as well, and each person who uses the phrase "*Torah u-*

Madda" seems to have a slightly different version in mind, depending on her understanding of each term on its own as well as the two in conjunction. Despite this relative imprecision, the phrase serves as a kind of shorthand for the best of what Modern Orthodox education can offer, and holds a similar status to the term "Modern Orthodox" itself as an achievable and desirable oxymoron.

On the Jewish curriculum side, students' educations may be integrated with their secular knowledge in myriad ways, both in methodology and content. Students may be asked to create *parshah* memes or rewrite song lyrics with themes from the Gemara, viewing traditional texts and ideas through the lenses of contemporary secular media. They are also often asked to consider modern situations in light of various halakhic or rabbinic arguments, demonstrating not only how Jewish concepts operated in their original contexts but also how their relevance continues today. In Jewish Studies classes, therefore, the permeability of the dual curriculum is alive and well.

But is the secular aspect of the education explicitly Jewish in any way? Or are Jewish day schools simply offering students an integrated Jewish curriculum and an excellent secular curriculum that is totally divorced from Judaism? That is, does the secular side of the dual curriculum exist so students can study Torah subjects and not "miss out" on secular subjects, or can the secular subjects themselves be changed by existing in a day school environment? Perhaps secular courses in day schools "lean Jewish" at certain moments, like when biology teachers bring in the school's rabbis to discuss Jewish views on evolution, or when literature classes' understandings of *Maus* or *The Book Thief* are deepened by students' knowledge of the history of antisemitism. But we believe that an attitude of merely "matching" the secular curricula of excellent non-Jewish schools is not sufficient; in fact, bringing Jewish concepts and texts fully into the secular side of the dual curriculum is not only possible but desirable.

At SAR High School, where we both teach English, teachers are encouraged to approach *Torah u-Madda* from both the Jewish and secular sides of the equation, but the concept is couched in different terminology: the Grand Conversation. One point of our mission statement, which is a prominent and frequently discussed document throughout the school community, is that SAR is a community of learners dedicated to "immersing themselves in a culture of learning and service as participants in the grand conversation between Torah and the world." The shorthand for that concept – the Grand Conversation – signals finding points of connection between Torah and secular learning, and it is so familiar and prominent in the school that whenever a reference to a Torah text arises in one of our secular classes, or a point from the news or a contemporary novel emerges in a Jewish Studies class, a student or teacher will inevitably say that we just experienced "a Grand Conversation moment."

To deepen that kind of important, boundary-crossing thinking, we are working to leverage the Jewish school environment by crafting

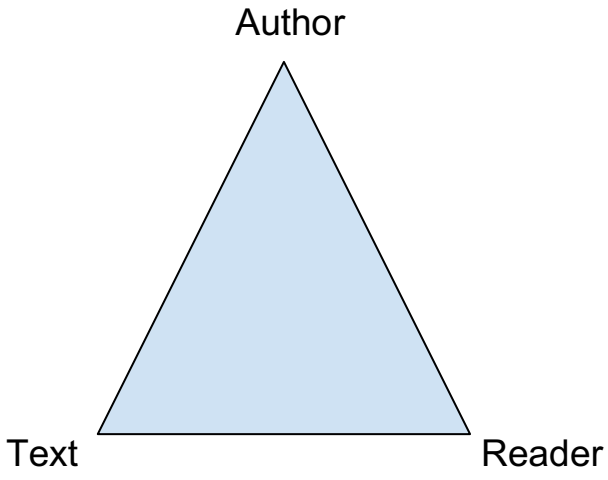
assignments that more actively enact "Grand Conversation moments" in English classes, encouraging students to find Torah resonances even in texts where those resonances may not have been intended by the authors. We are certainly not the first to have done such work, and we build on the tradition of great rabbinic thinkers like Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, who writes about Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" that "I know of few poems that express so forcefully the moral idea that binds us to the *beit midrash*… One who sees the beauty in God's creation, who comes to love it, must be strong in order to devote himself to learning Torah." R. Lichtenstein explains that the poem's speaker must choose between two worlds, the "lovely" and the "dark," to use Frost's language from the poem, which R. Lichtenstein interprets as the "aesthetic" and the "ethical." This is a beautiful reading that highlights the bifurcated experience of observant Jews in the modern world, thus bringing a Torah-oriented reading to a secular, or even Christian-inflected, poem.

R. Lichtenstein acknowledges the poem's Christian roots in a footnote, where he writes that "Frost had a certain religious bent, and it is therefore possible to explain this poem as a spiritual analogy. The woods' absent owner is God 'hiding His face'; morality and aestheticism can be seen as two alternative spiritual paths." This footnote elucidates Frost's own spiritual feelings, but it does not lessen the truth of R. Lichtenstein's interpretation. Clearly, Frost did not have the *beit midrash* in mind when writing this poem. Nonetheless, that "Grand Conversation" interpretation of the poem can be meaningful to students as it was meaningful to R. Lichtenstein and so many of his readers and pupils. In this case, the world of the readers matters more to the poem's interpretation than the world of the author, and R. Lichtenstein's goal is to extract meaning from a juxtaposition of the poem and himself, the reader, not from Robert Frost's biography or religious faith. In this way, R. Lichtenstein avoids William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley's "Intentional Fallacy," a term they coined in 1946 to argue against mining texts for an author's intended meaning. However, R. Lichtenstein's work is tinged with another of Wimsatt and Beardsley's fallacies, albeit a lesser-known one: the affective fallacy. By bringing his own experience of the *beit midrash* to the poem, R. Lichtenstein reads something into the text that emerges from the reader rather than the text itself or, perhaps more accurately, it emerges from that magical interaction between reader and text.

Countering the "meaning is in the text" view, E.D. Hirsch, best known for his controversial 1987 book *Cultural Literacy*, was first a proponent of authorial intention, not believing it was a fallacy at all. He argued that the reader's goal is to discover, through the text, the author's genius and purpose. In literature classes across America, and in much of the Western world, students are still taught with some combination of those two methodologies: mining the text for its uncontextualized meaning – "what the poem says as a poem," as Cleanth Brooks argues in *The Well-Wrought Urn* – or using the text as a vehicle through which "to sense the author behind the words," in Hirsch's terms. Even the many theories

that have emerged since the mid-20th century – those focusing on race, gender, sexuality, ecology, history, and many other critical lenses – do not resolve these foundational questions of where meaning resides.

However, in the Jewish day school classroom, where students generally study literature that comes from – or, at least, through – a religious tradition that is not their own, there can be some difficulty in following either Wimsatt and Beardsley's or Hirsch's injunction. But R. Lichtenstein's reading of Frost asks students to bring something of *their own* culture to their reading rather than – or in addition to – that of the author's background or the text's isolationist existence. R. Lichtenstein's approach, importantly, is not a misreading of text, although it may be interpreted that way by people who are familiar only with text as a medium through which to read authorial intention or text as decontextualized object. But if we encourage students to consider three possible sites of meaning (text, author, and reader) in literature rather than only two (text and author), they see that readers' responses – the approach that R. Lichtenstein chooses when he elects to place Robert Frost in the *beit midrash* – is a third legitimate, interpretive approach.



With some classes, we share the schematic above and ask students to consider where they think the meaning of a text lies. Many of them do believe that it lies fully with the author or, in the manner of the traditional New Criticism that Wimsatt and Beardsley espoused, entirely with the text itself, fully separate from the author or the reader. But when we suggest that the reader cannot help but bring herself and some of her biases, knowledge, and predilections to a text, students see that truth as well. What we encourage students to do, therefore, is become aware of the impossibility of excluding themselves completely from the reading experience. No matter how much they try, they cannot be a reader other than themselves. For our students, they can read Christian texts as their peers at other outstanding

schools do, but they cannot become Christian readers, nor should they aspire to that positionality. As the Reader-Response critic Louise Rosenblatt states in her 1933 text *Literature as Exploration*, "An intense response to a work will have its roots in the capacities and experiences already present in the personality and mind of the reader." If readers imagine that they can erase themselves from the reading experience, they may become blind to their own blind spots. Part of our work, therefore, is teaching students how to read literature the way that "everyone else" does, by understanding certain "universal" literary constructs like metaphor and imagery. It also means opening doors for our Jewish students to unfamiliar aspects of literature, especially allusions to the New Testament or Christian symbolism, both of which frequently arise in Western literature. Our students are adept at recognizing biblical allusions from the Hebrew Bible but need help understanding references to the Fall, Christ figures, and other aspects of literature that shape conventional interpretations. (For example, the students almost always think that "Lazarus, come from the dead" in T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is Emma Lazarus.)

At the same time, we believe that the Grand Conversation – or Torah u-Madda – need not merely mean that students receive this conventional, Western, Christian-inflected literary education alongside, and separate from, a Jewish education. Offering an exclusively "conventional" Western literary education, we believe, implicitly teaches our students two things: first, that we study literature only for some distanced, impersonal, *parnasah*-based purpose and should therefore only learn it as the secular world learns it and, second, that secular education cannot and should not be adapted to Jewish audiences; it must remain static, as it is taught for the universal (assumed Christian) reader.

Instead, we believe students should bring their Jewish knowledge into conversation with canonical, Western classroom texts – even if the original authors might never have imagined those connections. To combat the sense that secular day school education is merely excellent but need not be overtly Jewish, and to demonstrate that readers can and should contribute to their understandings of literary texts, we offer not only assignments that promote "conventional" interpretations of texts but also those that draw primarily on Jewish understandings – even when those interpretations would not have been familiar to the text's authors. That is, readers – in this case, high school students – can bring something to these texts that the authors themselves could never have known. Doing so not only enhances students' understanding of the texts, but is a legitimate interpretative approach, placing Western literary texts in conversation with Jewish texts and ideas, thereby and creating a true "Grand Conversation" experience, not only by juxtaposing Jewish and secular curricula but by meaningfully integrating them.

One such assignment is what we call "Pirkei Willy." This assignment, during the 11th-grade *Death of a Salesman* unit, was inspired by the many repeated aphorisms of the tragic hero Willy

Loman as he attempts to pass down his distorted beliefs about the American Dream to his children. While Arthur Miller assigned no religion to the Loman family, perhaps attempting to universalize their experience, he later wrote that they were "Jews light-years away from religion or a community that might have fostered Jewish identity." Even though the author's intentions are not our educational focus, the students often recognize aspects of Jewishness in the text. For example, they hear something Jewish in the characters' cadences ("Attention, attention must finally be paid to such a person"), in the family's belief in the promise of "the greatest country in the world," and in some of the familiar family dynamics. However, it is also clear that, whatever Jewish origins the family might have had, their only religion is American capitalism, with its rugged individualism and "business is business" mentality. Desperately trying to be a good father to his sons but never having been exposed to a text such as *Pirkei Avot*, Willy creates his own code of ethics, passed down in the form of his myriad slogans, such as "It's not what you say, it's how you say it, because personality wins the day"; "Be liked, and you will never want"; and "Start big and you'll end big."

For this assignment, we ask students what it might have been like if the Loman family had access to *Pirkei Avot*. After first exploring the origin and role of a particular aphorism, students choose a contrasting *mishnah* from *Pirkei Avot* that might have averted the play's tragic ending had Willy internalized some of the wisdom of Hazal. One student, David Muss, suggested that, had Willy Loman heeded Shammai's advice, "Speak little, but do much" (1.15), he and his family might have led more fulfilling lives. David's conclusion reflected his thoughtful consideration of the contrast between the moral code expressed in *Pirkei Avot* and that of the Loman family, noting that "the absence of Jewish values in Willy Loman's American Dream leaves him exposed to the vacuous chase of capitalism. With no wisdom or discipline, which are embedded in *Pirkei Avot* and could have provided him the tools required for a successful work and personal life, Willy squanders his professional life and devalues the meaningful relationships with his own family, forcing him to confront his misdeeds and only redeem himself through taking his own life." Noting that Willy's own father left the family when Willy was young, another student, Ethan Vorchheimer, suggested that, given Willy's strong desire to be liked and his lack of a real mentor, Willy would have benefitted from the wisdom of Hazal (1.6), which states that one must appoint for themselves a teacher, acquire a friend, and judge all people favorably.

In *Death of a Salesman*, the students are in conversation with a text written by a Jewish author – one who at times lamented his own lack of knowledge of Judaism and Hebrew – that does not contain any easily recognizable connections to the Jewish life that the students themselves live on an everyday basis. Juxtaposing *Pirkei Avot* with this rich and thought-provoking play prompts them to consider their own beliefs on a much deeper level, reflecting on how much they might also be influenced by the ethics of a superficial,

competitive, and business-driven American society that values financial success and, as Willy himself says, "personal attractiveness."

Another student, Emma Karesh, was struck by the contrast between the Mishnah's warning that one who creates a great name for themselves will cause their name to be destroyed (1.13) and Willy's philosophy, noting that "Willy places more weight on his reputation than on any other aspect of his life, and this teaches his sons to value fame and being known over hard work and a sense of joy and pride in their professions. Had the Lomans been privy to this message in *Pirkei Avot*, they may have been able to internalize the idea that valuing your reputation and other people's opinions of you over your own opinion of yourself does not help you to lead a successful and happy life." In asking students to bring texts from "both sides" of their education into conversation, we ask them to see that the dual curriculum – like Modern Orthodox life – does not consist of two separate and unrelated spheres, but of ideas and practices that inform one another within their lives.

Other assignments extend this type of thinking to additional literary periods and locations and to different Jewish texts and concepts. A popular essay option for one of the senior AP Literature section's studies of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is one in which students consider *Hamlet* and *teshuvah*. In Act 3, scene 3, King Claudius seems to express regret for his past actions, and students have the opportunity to compare his approach in that stirring soliloquy to their own understanding of *teshuvah*. Does Claudius' perception resonate with theirs? With Hazal's? Students must first ensure they understand Claudius' complex and self-critical theology during this scene, wherein he attempts to pray, but cannot truly make himself do so, because "my stronger guilt defeats my strong intent." He wonders if he might be forgiven because "my fault is past," but then reminds himself that he wishes to retain the spoils of his fratricide:

> … But, O, what form of prayer
> Can serve my turn? *Forgive me my foul murder*?
> That cannot be; since I am still possess'd
> Of those effects for which I did the murder,
> My crown, mine own ambition and my queen.
> May one be pardon'd and retain the offence?

Claudius articulates a difference between this world, where "the wicked prize itself/ Buys out the law" and the world to come or, as he calls it, the world "above," where "action lies/ in his true nature." He knows that he may continue to get away with his deceptions here on Earth but that, in God's kingdom, he will face the truth with "no shuffling," no possibility of avoiding the reality of his sins.

Once students understand Claudius, they must begin to consider their own views: what have they learned about *teshuvah* from their *rebbeim* and teachers, and how do they conceptualize this central Jewish concept? To what texts can they

turn to explore it more deeply? Many students sit with our *beit midrash* fellows to discuss these questions, creating true "Grand Conversation" moments as they read through *Hilkhot Teshuvah* in service of an English literature assignment. And, indeed, most students include Rambam in their essays and express insightful sentiments – often quite different from one another – about their understandings of the intersection of Rambam and Claudius. As one student, Ananya Silverman, wrote:

> "The Rambam in his Hilchot Teshuva identifies three necessary steps one must take in the teshuva process: regret ("*yitnachem al sheavar*"), confessing ("*l'hisvados bi'sfatav*"), and leaving the sin behind/committing to not doing it again ("*she'ya'azov ha'choteh chet'o ... vi'yigmor b'libo she'lo ya'asehu od*"). If only Claudius had been familiar with Rambam, perhaps he truly could have repented, and we would have had a very different *Hamlet*. But alas, Claudius is stuck in what the Rambam describes as the first step. He begins the *teshuva* process, yet is unable to conclude it because it would bring about too much loss for him."

Ananya focuses on Claudius' unwillingness to give up "those effects for which I did the murder/My crown, mine own ambition and my queen." Highlighting the distinction between the two views emphasizes Claudius' limitations and the reasons for the play's tragic outcomes; because Claudius cannot see other possibilities for return and self-renewal, he limits himself to greater and greater depths of sin.

Other students study the diction of each text to understand why the two texts' views might diverge. One explained the subtle differences between types of guilt as Rambam describes them, noting that "the Rambam views guilt in a nuanced way that acknowledges both its helpfulness in preventing future sin and the adverse impacts unhealthy guilt poses to the goal of repentance… The word the Rambam uses to describe the guilt stage of this process is '*yenaheim*,' regrets, which has a less harmful, more 'constructive' connotation than '*haratah*,' guilt." This student then went on to explain Claudius' use of the word 'guilt': "Claudius says that his 'guilt' is preventing him from actualizing his 'strong intent' (3.3.5) to repent." In this situation, the student concluded, "Claudius, like the Rambam, has a nuanced understanding of the powerful yet potentially harmful role guilt plays in the process of sin and repentance" but also elects to see guilt as an inescapable punishment rather than an incentive to become better. This student truly wrestled with his conclusions, writing lists of notes about both characters' thoughts and motivations, including that it's important to remember that "the two texts are working in different religious frameworks" and that "the King [Claudius] is someone who has sinned and the Rambam is writing from a removed position," an

outstanding observation that is often overlooked.

Some students who choose this essay topic engage in extensive learning to see what other texts, beyond the *Mishneh Torah*, might apply to Claudius' situation. Two students in last year's class, for instance, explored the principle of *Takkanat ha-Shavim*, which, one explained, "was instituted so that people would not be discouraged from repenting and returning stolen objects in the first place." He concluded that "The Rabbis wanted the Torah to encourage *teshuvah,* not discourage it," but that "this power of *teshuvah* is something that Claudius did not comprehend. He did not recognize the great amount of leeway that G-d gives to those yearning to come back to Him." Another student, examining the same halakhic principle, wrote that "As opposed to Claudius' outlook on sin and repentance, which cannot go hand [in] hand, the Sages allowed for sin (the beam in the house) to exist while repentance (confession and returning the value) existed as well." This student then discussed the fifth and sixth blessings of the *Amidah*, which, at first, "feel similar in nature. But, on closer examination, it becomes clear that the nuances between the two blessings further highlight the contradictory nature of forgiveness that a Jew must live with." The student, building on the idea of Judaism encouraging this kind of complex and even contradictory understanding of the world, reasoned that "Claudius and those living under the same beliefs and worldviews as him did not know how to live in a world of contradictions… It is specifically because Jews look at God's contradictory nature that they are able to embrace a contradictory approach to sin and forgiveness in a way that Claudius cannot even fathom."

For each of these students, the opportunity to examine Claudius' beliefs through a Jewish lens – something Shakespeare would never have intended and would not have been capable of doing even had he wanted to – provides a powerful learning experience and a way to bring this classic text closer to themselves. The objective in this situation is not to understand conventional readings of *Hamlet*, although the close examination of the soliloquy does provide some measure of that New Critical literary analysis, but to understand the Grand Conversation as a principle that informs both the Torah and *Madda* sides of their education.

Secular studies teachers may not take advantage of the vast possibilities available in Grand Conversation lessons like these for a number of reasons. Some secular studies teachers may not be Jewish or Jewishly knowledgeable, and so this kind of assignment feels impossible. Some schools discourage or even forbid this kind of teaching when it does not come from a rabbinic figure, for fear of crossing certain boundaries. And some schools may still believe that a day school education exists primarily to offer side-by-side curricula: excellent Jewish Studies coincident with, but unrelated to, excellent secular studies.

We believe, however, that the opportunities are far greater when schools take full advantage of the possibilities of a Grand Conversation between

Torah and the world. In day schools at their best, secular learning can be actively changed, shaped, and enhanced by being placed in a Jewish setting, adapted to a Jewish environment, and bolstered by Jewish knowledge. What happens when we put Robert Frost in the *beit midrash*? Where better to find out than the Jewish day school? The dual curriculum need not mean only that students don't "miss out" on secular studies when their formal education also contains Torah; it means that their secular studies – through Torah – can be taken to new heights.

BEDECKED IN SPLENDOR

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For the immediate and complete recovery of yedid nafshi *Binyamin Ber ben Chana*

In the year 5651/1891 a young man in his mid-twenties, with piercing eyes and a scruffy beard, anonymously published a scholarly *kuntres* (manuscript pamphlet)—47 pages in length—on the laws of *tefillin* (phylacteries). It was his fervent hope that the work would bring to light what he felt was a common oversight among some of his coreligionists: namely, the careless and improper placement of the *tefillin shel rosh* (head phylacteries) either on the forehead, beneath the hairline, or off-center, to the right or left side of the skull. That young man was the *tzaddik* and *gaon* Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Ha-Kohen Kook *zy"a*. The subtitle of the first edition of the work, aptly entitled *Chavush Pe'er* (*Bedecked in Splendor*), clarifies the purpose of the *kuntres*: "For the multitudes of Hashem's people who place the head *tefillin* in the wrong position without knowing, and for the educated among the people who ignore the correction of this mistake, to inspire love to stand in the breach, to save from the stumbling block of sin, and to bring merit to the masses."


מאמר

חבש פאר

כולל תוכחת מגולה

וואַרשא

СЕФЕРЪ ХЕВЕШЪ ПЕЕРЪ

ВАРШАВА

The original printing even included a separate leaflet that indicated the proper placement of the head *tefillin* (see *Shu"t Orech Mishpat*, *ha'arot* on p. 266). Earlier in his life, while studying in the famed Volozhin Yeshiva, the young Rav Avraham Yitzhak received permission from one of the

Roshei Yeshiva, Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin *zt"l*, to wear *tefillin* throughout the entire day. He would go on to continue this practice for much of his life.

On Tuesday, July 23, the 17th of Tammuz, Benji Brown (aged 20) was stationed at Mount Dov on Israel's northern border when a missile struck an army base he was guarding. Although I never studied formally with Benji, he frequented a weekly *shiur* that I give on Thursday afternoons in the Old City of Jerusalem that is open to the public. In time, our relationship developed through a mutual love of *penimiyut ha-Torah* (the inner aspect of Torah). In fact, tragically, at the exact moment the missile struck, Benji was studying from an annotated translation of Rav Kook's *Orot Ha-Torah* (112-113) that I had published earlier last year. He sustained a severe head injury, but he miraculously survived the attack. After two major surgeries, Benji was temporarily placed in an induced coma and has, since then, been slowly returning to consciousness and health under the care of his remarkable family and friends as well as a capable staff of doctors, nurses, and specialists from the Rambam Health Care Campus in Haifa. With faith in the Almighty, we continue to draw strength from and plead for the fulfillment of the Gemara's promise that "the study of Torah shields and protects both during active study and after one has ceased studying" (*Sotah* 21a).

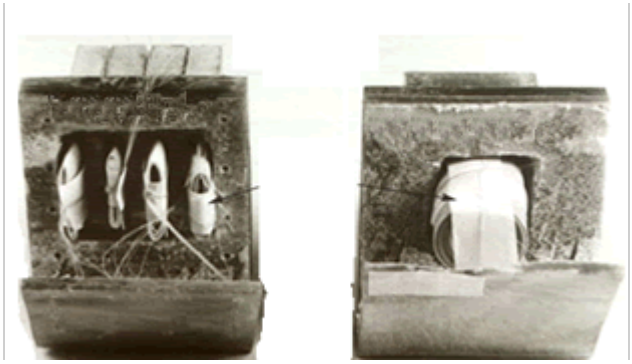
Benji's blood-splattered *Oros HaTorah*

But there is further cause for optimism. Several weeks ago, I traveled by train to visit Benji and his family at the hospital. Benji's brother Zach, who I have been in close touch with since the incident, shared something uncanny with me. For some time, Benji has been sending pictures to his family and friends of him holding up his pinky, index finger, and thumb, the universal sign for "I love you" (not to be confused with the ubiquitous "rock on" symbol, which does not include the thumb). Incredibly, one of Benji's first communications after returning to consciousness was to make his "I love you" symbol. I couldn't help but be struck by the similarity between that

hand gesture and the gesture Jewish men make when they are checking to see that their *tefillin* are properly in place.

We are not prophets (nor, at this point, the sons of prophets), and it is always unwise to craft a narrative that conflates correlation with causation; still, the words of the sweet Israeli singer Reb Yosef Karduner ring in my ears: "*Tismah, yesh tikvah yedidi, tireh simanim ba-derekh*—Rejoice, there is hope my friend, for there are signs on the road." These words, based on a teaching from Rebbe Nahman of Breslov *zy"a*, invite us to garner strength from the road marks and signposts pointing and beckoning us in the right direction. Can it be coincidental that the *tzaddik* whose Torah Benji was learning when the missile struck is the same *tzaddik* who, also in his twenties, sought to awaken the Jewish people to the proper placement of the head *tefillin*? Let us then turn to—and draw insight from—these *simanim ba-derekh*.

What is the mysterious meaning of Rav Kook's deep and abiding connection to the *mitzvah* of *tefillin* in general and to the *tefillin shel rosh* in particular? I have long felt that Rav Avraham Yitzhak Kook *zy"a* was, in so many ways, the embodiment of the *tefillin shel rosh*. For one thing, the head *tefillin*—as the title of his *sefer* suggests—are called *pe'er* and are, thus, evocative of the *pe'er Yisrael*, the unrivaled splendor and beauty of *Am Yisrael*. Examining the contours of this "splendor" was one of the major focuses of Rav Kook's writing and attention. More strikingly, the *tefillin shel rosh* contains four passages describing the fundamentals of Jewish faith, housed in four separate compartments. If we compare this phenomenon with the *tefillin shel yad*, where these same passages are housed in a single compartment, a clear symbolism emerges.



The *tefillin shel rosh* represents the expansiveness of the Jewish prophetic and visionary traditions, where paradoxical and contradictory views can coexist in the spirit of "*Elu va-elu divrei Elokim hayyim*—These and these are the words of the Living God." As such, a single box envelops the four paragraphs that are contained in four different compartments of the head *tefillin*.

The *tefillin shel yad*, on the other hand, represents a unity of halakhic action, where there can be only

one way, in the spirit of the verse "*Mishpat ehad yiheyeh lakhem*—There is one rule of law for all of you" (Leviticus 24:22). Here, all four paragraphs must be housed in a single compartment. Rav Kook's soul, like the *tefillin shel rosh*, was filled with nuance, contradiction, and paradox. On the one hand, he possessed an unshakable faith in the Almighty and the eternal relevance of God's Torah; on the other, he possessed an unshakable confidence in the strength and holiness of each of the distinct parts of the nation that, although fractured and weakened by the tribulations of a 2,000-year-long exile, found a mutual home in the heart of this once-in-a-generation *tzaddik*.

But the teachings of Rav Kook, like the teachings of many *tzaddikim* before him, were ahead of their time. Citing the Gemara's interpretation of the verse, "They shall be as frontlets between your eyes" (Deuteronomy 6:8)—"So long as the *tefillin* are between your eyes (i.e., on your head) there must be two (i.e., the hand *tefillin* must also be worn)" (*Menahot* 36a)—the Halakhah maintains that the *tefillin shel* rosh must not be worn without the accompanying *tefillin shel yad*. This explains the order of putting on *tefillin*. We first put on the hand *tefillin* and only then the head *tefillin*.

The removal of the *tefillin* is done in the opposite order: first we remove the head *tefillin* and, only then, the hand *tefillin*. During Rav Kook's remarkable career as Chief Rabbi of Zaumel and Boisk in Lithuania and then Jaffa and Jerusalem in *Eretz Yisrael*, he wrote and taught what would eventually be compiled into the volumes of life-giving Torah that continue to sustain the Jewish people today. These works are unmistakably filled with the complex, visionary thinking that is characteristic of the *tefillin shel rosh*. But when Rav Kook first wrote many of these words, the Jewish people were still physically and spiritually weak: the majority of world Jewry had not yet returned to the Land of Israel, and large segments of the population were not yet "wearing their *tefillin shel yad*"—both literally, neglecting to don their phylacteries, and figuratively, in the guise of a tenuous commitment to total *mitzvah* observance. Still, the *tzaddik*'s job is to awaken the slumbering spirit of *Knesset Yisrael* (the Congregation of Israel) with the healing medicine of *penimiyut ha-Torah* (the inner light of Torah). As such, Rav Kook lovingly prepared his elixir, suffering the slings and arrows of those who could not comprehend the complex and paradoxical nature of his teachings, so that when the time would come, the Jewish people could once again bedeck themselves in the splendor of the *tefillin shel rosh*.

In the subsequent years, the Jewish people have been slowly returning to complete consciousness and health: we are returning to the Land, and the Land is returning to us. Torah study and *mitzvah* observance have increased significantly. More and more members of our beautiful nation are wearing *tefillin*, lighting Shabbat candles, keeping kosher, caring for the poor and the sick, risking life and limb to protect our people, and studying our sacred Torah. Now that the *tefillin shel yad* is more securely fashioned upon the collective soul of the Jewish people (even if we still have more

straps to wind!), we must prepare to return to the message of the *tefillin shel rosh*.

Some pointed questions are in order: Are we ready to return to the prophetic and visionary thinking associated with the *tefillin shel rosh*? Do we even want to be ready? Are we prepared to lovingly accept and even rejoice over the crucial distinctions that currently seek to divide the not-so-different streams of our people? Can we accept the reality that, to be sure, our *tefillin* contain different paragraphs that occupy different compartments, but they must still be housed in a single, unified home? The Gemara in *Berakhot* (6b) records that Rav Nahman ben Yitzhak once asked Rav Hiyya bar Avin: "What is written in the *tefillin* of the Holy One, blessed be He?" He replied to him, "Who is like Your people Israel, *one nation* upon the earth?" Are we ready to be *one* nation on Earth? But, there is still one more question to ask. It is a question that I have heard Rav Osher Weiss *shlit"a* ask on a number of occasions: "Who is the perfect Jew?" The answer: "He should have a "*Litvishe kup"* (the mind of a Lithuanian Jew) and a "*chasidishe' hartz"* (the heart of a Chasid); the honesty and integrity of a *Yekke* (German Jew); the *temimut* (innocence) of a Hungarian Jew; the *kavod ha-Torah* of a Sephardi; and the love of *Eretz Yisrael* of a *dati leumi* Jew." Of course, this "perfect Jew" exists only in potential; but, to the degree that we honor these character traits in one another, we together make up that "perfect Jew."

Our Sages say that the verse "And all the nations of the earth shall see that the name of G-d is called upon you, and they shall fear you" (Deuteronomy 28:10) is a reference to the *tefillin shel rosh* (*Menahot* 35b). When the nations see the name of *Hashem* inscribed upon our head *tefillin*, they will be imbued with fear and awe. When the validity of our head *tefillin* is compromised by jaundiced vision and thinking, our enemies are not afraid of us; they do not stand in awe of the *pe'er Yisrael*. But I am the optimistic type. I believe that our head *tefillin*—with its four different compartments—is more properly aligned than we let on. As Rav Kook put forth more than 120 years ago, our head *tefillin* just needs a little lifting, a little nudge to the right or to the left, brought about by an uncompromising commitment to one's own path and one's own "compartment," yet stabilized by a radical love and appreciation for the invaluable worth and halakhic necessity of the remaining "compartments."

I conclude with a prayer in the form of a story: Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev *zy"a* once saw a Jew accidently drop his head *tefillin* as he was wrapping it at the end of prayer. Startled, the fellow hastened to bend down and pick up the black box, lovingly showering the *tefillin* with kisses. Taking in the scene, Reb Levi Yitzhak lifted his eyes to Heaven and said, "Master of the World, when this simple Jew's *tefillin* fell to the floor, he immediately picked them up and kissed them. The Gemara says that we, the Jewish people, are Your *tefillin*. But we have fallen to the floor and have been lying in the dirt, disgraced and trampled over, for many years. Please pick up Your *tefillin*—the Jewish people—and give them

the ‘kiss’ they so well deserve.” *Amen*.