

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Atifa

I VERY MUCH ENJOYED the insightful article by authors Berger and Zelcer. Support for their view, that *atifas Yishmaelim* does not mean that even one's eyes should be covered when he enwraps himself in a *tallis* at the time of its blessing, is to be found in Rav Moshe Shternbuch's *Teshuvos V'hanbagos*, vol. II, no. 10.

Rev Shternbuch states that an *atifa* that fully covers the eyes does not constitute a fulfillment of the *mitzvah*, as this is not an act of *atifa* at all. Such an act is thereby a *hefsek* (interruption) after the *beracha* on the *talis* has been pronounced. Furthermore, the *beracha* itself may be inappropriate and in vain due to the incorrect act that follows. He suggests that those who practice the excessive *atifa* described by the authors also engage in *kol ha-mosif goraiya*, whoever adds, subtracts.

Rav Shternbuch, however, then criticizes the view of the *maskilim* who claim *atifas Yishmaelim* is not necessary when donning a *talis*. This criticism seems unwarranted in light of the authors' correct citation of the *Baal Haitur* and the *Mechaber* (pp. 193-94) that *atifas Yishmaelim* is not required for the wearing of a *talis* but only for the *aveil* and *metzora*.

The authors note that "it seems that our custom is to do the premier *atifas Yishmaelim*," and perhaps Rav Shternbuch writes with that in mind, but the view of the *Baal Hai-*

tur and the *Mechaber* is also subscribed to by the *G"ra* as recorded in *Maase Rav* and *Shaarei Rachamim*. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik also endorsed this view (see Rav Herschel Schachter, *Nefesh HaRav* p. 104). As such, there may be numerous individuals who follow this custom as well.

In any event, it has always seemed strange to me that Rav Shternbuch—a descendant (and follower) of the *G"ra*, as noted on the title page of his popular work *Moadim Uzmanim*—in his zeal to denounce the *maskilim*, would altogether dismiss this *shitta* as not viable in the realm of *halacha*.

Hanan Balk
Cincinnati, Ohio

IN THEIR ENGROSSING article "Wrapping Ourselves Blindly" (*Hakirah*, vol. 7, pp. 177-204), authors Shimi Berger and Shloimy Zelcer maintain that the common custom of performing *atifa* by wrapping the *talis* so that it covers completely the face and the eyes, "appears to be a mistake and an incorrect practice." To bolster this bold conclusion, they cite among other sources, the responsa of Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Leibes (*Bais Avi*, vol. 3, chapter 12). He writes that it is difficult to say that *atifas Yishmaelim* means that Arabs wrap themselves covering their entire face, for "how will they see with covered eyes when they walk the streets? It is thus clear..." he continues, "that they covered their

heads until their eyes. Therefore the eyes are totally uncovered as well as part of the face.”

However, the authors fail to quote the final seven lines of that very same chapter, in which Rabbi Leibes offers support for the practice of covering the face entirely. He writes: “When I was in Eretz Yisroel, I saw that the Arab women were walking with their heads completely wrapped in a black cloak, but the cloak was woven so that they were able to see through the small holes between the warp [longitudinal threads] and the woof [latitudinal threads]. There is thus a basis for the previously mentioned custom of covering the entire face. This therefore should not be considered a discernable difference between the *mispalalim*, and in all synagogues each should perform as one is accustomed to.”

Shlomo Zucker
Brooklyn, NY

The authors respond:

We thank Rabbis Hanan Balk and Shlomo Zucker for their comments and kind words. In response to R. Zucker’s comment regarding our citation of Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Leibes’s responsa (*Bais Avi*, vol. 3, chapter 12) to bolster our conclusion, we note (as Rabbi Zucker does in his letter) that Rabbi Leibes’s *teshuvah* is only one of many such sources. We are also puzzled as to why Rabbi Zucker labels our conclusion as “bold,”

when it is evident from the sources cited that there is ample support among the *Rishonim* and the *poskim* for our conclusion.

To address Rabbi Zucker’s main concern, namely that we failed to quote the final seven lines of Rabbi Leibes’s *teshuvah*, we do not believe that these final lines contradict Rabbi Leibes’s previous point. He states clearly throughout his *teshuvah* that: “I never understood the form of *atifah* [that covers the entire face]”; “it is difficult to say that *atifas Yishmaelim* means to wrap the entire face,” and “whoever wants to perform *atifah* properly is required to cover his head until his eyes during the *beracha*.” These strong statements and the sources cited by Rabbi Leibes are not refuted by his observation that some Arab women cover their entire face as a form of modesty. Rabbi Leibes only notes that according to his observation, *יש מקורם* for the custom of covering the entire face during *atifah*. This hardly sounds like a ringing endorsement, although we acknowledge that Rabbi Leibes is trying to find some explanation for the widely observed custom.

On a side note, in this short space we cannot fully address the question of whether the practice of some Arab women to cover their entire face out of modesty can serve as the basis for covering the entire face during *atifah*. We simply point out that such a practice is generally observed only by Arab women (seemingly as a form of modesty), and was probably practiced by some Arab women during

the Talmudic period as well (as Rabbi Leibes cites from *Shabbos* 65). Yet neither the *Gemara* nor any of the *Rishonim* cite these practices as a basis for performing *atifah*. See also *Bikurim* 4:2 where it is implied that a woman's *atifah* is different from a man's *atifa* (and indeed, women may not even perform *atifas aveilim* at all—see the *Melechesh Shlomo*, *Bikurim* 4:2).

Corporeality

REGARDING Rabbi Natan Slifkin's "Was Rashi a Corporealist?" in *Hakirah* 7, I thank Rabbi Slifkin for providing this fascinating article, and I commend him for the courage of writing something as controversial as I am sure this is. I found the article's thesis to be absolutely incredible.

One comment: Rabbi Slifkin notes at the very conclusion that though (according to his thesis) Rashi was a corporealist, we cannot believe this today anymore, and Rabbi Slifkin says he hopes to write an article in the future on why.

I find this difficult. My following comments will be based chiefly on Professor Marc Shapiro's *The Limits of Orthodox Theology*:

Is truth time-conditioned? Why could Rashi believe something we cannot? Did the truth change? There is no *paskeining* on issues of *hashkafah*, and so we cannot *pasken* here, and we cannot say that corporeality was kosher once but no longer. Only in halakhah is there *paskeining*, and not because the view

is no longer valid, but only because a binding norm is necessary; the rejected halakhic view remains theoretically valid, and is only practically "dead" —*elu v'elu*. But in *hashkafah*, no binding norm is necessary, and all we have is the enduring theoretical validity.

On the other hand, in issues of dogma, there is only one truth, and thus, there is no ability to *pasken*, as there is only one option. But if there is only one truth, that truth is eternal and will never change. If the sole option was incorporeality, then Rashi's belief in corporeality was just as invalid then as it is today; or vice versa, if his belief was valid then, it is no less valid today.

Either way, we cannot *pasken*; either both views are kosher, were kosher, and will always be kosher; or one and only one view was, is, and will be kosher.

Michael Makovi
Jerusalem, Israel

The author responds:

I am grateful for Michael Makovi's praise, but I cannot agree that my thesis was "absolutely incredible." What people may find incredible is that some of the great *Rishonim* were corporealists, but that is not my thesis; it is the explicit description given by Rambam, Ramban, Raavad, R. Shmuel ben Mordechai of Marseilles, R. Moshe Taku, R. Isaiah de Trani, and many others. Given the testimony that many of the Torah scholars in northern France were corporealists, the question of whether Rashi was part

of that group is relatively insignificant.

It is interesting that while my article on Rashi apparently caused quite a stir, not a single counter-argument was offered by anyone. I have studied only a small portion of Rashi's commentary on Tenach and Talmud, and it would have taken only a single citation to counter all the arguments that I presented. Yet none was offered. It also turns out that the single counterargument that I raised, that Rashi's disciple R. Simchah of Vitry was not a corporealist, is invalid. Shamma Friedman, in his article "Tzelem, Demus VeTannis," *Sidra* 22 p. 105, notes that one of the people quoted by the corporealist R. Moshe Taku to support his case is R. Yaakov Bar Shimshon, who attacks those that are trying to avoid the idea of God possessing an "image." (It is possible that R. Taku misunderstood the meaning of R. Yaakov's statement, but unlikely.) R. Taku stresses that R. Yaakov bar Shimon was a disciple of Rashi as well as a teacher of Rabbeinu Tam. This shows that corporealism was present in Rashi's school of thought, and R. Simcha of Vitry would therefore be one of the first to break away from that.

There is another minor correction to my article: the first statement I cited from Rabbi Isaiah of Trani, describing belief in a corporeal God as belief in His possessing a gigantic human form made of an ethereal substance, was made not by Riaz as I claimed, but rather by his grandfather, Rabbi Isaiah de

Trani I (Rid). Friedman (pp. 99-100 note 46) points out that he is simply citing Rambam in the *Guide for the Perplexed*, although Yair Lorberbaum, in *Tzelem Elokim: Halacha v'Aggadda* (Schocken, 2004) p. 86 note 5 (see too p. 31 note 18) still assumes it can be used as independent testimony. The second statement from Rabbi Isaiah of Trani that I cited, which states that some of Chazal themselves believed in a corporeal God, is from Rabbi Isaiah of Trani II, known as Riaz.

Michael Makovi's questions concerning the final paragraph of my essay are precisely those that I address in my follow-up to the essay. It was not ready in time for publication of this issue, but I hope to be able to submit it for the forthcoming one.

Kiddush Levanah

IN "Backward and Forward," Rabbi David Farkas focuses on an unusual custom in the ritual of *Kiddush Levana*, namely the recitation of a Biblical verse forwards and backwards. He wonders how this custom may have originated and presents much interesting background material. I would like to suggest some avenues for further analysis that may point in a direction different from that suggested by the author.

1. It seems most appropriate that a custom should be investigated in the context of the ritual it is part of, not in isolation. Reciting the

verse forwards and backwards is not the only unusual feature of Kiddush Levana. Other unusual features include “dancing” in the middle of the prayer (which may already be alluded to in as early a source as the gemara in Sanhedrin), as well as greeting other parties with “*Shalom Aleichem*” (discussed in another article in the same issue of the journal). It is well known that Rambam believes that Kiddush Levana is not an ordinary prayer, but a *Bircas HaRe’iyah*—a “visual blessing” that one recites upon seeing the moon as it waxes. However, according to other Poskim who do not accept this innovative position of the Rambam (which is not explicitly stated in the Talmud), the very fact that we must say this prayer in the presence of a visible moon is a highly unusual feature of this prayer. Rather than focus on one anomaly, it would be preferable methodologically to begin by trying to understand the context that gave rise to all of these unusual features. Perhaps an understanding of this context could help explain the backwards recitation. (Incidentally, this context may be related to defeating or gaining protection from one’s enemies, a theme that is prominent in a simple reading of the prayer even though its connection with the moon is less than obvious. This theme appears more than once in the prayer, even in the early version cited in *Maseches Sofrim*, which already includes a variation of the phrase *כך לא יוכלו* (כל אויבי לנגוע בי לרעה).

2. The backwards recitation is not

completely unprecedented in our prayers. As the author himself notes in a footnote, a verse from *Parshas Vayechi*, *לישועתך קויתי ה’*, is cyclically permuted three ways in *krias shema al hamittah*. While the author dismisses this as unrelated or unimportant, there is not much of a conceptual gap between a reversal of a verse and a cyclic permutation of a verse—both practices may stem from the same sort of mystical impulse about the power of words *qua* words.

3. The author assumes that since *Maseches Sofrim* is a “sober halachic text,” a recommendation to read a verse backwards would be out of place in it. But this assumption is questionable. It is possible that by the time *Maseches Sofrim* was written, the backward recital had already become established practice, at least in some communities, and *Maseches Sofrim* was codifying this practice. Surely, many halachic practices that are codified in *Maseches Sofrim* have been influenced by mysticism or similar currents of thought. Besides, the author’s argument is undermined by the fact that this “sober halachic text” includes in the very same passage the various other unusual traditions of Kiddush Levana, including dancing and saying *Shalom Alecha* three times to a friend.

4. The author’s argument from silence, based on the fact that halachic sources between *Maseches Sofrim* and the Tur do not mention this custom, is weak. Actually, as the author acknowledges, many of these sources *do* mention the custom, quoting the brief formulation

of *Maseches Sofrim*. The Tur is merely one of the first sources to provide more detail about exactly what is entailed by the word *u-lemafrei'a*.

5. Finally, another important point of methodology. The author suggests that the word *u-lemafrei'a* in *Maseches Sofrim* actually does not mean “and backwards.” Rather, under the author’s proposed approach, the word introduces the next phrase, and means: “and as to what has previously been recited, he continues with *amein*, *amein*, *selah*, etc.” Moreover, he notes, this formulation in *Maseches Sofrim* was later misinterpreted to mean “and backwards.” In responding to this theory, it should first be noted that the traditional definition of “*u-lemafrei'a*” in this context—“and backwards”—is extremely well attested in the language of Chazal. In fact, a well known mishnah in the second perek of *Berachos* says “*hakorei lemafrei'a lo yatza*”—if one reads *krias shema* backwards, he is not *yotzei*—as precise a parallel as one could ask for. Similarly, this usage appears in the mishnah of *Maseches Megillah* (second perek). Even so, there is nothing inherently wrong with attempting to creatively reread a passage perceived as problematic. But the new reading needs to be supported by evidence that the phrase is actually used, in similar passages, in the novel fashion that is being proposed. It’s not enough merely to note the possible meanings of a word that are listed in the Jastrow dictionary. One must account for word order, sentence structure,

context, etc. Ultimately, it is important to consider whether, in *Maseches Sofrim* or elsewhere, the word *u-lemafrei'a*, at the beginning of a sentence or phrase, is ever used with the meaning that the author is proposing. In the absence of any evidence of such usage, it’s hard to see that the author has met his burden of proof in suggesting this novel interpretation.

After writing the above lines, I spent a few minutes with a database looking through the hundred or so occurrences of the word *u-lemafrei'a* in Jewish literature through the ages. I did not find even one example of the novel usage suggested by the author. I did find, however, an interesting citation that may perhaps shed some light on the author’s original question.

Rav Yitzchak Karo (the uncle and adoptive father of Rav Yosef Karo) wrote a commentary on Chumash, *Toldos Yitzchak*, which is influenced by Kabbalah. In reference to the previously noted *pasuk* in *Parashas Vayechi*—*לישועתך קוייתי*—he writes as follows:

ודע שיוצא מזה הפסוק שם שמועיל בדרך כנגד השונאים, והוא כסדר אותיות הכתוב, והתיבות משולשות, וצריך להזכירו כסדרו ולמפרע לשישיב אויביו אחור, ולזה סמך אחור, ובשמשון אמר ויט בכח לא אמר בכחו אלא בכח זה השם.

The *Toldos Yitzchak* is saying that the *pasuk* in question, when recited forwards and backwards (*kesidro u-lemafrei'a*) has the mystical power to thwart enemies. It appears that reciting the phrase backwards symbolically represents

knocking the enemy backwards, and this appears to be connected with the juxtaposition of the pasuk לישועתך קויתי ה' ויפול רוכבו אהור. (Incidentally, this passage is very similar to the Rabbeinu Bachya *ad loc.* that the author cites in a footnote but does not pursue; it is clear that the Toldos Yitzchak is quoting the earlier Rabbeinu Bachya or at least the same tradition. However, while Rabbeinu Bachya, at least in the text that has come down to us, has the somewhat difficult reading למפרע כסדרו, the Toldos Yitzchak has the clear and explicit reading ולמפרע כסדרו: forwards and backwards.)

I also discussed this issue with a friend, who steered me to a Rashi on the Mishnah in *Sukkah* 45a, which explains the peculiar expression used in *Hoshanos* אני והו הושיעה נא. Rashi notes that three consecutive *p'sukim* right before the *Shiras Hayam* have 72 letters each—the *p'sukim* starting ויט, ויבא, ויסע. Rashi explicates an intricate derivation of the 72 3-letter *shemos* encoded in these *p'sukim*. It involves successively taking in forward sequence letters of the first *pasuk*, appending the corresponding sequential letter from the second *pasuk* starting from the end of the *pasuk* (backwards), and concluding with the corresponding letter of the third *pasuk* forwards again. From this process, Rashi concludes that the *shem* אני emerges from:

אני אל"ף דמאחריהם ונו"ן ראשון דהענן
בחשבון של מפרע ויו"ד דרוח קדים.

Note that the word Rashi uses for taking the middle pasuk in reverse order is מפרע. Overall, this Rashi appears to be dealing with secrets of Torah that most of us are not privy to in this day and age. But underlying his account may be the same themes we have noted: forward and backward reading (of the letters), and protection from enemies (both in the three *p'sukim*, which are about protection from the Mitzrim, and in the phrase we say: הושיעה נא). Interestingly, הושיעה נא sounds like it may be connected with לישועתך קויתי ה', the phrase where this phenomenon occurs in *kerias shema al hamittah*. It seems significant that this Rashi, if we are interpreting it right, gives this concept a much earlier date than the Rabbeinu Bachya we have cited, and brings it substantially closer to the *Maseches Sofrim* that talks about a forward and backward reading.

Does a conception of the mystical power of a forward and backward utterance explain why it is traditional to recite permutations of לישועתך קויתי ה' in *kerias shema al hamittah*, which is related to protection from *mazikim*? Is it a coincidence that this very same theme (protection from one's enemies) is also one of the overall themes of *Kiddush Levana*, and in particular is the theme of the *pasuk* that we recite forwards and backwards (תפול ופחד)? What about the mystical Rashi about forward and backward readings of letters in the ritual of *Hoshanos*, in a section also related to protection or salvation? I don't know the answers to these

questions; but these would be interesting possibilities to consider and explore. In any case, it appears that the forward and backward recitation in *Kiddush Levana* is **not** unprecedented, and that the two well-known rituals in which this practice clearly appears, and the one where we may be seeing its echoes, may have a philosophical or mystical connection with one another.

Yacov Balsam
Woodmere, NY

The author responds:

I appreciate Mr. Balsam's comments, but I don't think his argument really harms or weakens the points made in my article. I do not share his belief that the *Kiddush Levana* prayer and the permutations said in connection with *kerias shema* are related, nor do I really understand what he means when he writes of "the mystical power" of "words qua words." Likewise, no evidence is adduced by Mr. Balsam either for the suggestion that *Masechet Sofrim* was codifying an existing practice, or that other mystical practices are also codified in the work. (The dancing and recital of *shalom aleichem* Mr. Balsam refers to are not based on mystical practices.) The reference to *Sukkah* 45a is interesting, but again, I do not see any real connection to the *kiddush levana* prayer, nor do I see the basis for the claim that asking for protection from enemies is one of the overall themes of *kiddush levana*.

As for the fact that I proposed a novel interpretation of the word *u-limafreah*—guilty as charged. Of course, I am well aware of the usual meanings of the word. But I believe that the meaning I suggested makes perfect sense in the context. Mr. Balsam is free to disagree, but I don't think a "few minutes," as he writes, is enough time to assess all the occurrences of this word in "Jewish literature through the ages." (A proper search, incidentally, should probably focus on the way the term is used in works written after the close of the Mishnah and before the times of the *Rishonim*.)

Having said this, there may well be a better solution to the problem than the answer I suggested. Indeed, a lot of people (including some Googlers who were complete strangers) emailed me privately to suggest solutions. One very well-known rabbi suggested that the word *u-limafreah* might originally have been a personal copyist note, noting that the verse in question was similar to the five verses mentioned in *Yoma* 52b that could be read backwards and forwards. My old friend Rabbi Daniel Freitag, of the Atlanta Scholars Kollel, thought it might refer back to the three steps *Masechet Sofrim* directs us to dance towards the moon. He suggests the word might be an instruction to now move three steps "backwards," similar to the universal practice upon the conclusion of the *amidah*. It is interesting that while I received many such suggestions as to the meaning of the enigmatic phrase, everyone seemed to

agree that the way we do things now could not have been what *Masechet Sofrim* originally meant.

Again, I thank Mr. Balsam for his thoughts, and the editors for providing this outstanding forum for torah scholarship.

Ner Hanukkah

THE MOST recent issue of *Hakirah* contains a learned article by J. Jean Ajdler on the lighting of the Hanukkah candles. However, it has one error—a fairly common one—that should be corrected.

In explaining the divergent understandings of *mehadrin min ba-mehadrin*, Ajdler writes: “According to Maimonides, on the first evening each person present lights one candle, on the second evening, two candles, and so on.”

This is incorrect. Here are Maimonides’ words (*Hilkebot Hanukkah* 4:2).

כיצד הרי שהיו אנשי הבית עשרה, בלילה הראשון מדליק עשרה נירות ובליל שני עשרים ובליל שלישי שלשים עד שנמצא מדליק בליל שמיני שמונים.

What the Rambam is saying is that the head of the household lights for everyone, not that each person lights for himself. Why is the latter option often mistakenly stated to be Maimonides’ view of *mehadrin min ba-mehadrin*? I assume the reason for this can be traced to the following gloss of R. Moses Isserles (*Orah Hayyim* 671:2):

וי”א דכל אחד מבני הבית ידליק

(הרמב”ם) וכן המנהג פשוט.

The problem with this quote is, as just mentioned, that Maimonides doesn’t define *mehadrin min ba-mehadrin* this way. Yet because Maimonides was given as the source of Rama’s opinion, people assumed this to be so without investigating further. The identification of Rama’s view with that of Maimonides is not found in the first edition of the *Shulhan Arukh*. It was added by the printer in a later edition, and remained in the text until it was removed in the recent Machon Yerushalayim edition.

Understandably, people who knew about the first edition of the *Shulhan Arukh* were happy to point out that the identification of the views of Maimonides and Rama is no more than a mistake by the printer. Yet matters are not so simple, for while it is true that it was the printer who added Maimonides’ name, a glance at Rama’s *Darkhei Moshe*, (*Orah Hayyim* 671:1) reveals that Rama indeed identified the practice he describes as Maimonides’ view. I don’t know of any satisfactory way to explain Rama, for while it is certainly possible, as *Arukh ba-Shulhan* argues (*Orah Hayyim* 671:15-18), that the Rama’s position is a natural corollary of Maimonides’, they are clearly not identical. (For a possible explanation as to why Rama’s position differs from that of Maimonides, see R. Isaac Ze’ev Soloveitchik in his *Hiddushim* on the Rambam.) R. David of Navaradok, *Galya Masseket*, vol. 1, p. 81a, discusses

the problem and concludes:

לכן דעת הרמ"א שכתב וי"א דכ"א מבני הבית ידליק... ולא ידעתי אנה מצא רמ"א מקור לדין זה שכל א' ידליק בפני עצמו. ועוד לפי מה שעלה על דעת רמ"א לפרש שכך הוא דעת רמב"ם למה לא הנהיג שגם נשים מבני ביתו של אדם ידליקו ומדוע בנו ידליק ולא כלתו ומדוע ידליק חתנו ולא בתו. ע"כ לא יכולתי לכוין דעת רמ"א בזה... אבל הרמ"א אין לו מקום לא לדעת תוס' ולא על פי הרמב"ם. ולפי הנתבאר יש לחוש לברכה לבטלה מה שכל א' מבני בית מברך בפני עצמו.

Marc B. Shapiro
University of Scranton

The author responds:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to respond to Prof. Shapiro concerning my article in the last edition of *Hakirah*. Prof. Shapiro says that I erred in saying that to satisfy *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* "According to Maimonides, on the first evening each person present lights one candle, on the second evening, two candles, and so on." Prof. Shapiro asserts that Rambam's position is "that the

head of the household lights for everyone, not that each person lights for himself" and attributes my "mistake" to an incorrect gloss in Rema that in standard texts incorrectly attributes the idea of individuals lighting to Rambam. In support of his position he cites R' David of Newardok who suggests that it would be an unnecessary benediction if one of those present would make the benediction and light his own candle(s).

I would point out that my statement of Rambam's position is offered by: R. Moses Isserles (Rema) in *Darkei Moshe* on Tur (whom Prof. Shapiro himself cites); Taz (whom I cited in footnote 1 of my article) **and, in a very concise but clear way, G"ra** in *Biur ha-G"ra* on *Sh. Ar. O. H.* 671.2. Although Prof. Shapiro may want to argue the point, the fact that many of the greatest Ashkenazi *poskim* agree with this position implies that it certainly cannot be categorized as an "error... that should be corrected, as it is a fairly common mistake."

