

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson: On Confrontation with the Secular World¹

By: CHAIM MILLER

Introduction

On the 10th of Shevat 5740, the Rav, Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik (1903–1993), made a highly unusual, public visit to the court of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902–1994). The essay below is a short segment of the Torah discourses which the Rebbe delivered to a large assembled crowd of Chassidim and devotees, with the Rav sitting near the Rebbe on the front dais. While these two Torah giants had known each other for many years—their friendship began as students in the University of Berlin in the late 1920s—they had been in relatively little contact during four decades in the United States. The Rav had visited the Rebbe to comfort him after the passing of his mother in 1964, and stayed for some two hours discussing fine points of Jewish Law.² We know of a telephone call from the Rebbe to the Rav in 1967, after the

¹ Translation of a segment of *Hadran al Masechtos Brachos, Nazir, Mo'ed Katan ve-Kerisus*, a talk delivered by the late Lubavitcher Rebbe on 10 Shevat 5740, prepared for publication in 1991 and printed as addendum to *Sefer ha-Sichos* 5751, vol. 2 (New York: Kehot, 1993), p. 835ff. The segment translated here is excerpted from sections 4–9. The title suggested here is my own, and does not appear in the original. I thank my dear friend Rabbi Chaim Rapoport for reviewing this article and offering many helpful comments.

² A brief record of the discussion is found in *Siach Sarfei Kodesh* (Jerusalem: Machon Oholei Tzadikim, 1998), p. 487.

Rabbi Chaim Miller was educated at the Haberdashers' Aske's School in London, England and studied Medical Science at Leeds University. At the age of twenty-one, he began to explore his Jewish roots in full-time Torah study. Less than a decade later, he published the best-selling *Kol Menachem Chumash—Gutnick Edition*, which made over a thousand complex discourses of the late Lubavitcher Rebbe easily accessible to the layman. His 2011 compilation, the *Lifestyle Books Torah, Five Books of Moses—Slager Edition*, was distributed to thousands of servicemen and women in the U.S. Army. He is the author of a full-length biography of the late Rebbe, *Turning Judaism Outwards*, to be published this Summer. He lives in Brooklyn, New York, with his wife and seven children.

passing of the Rav's mother, and in 1971, the Rav visited Crown Heights once again to comfort the Rebbe's wife and sister-in-law after the passing of their mother, Rebbetzin Nechama Dina Schneersohn (wife of the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak. The Sixth Rebbe had been influential in the Rav's appointment in Yeshiva University in the forties³). Besides these few meetings we find only a handful of letters,⁴ but no sustained dialogue in either Torah or communal matters.

The two rabbis evidently held each other in great mutual esteem. Rabbi Hershel Schacter, who accompanied the Rav on his 1980 visit, recalls the positive impression the event made. "*Er iz a gaon, er iz a gadol* (He is a genius, he is a giant)," the Rav commented to his disciple in the car on the way home. Rabbi Shlomo Riskin recalls the Rav saying in 1967, "The Rebbe is a very great leader, but what people don't know is how great his *lumdus* (learning) is. He has an explanation for every comment of Rashi in the Talmud." In a 1972 letter which the Rav sent to the Rebbe in honor of his 70th birthday, the scion of Brisk concludes "with admiration and great affection."⁵ In a 1977 letter, the Rav wrote of the Rebbe: "May he merit to quench those who thirst for the wellsprings of Jewish law and mysticism, and to illuminate the eyes of the public until the coming of Mashiach. We all need him and we all pray for him."⁶ The Rav also seems to have been impressed with the Rebbe's understanding of "the secular community."⁷

The Rebbe's great respect for the Rav was also well known. While still in Berlin, the Rebbe had informed his father-in-law, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, how much he was impressed with the Rav, as we see from a 1941 letter: "Regarding *HaRav HaGaon* Rabbi Yosef Dov... while he was in Berlin, my son-in-law... told me about his tremendous greatness in learning... I see in him potential to bring results in the communal work of

³ See Rabbi Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff, *The Rav: The World of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, vol. 1 (New Jersey: Ktav, 1999), p. 41.

⁴ *Igrot Kodesh*, vol. 23 (New York: Kehot, 1994), pp. 273–4; vol. 24 (New York: Kehot, 1994), pp. 276–7; vol. 27 (New York: Kehot, 2006), pp. 385–6. A letter from the Rav to the Rebbe on his seventieth birthday is found in vol. 27, *ibid.* (Facsimile of the letter printed in *Shu"t Menachem Meshiv Nafshi* (Jerusalem: Machon Oholei Tzadikim, 2011), vol. 2, p. 1101).

⁵ *Menachem Meshiv Nafshi*, p. 639.

⁶ Letter to Rabbi Shmaryahu Gourary, brother-in-law of the Rebbe, dated 11 Tishrei 5739, printed in Rabbi Sholom Wolpo, *Shemen Sasson MeChaveirecha*, vol. 3 (Private Publication, 2003), p. 188.

⁷ See David Holzer, *The Rav Thinking Aloud* (Holzer Seformim, 2009), p. 131.

strengthening Judaism which is so urgently needed in this country, like air for the soul.”⁸

A 1983 letter to the Rebbe’s secretariat from the editors of *Beis Yitzchak* (a Torah publication of RIETS and Yeshiva University), stated, “We know how close are the ties of friendship, appreciation and mutual admiration that exist between the Rebbe, *sblita*, and *moreinu v’Rabeinu, sblita*.” With his pen, the Rebbe circled these words and wrote, “It is far greater than you know.”⁹ The Rebbe stood up in honor when the Rav arrived to comfort him at *shivah* in 1964, and again in 1980 in front of a large group of assembled Chassidim when the Rav entered the main sanctuary at 770 Eastern Parkway to hear the Rebbe’s talk. (This conduct was highly unusual for the Rebbe). In a 1972 letter, the Rebbe encouraged the Rav to publish his *shiurim* in Talmud.¹⁰

But despite their longstanding friendship and personal admiration, these two luminaries took different positions with regards to *hashkafah*, *halachah* and rebuilding the Orthodox community on American shores.¹¹ While the Rav expressed interest in Chabad teachings (his childhood teacher was a Lubavitcher who taught him *Tanya*), the Rav apparently once said that he felt far from Chabad¹² and that he did not understand the Rebbe.¹³ In one unpublished letter, the Rebbe is sharply critical of

⁸ Letter to Rabbi D. M. Rabinowitz in *Igrot Kodesh Rayatz*, vol. 5 (New York: Kehot, 1987), p. 368. See also letter to Rabinowitz (*ibid.*, vol. 6, pp. 178–9) where Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak expresses his “great pain” at the inappropriate treatment of the Rav. For more details, see Seth Farber, *An American Orthodox Dreamer: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Boston’s Maimonides School* (Brandeis University Press, 2004), pp. 62–63.

⁹ Facsimile in *Teshurah misimchat nisuin shel Baruch Shneur v’Chaya Krinsky*, 15 Elul 5770, p. 20. Accessible at: <http://www.teshura.com/teshurapdf/Krinsky-Schmukler%20-%20Elul%2015%205770.pdf>

¹⁰ *Menachem Meshiv Nafshi*, p. 639. For more on the relationship between the Rav and the Rebbe, see Wolpo, p. 173ff.

¹¹ This might explain why, despite a deep sense of admiration, they did not remain in much direct contact. There were, however, numerous points of agreement, such as the issues of interfaith dialogue (see Rabbi Soloveitchik’s letter, dated 15 June 1962, published in *Community, Covenant and Commitment: Selected Letters and Communications* [New Jersey: Ktav, 2005], p. 251), and *aliyah* (see *The Rav Thinking Aloud*, p. 241).

¹² *The Rav Thinking Aloud*, p. 154.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 175. I am not convinced these comments in Holzer’s volume are indicative of the Rav’s general outlook to Chabad (which also may have shifted over time). Clearly, the Rav’s public attendance at the 1980 *farbrengen* conveyed a very deep admiration for the Rebbe and Chabad. The Rav also told Rabbi Julius Berman, in connection to his minimal contact with the Rebbe, “A friendship is a

some of the Rav's halachic positions, and in general the Rebbe had difficulty with the notion of "Modern Orthodoxy."¹⁴

While the Rebbe and the Rav differed over various issues, their main divergence seems to have centered on the issue of modernity and secular wisdom. Apparently, the Rav felt that it was impossible to replant the Chassidic community in America,¹⁵ and that in order not to be overshadowed by Conservative Judaism, Orthodoxy needed to integrate considerably with secular society. "If everything is *treif*—college is *treif*, education is *treif*, the whole world is *treif*, nothing is kosher—so the American Jew cannot live with that," he said.¹⁶

The Rebbe, on the other hand, held the very deep conviction, initially articulated by his father-in-law, the Sixth Rebbe, that "America is no different,"¹⁷ and the United States—which at the time was known as the *treife medinah* (unkosher country), due to very low success rates of immigrants maintaining their Orthodoxy—would prove to be fertile ground for old-school, East European Jewry. The Rebbe, while secularly educated himself, felt that this should be the exception rather than the rule, and discouraged American youths from attending college. This was due to the danger of being influenced "by the views, outlook and way of life of his professors. These, as well as the whole atmosphere of a college are unfortunately, not compatible with the Jewish way of life, and frequently if not always quite contradictory to it."¹⁸

bonding, and when you have a bonding it's not a question of how often you meet." <http://www.chabad.org/multimedia/media_cdo/aid/527752/jewish/In-Berlin.htm>.

¹⁴ See letter dated 4 Adar II, 5738 [1978], accessible at <<http://www.lchaimweekly.org/lchaim/5758/496.htm>>.

¹⁵ Lecture of Prof. Marc. B. Shapiro on www.torabinmotion.org on the Satmar Rebbe: "We have the Rav on tape speaking about how there will never be Chassidus in America. Someone gets up in the audience and says no, there is Chassidus. This is from the seventies. The Rav shoots him down, even makes fun of him. 'You don't know Chassidus. I saw real Chassidus in Warsaw, in Europe.' And the Rav was wrong."

¹⁶ *The Rav Thinking Aloud*, p. 135.

¹⁷ See *Likutei Sichos* vol. 6, p. 364 and many other places.

¹⁸ Letter dated 1 Adar 5722. There he adds: "The Jewish boy (or girl) entering college, yet desiring to retain the Jewish way of life in accordance with the Torah, finds himself tossed about in the raging waves of conflict between two contradictory worlds. He is at a further disadvantage in finding himself in the minority camp, since those sharing his views and convictions are Jew on the college campus, while the forces pulling in the opposite direction are overwhelming.... It is very doubtful whether even an adult and mature person who is subject to such

This isolationist approach was clearly at sharp odds with the Rav's encouragement of secular study for Orthodox youths, and his *de facto* leadership of American Modern Orthodoxy.

The fact that the Rebbe chose to speak about the clash between Jewish values and those of "the world" at a public gathering in the Rav's presence in 1980, seems to me more than coincidental. Even though the masses would not have realized this (because the Rebbe's words were couched in traditional parlance¹⁹) the Rav himself would have certainly been able to hear the not-too-subtle dialogue that the Rebbe was having with his own *weltanschauung*.

The Rebbe did believe that some subtle accommodations had to be made for Orthodoxy to succeed in America, and his approach has been typified as a conservative but "adaptive" Orthodoxy, in contrast to the violently anti-modern, self-segregating form of "ultra-Orthodoxy" common among other Chassidic groups.²⁰ On the other hand, he felt strongly that the doors of tolerance and accommodation needed to "open from the inside" of Judaism itself, stemming from ancient, sacred values and texts, not from a "synthesis" between traditional and modern sentiments.²¹

In the current essay, the Rebbe speaks of four possible Torah approaches to confronting challenges to Judaism posed by "the world," based on the Midrashic account of four reactions of the Jewish people to being trapped at the Reed Sea by the Egyptian army. The four responses—1. Jump into the sea; 2. Go back to Egypt; 3. Fight; and 4. Pray—are interpreted as four different "philosophies" to the threat of all "worldly" opposition to Torah, including acculturation: 1. Resist, 2. Re-frame, 3. Tackle, and 4. Spiritualize.

The first group, "resist," see the problem as insurmountable. Although the reference is not explicit, this loosely corresponds to the *Chareidi*

'shock treatment' day after day, would not be shaken; how much more so a teenager."

¹⁹ Much of the Rebbe's theological discussions were presented in traditional Torah vernacular rather than employing the modern philosophical mode and lexicon as did the Rav.

²⁰ See David Assaf, *The Regal Way: The Life and Times of Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin* (California: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 329.

²¹ See letter cited in note 10: "Modern' implies a compromise and adjustment supposedly in keeping with 'modern' ideas. But where truth is concerned, there can be no compromise or accommodation, for even 99% of truth is not the whole truth, and therefore not truth at all. Needless to say, 99% is better than 98%, but one must not delude oneself in believing that it is the whole truth."

philosophy of ghettoization. The culture presents an insurmountable obstacle to traditional Judaism and must be rejected.

The second group would rather “reframe” the problem with some interpretative license: We need to *transform* the challenge of modernity so that it ceases to be problematic. We can “return to Egypt” and be part of an alien host culture so long as we remember our purpose there. This would loosely correspond to some sort of Modern Orthodoxy.

The third camp says we need to actively “tackle” the culture, presenting Jewish values and traditions as a viable, superior alternative to secular ones. This, I feel, reflects the spirit of Chabad’s “*sblichus*” initiative, which encourages Chassidic men and women to live in non-religious communities, but to be pro-actively supporting Jewish observance there.

The fourth camp, “spiritualize,” seems to refer, not to a movement per se, but to a smaller group of mystics who attempt to heal the universe through the theurgic powers of their prayers and *mitzvos*.

If I am reading the Rebbe’s words here correctly, the “dialogue” to Rabbi Soloveitchik would be twofold. First, the Rebbe is espousing here a somewhat postmodern “pluralism” of multiple narratives and approaches.²² In the essay, he stresses that each of the four approaches are necessary to heal the rift between Torah and the world, and that would mean we need *Chareidim*, we need Jews who will integrate with the culture, and we need Chabad. No group has the “correct” way, there is no single “grand-narrative” of Jewish *hashkafah*, but multiple narratives, as the *Midrash* itself implies.

But along with this quasi-endorsement of the Rav’s movement, I believe there is also a veiled critique. As I mentioned above, the Rebbe very much felt that the doors of integration and tolerance must open from the inside of Judaism, and this is reflected here in his reading of the second camp. The “integrationist” group does not propose to return to Egypt in order to “synthesize” their own values with those of an alien culture so as to live comfortably in it. Their value system stems exclusively from Torah, and they do not attribute any independent value or power to the world itself. They are, to borrow Rabbi Jonathan Sacks’s phrase, “the acceptable face of fundamentalism.”²³

The reader can decide for him- or herself how much, if any, of this can be teased out from between the lines of the essay.

²² This theme, which pervades the entire essay, appears to fly in the face of a literal reading of the *Midrash*, that Moses refuted the four groups as being incorrect. See how the Rebbe struggles with this issue in footnotes 39 and 172 of the original text.

²³ *London Times*, October 20, 2007.

What follows is a small segment of the Rebbe's talks of the evening in my free translation. I have omitted the copious footnotes which the Rebbe added in 1991 when preparing the talk for publication.

I.

In Scripture, the Jewish people are referred to as "Shulamis," which literally means "peace" (*Song of Songs*. 7:1). The *Midrash*, expounding upon the significance of this term, suggests that through accepting the Torah, the Jewish people became "*a nation who made peace between Me and My world*" (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah*, *ibid.*).

What is particularly interesting about this *Midrash* is that we normally think of peace in terms of establishing harmony among human beings, while here the "peace" is depicted as the relief of a metaphysical tension between G-d and His world. If we extend the Midrashic idea to its broadest context, we might say that *all Torah observance is a means by which man reconciles the rift between G-d and His world.*

In simple terms, what this implies is that the world's tendency is to draw man away from G-d, or at least to provide him with an arena that makes a rebellion possible. The world's inertia naturally opposes everything that is sacred. Peace is made "between Me and My world" when the Jewish people observe the Torah, thereby satisfying G-d's will on Earth. The starting point is man's personal religiosity, "*the miniature world of man*" (*Tanchuma, Pekudei*, par. 3), but these "peacemaking" effects dissipate outwards to man's immediate surroundings and, ultimately, they have a global impact.

What we shall argue in this essay is that the effectiveness of this process—Jewish people observing the Torah to harmonize G-d with the world—is not uniform. This "peace" can be achieved through a number of different approaches which vary incrementally in their harmonizing powers, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

II.

A key text for our discussion is a Midrashic analysis of the post-Exodus entrapment by the sea, when the Israelites saw "Egypt chasing after them" (*Shemos* 14:10). This text is important because it informs us of different Jewish responses that were formulated when the opportunity to receive the Torah—whose purpose is to make peace "between Me and My world"—was threatened by hostile opposition.

Our Sages taught:

The Israelites formed four groups by the sea. One said, “Let us jump into the sea!” Another said, “Let us return to Egypt!” Yet another said, “Let us make war with them!” And yet another said, “Let us cry out against them!”

To the group that said, “Let us jump into the sea!” Moses replied, “*Stand by, and witness the deliverance which G-d will work for you today*” (*Shemos* 14:13). To the group that said, “Let us return to Egypt!” Moses replied, “*For the Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again*” (*ibid.*). To the group that said, “Let us make war with them!” Moses replied, “*G-d will battle for you*” (*ibid.*, 14). And to the group that said, “Let us cry out against them!” Moses replied, “*You remain silent*” (*ibid.*; Jerusalem Talmud, *Taanis* 2:5; *Mechilta* to *Shemos*, *ibid.*).

All of the Torah, even passages which pre-date Sinai, is of enduring significance. Our “four groups” here could therefore be understood as a timeless, highly relevant, paradigm—that *whenever obstacles stand in the way of something sacred, Judaism provides four legitimate solution-pathways*.

According to this interpretation, all four groups are, in a sense, correct. Even the more outlandish suggestions, such as drowning in the sea or returning to Egypt, can be shown to follow a certain valuable logic, (and Moses only took issue with the suggestions of each of the four groups because he wished to *improve* them, not because he felt it necessary to refute any of them).

First, however, we need to carefully examine the logic of each of the four groups and explain how they correlate to four possible solution-pathways that become available when Judaism’s sacred values are opposed.

“*Let us jump into the sea!*”

G-d commanded the Jewish people to leave Egypt in order to free themselves from slavery to the Egyptian people—“*They are My slaves, whom I freed from the land of Egypt*” (*Vayikra* 25:42); “*They are My slaves—and not slaves to others*” (*BT Bava Metzvia* 10a). Thus, upon seeing the Egyptian armies chasing after them, this first group was willing to sacrifice their lives and drown in the sea rather than become re-enslaved and transgress G-d’s command.

“*Let us return to Egypt!*”

The intention here was not to return to Egypt and be re-enslaved, since that would represent a flagrant violation of G-d’s command. Rather, this group argued that through returning they would be able to *fulfill* another Divine command more effectively, that of “*you shall empty Egypt (of its*

wealth)” (*Shemos* 3:22), G-d’s original promise to Abraham, “*afterwards they will leave with substantial wealth*” (*Bereishis* 15:14).

This group maintained that an act of martyrdom here would be misguided. While it might arguably avert the Divine prohibition against re-enslavement, it would nevertheless prove futile in that, if the people were annihilated—G-d forbid—the ultimate Divine intent of freeing them from Egypt and giving them the Torah at Sinai would be thwarted. So when this group saw that the Egyptian army was chasing after them, they asked themselves: “What might be the Divine intention here?” and they came to the conclusion that, apparently, G-d intends to return them to Egypt so as to provide them with the opportunity to “empty Egypt (of its wealth),” to an even greater extent. It seemed that the promise of leaving with “substantial wealth” was going to be even more substantial than they had yet realized.

“Let us make war with them!”

Returning to Egypt—argued this third group—involves too much risk, as there is a significant chance the Egyptians will re-enslave the people, G-d forbid. We must, therefore, forego any further opportunity to “empty Egypt” of its wealth if this necessitates returning. The only solution is to wage war against them, to eliminate their hostile opposition against our continued path towards accepting the Torah at Sinai.

The third group’s rejection of the two preceding groups was defined by a strong awareness of the post-Exodus condition. The drama of the Exodus was obviously for a purpose (to enable to the people to receive the Torah), which rendered martyrdom unacceptable. Returning to Egypt, on the other hand, was also out of the question, as this would jeopardize the achievement of the Exodus: liberation.

“Let us cry out against them!”

This group maintained that war is unnecessary to eliminate the enemy, since prayer could be used as an effective device to defuse their hostility. I would argue that this is implicit in the fourth group’s choice of phrase, “let us cry out *against them*,” which suggests a sort of spiritual offensive.

III.

Having suggested a logic for each of the four groups, I would now like to propose that they represent four very different, authentically Jewish approaches to healing the metaphysical rift between G-d and the world — “peace between Me and My world.”

“Let us jump into the sea,” is a pathway which heals this rift through the mode of *obedience* to G-d, to the point of absolute dedication. It is an approach which renders the world powerless to oppose anything sacred, because the posture of heroic defiance proves that the world cannot entice a person to transgress, even if it costs him his life, G-d forbid.

“Let us return to Egypt,” is a pathway that makes “peace” by *transforming* the world to be supportive to the sacred. The precedent for this in Egypt was when Moses demanded from Pharaoh, “*You yourself must provide us with sacrifices and burnt offerings to offer up to G-d our G-d*” (*Shemos* 10:25). In a similar vein, “*Each woman shall ask from her neighbor and the lodger in her house objects of silver and gold... and you shall empty Egypt (of its wealth)*” (*ibid.* 3:22).

“Let us make war with them,” is a pathway that makes “peace” by *eliminating* the world’s hostility to the sacred. We battle with those elements of the world which oppose G-d’s presence so as to banish the state of hostility.

“Let us cry out against them,” is a pathway that makes “peace” through *prayer*. This is a spiritual elevation, to the point of communion with G-d—“*One stands before the King, King of all kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He*” (*BT Berachos* 33a)—a level of connection so deep that opposition to the sacred is no longer metaphysically feasible, and the enemy simply dissolves.

IV.

In a broader sense, I would argue that these four spiritual pathways are not specific to different segments of the community, as a literal reading of our *Midrash* would imply. Rather, every Jewish person ought to implement a four-runged incremental ladder incorporating all the pathways so as to make “peace” between G-d and the world.

- 1) The worshipper begins making “peace” between G-d and His world through *accepting the yoke of Heaven* (*kabbalas ol*), which, in its most extreme manifestation, would be a willingness for martyrdom (*mesirus nefesh*)—“*Let us jump in the sea.*” This represents the conviction that the world can never force man to transgress G-d’s will. “Peace” is therefore achieved in that a certain element of the world has “acquiesced” to the sacred values of Judaism—unwillingly, of course—in the sense that all the world’s attempts of opposition have failed. But what we have not yet achieved is a genuine “good-willed” peace with the hostile components of the world itself.

The process of making real “peace” with those elements of the world which are deeply antagonistic to Judaism’s sacred values requires two further pathways.

- 2) Battling with the hostile element—“*Let us make war with them*”—in order to neutralize it.
- 3) Utterly transforming the hostile element to the extent that it becomes supportive—similar to the group that suggested, “*Let us return to Egypt,*” in order to empty Egypt of its wealth more effectively.
- 4) The final and highest pathway is distinguished by a holistic approach, where the world and its hostility are not seen as something external to G-d that needs to be eliminated or transformed. Rather, in this case, we aim to bring the world’s true identity to light, that *as a creation of G-d, it cannot possibly oppose G-d*. When this becomes evident, all hostility will simply dissolve. In fact, from such an elevated perspective the worshipper comes to the realization that all the hostility was only created by G-d in the first instance to demonstrate His great power, as Scripture indicates in the case of Egypt: “*Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great might which G-d had enacted on the Egyptians, and the people feared G-d*” (*Shemos* 14:30–1). All of this is achieved through advancing to a mindset where hostility is no longer seen as metaphysically viable; and this is through the experience of prayer, an attachment and communion with G-d.

V.

Having stated the four pathways in terms of *worship*, I would now like to frame them slightly differently, in terms of *Torah*, since it is ultimately Torah which empowers the worshipper to make “peace between Me and my world.”

Since the Torah “*is not in heaven*” (*Devarim* 30:12), and was given by G-d to the Jewish people here on earth, it inevitably contains elements that are favorable to the Giver, G-d (*gidrei HaNosen*), and components that are favorable to the recipients, the Jewish people and the world, where the Torah was given (*gidrei hamekabel*).²⁴ The Torah’s effectiveness in bringing about “peace” between G-d and His world will differ, therefore, depending on which elements of the Torah are at play: those favorable to the Giver, or those favorable to the world.

²⁴ Translator’s note: This concept, originally introduced by *Maharal (Tiferes Yisrael, ch. 43)*, was developed as a major theme in the Rebbe’s talks on a number of occasions. See my *Rambam Thirteen Principles of Faith, Principles 8–9: Torah* (New York: Kol Menachem 2007), p. 64ff; *ibid.* pp. 137–141. The notion of a layer of Torah which is “favorable to the recipient” is, in my opinion, one of the key sources which the Rebbe utilized to demonstrate how the doors of tolerance can open from the inside (see my introduction above).

First, let us dwell briefly on one brief illustration of these two contrasting “elements.” Among the commandments, there are three cardinal prohibitions (of murder, adultery and idol-worship), for which Judaism demands martyrdom rather than transgression; whereas with the remainder of the commandments it is said, “*a man shall do, and you shall live by them*” (*Vayikra* 18:5), “*and you shall not die by them*” (*BT Yoma* 89b). Clearly, the three cardinal prohibitions are very much an expression of the Giver’s side of the Torah (*gidrei HaNosen*) which is highly inconsiderate of the recipient’s ability to carry out any given command. Thus, even in an instance where a person has no reasonable alternative other than to transgress, he is told to allow himself be killed.

The remainder of the commandments, by contrast, emphasize the recipients’ side of the Torah (*gidrei hamekabel*)—“which a man shall do and *you shall live by them*.” Not only is any requirement of martyrdom lacking, but Scripture now indicates that, on the contrary, the very purpose of religious observance is to enhance human life, “*you shall live by them*.”

Let us now try to interpret our four pathways of achieving peace between G-d and the world in terms of the Giver’s and recipient’s sides of the Torah.

From the Giver’s side of the Torah, peace is achieved when, through obedience and heroic defiance (“Let us jump in the sea!”), the world’s hostility to Judaism proves ineffective. In fact, this is all that the “Giver’s side” demands from us.

But from the recipients’ side of the Torah, peace is only achieved when the hostile elements of *the world* are appeased. This can be either through a process of transformation, where the previously hostile forces are rendered supportive (“Let us return to Egypt!); or, at least, they must be neutralized (“Let us make war with them!).

Something is still lacking, however, until both sides of the Torah act *in unison* to bring about peace in the world; and this only becomes possible when the recipients’ side of the Torah starts to develop a genuine and profound appreciation for the sensibilities of the Giver’s side. Hence our fourth level of communion with G-d, prayer (“Let us cry out against them!”), which aims to bring to light how, in truth, the world *cannot* be hostile to Judaism’s sacred values. ❧