

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Conservative Chareidi-ism

THE ESSAY by R. Yehoshua Pfeffer “Toward A Conservative Chareidi-ism” was an engaging read. It eloquently put forth a strong case for members of the mainstream chareidi community to look to classical political conservative thought in helping shape an ethos that will be characterized by a “disposition to preserve and an ability to improve.”

In that context, R. Pfeffer looks to a future where more chareidim will be engaged in an integrative model of living and participating in Israeli society while staunchly retaining their religious passion and chareidi principles and practices. The author repeatedly writes about the growing numbers of chareidim in “academia and the work force” and the opportunities and challenges that this presents. Finally, he envisions a future in which “the chareidi voice will be heard on a range of contemporary policy issues related to Israel and the Jewish world.” And he lists some of those issues such as “jurisprudence, bioethics, technology, national security and academic research.” In the end this will create a sort of “Jewish conservatism” that combines civic involvement with a healthy distance from secular culture, personal advancement with communal commitment.

It is surprising that in the course of this thoughtful essay there was

no discussion of the current question of chareidi participation in one of the most significant elements of Israeli “civic involvement”: military or national service in the Israel Defense Forces. This has been and for the foreseeable future remains likely to be a major point of contention between the chareidi community and the rest of Israeli society. It touches on issues of morality, citizenship, halacha, equity, civic participation, integration and many other value-laden questions that have far-reaching implications. It would be worthwhile for R. Pfeffer to tease out in a subsequent piece or in a reply his thoughts on this matter and how he believes these sensitive questions should be approached and what policies he would advocate for within the model he would like to see chareidi society adopt in the coming years.

Rabbi Nathaniel Helfgot
Teaneck, NJ

Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer responds:

Thank you to R. Nathaniel Helfgot for raising the important point of Charedi participation in the IDF. As he rightly states, this is a significant issue, and a major point of tension (and, unfortunately, contention) between the Charedi community and the rest of Israeli society.

From a pragmatic perspective, as the number of Charedim in Israel continues to swell, the question of concrete need becomes ever more germane. And from a moral perspective, one can hardly dwell on the subject without having the words of Moshe Rabbeinu open before us: “Shall your brothers go out to battle while you settle here?”

And yet, it was not by chance that this emotive subject escaped treatment in my essay on “Charedi conservatism.” For one, the matter of army service simply raises too many additional issues and challenges, such that its inclusion in the essay would have done it an injustice. Beyond this, there is perhaps a deeper justification for its exclusion.

Though participation in the general workforce and in higher education raises delicate issues for Charedi society, these can be discussed and resolved “on our own terms.” The space, as it were, is broadly seen as a value-neutral. Furthermore, it is uncontrolled by foreign and potentially deleterious forces. Nobody “pulls the strings” of Israel’s workforce; certainly, nobody controls it as a tool for transforming Charedi society. The same can be said of academia, certainly in its Charedi variety.

The army, by contrast, is defined in the Charedi narrative as an institution constructed to redefine the meaning of being Jewish. It was designed by Ben Gurion as the ultimate “melting pot” of Israel society, the frontline of Zionist assault on traditional, Torah Judaism. Times

have changed of course, but this basic narrative remains the dominant Charedi outlook (certainly in an official capacity), and elements in the army’s “education corps” and elsewhere have not always been helpful in dispelling it.

Far beyond the neutral realm of the workforce, the army is therefore perceived as an existential threat to the integrity of Charedi society. Entry into the army means more than taking up arms. It entails taking orders from a higher authority that is entirely distinct from, and in deep conflict with, Charedi leadership. The totality of army service implies a loss of control and oversight over boys at a young and impressionable age—boys who form the backbone of a Torah-centered society.

These concerns are not merely subjective. Army service raises objectively searching questions—questions relating to Charedi identity and its meaning, to authority and the tension between rival sources thereof, to value systems outside of traditional Torah society, to culture and cultural heroism—that participation in other areas of Israeli life only touch superficially. These questions, replete with moral and pragmatic overtones, must be raised as part of internal Charedi discourse. And they will, in good time. Their presence, or relative absence, should not overshadow (and potentially damage) the processes already in motion in areas outside of army participation.

To use economic parlance, meeting the challenges of Charedi society in Israel is not a zero-sum

game. There is no obligation to meet them all at once. On the contrary, experience has shown—even recent experience in the Charedi space—that artificially imposing an expedited pace (and unrealistic expectations) on social processes does far more harm than good. This, of course, is an eminently conservative insight. It is thus probably fitting that my article on Charedi conservatism omitted the thorny issue of army service. *Ve-od chazon la-mo'ed.*

Women's Aliyot

FIRST, LET ME MAKE a possibly important *diyuk* regarding women's *aliyot*: The *poskin* speak of *Ir Shekulo kohanim* and not a *minyán* or *Bet Keneset shekulo kohanim*. In other words, it will not do if a particular *minyán* lacks a male *ba'al koreb*; they would have to try to import one from elsewhere in town before they could even consider calling up a woman to read.

Second, the *baraita* speaks of *minyán shiva* but says nothing about extra *aliyot*. See response *Bnei Banim* IV, 2 footnote where I suggest a way to permit women to have *aliyot* on Simchat Torah.

Rabbi Yebuda Henkin
Jerusalem

Rabbi Dr. Aryeh Frimer responds:

I would like to thank R. Yehudah Herzl Henkin *Sblit"á* for carefully reading my article and for his two comments thereto. R. Henkin first

notes that the Talmud in *Megilla* 23a uses the formulation of “*Ir* (a city) *she-kula kohanim*” rather than “*Bet ha-keneset* (a synagogue) *she-kula kohanim*.” From this R. Henkin wants to derive that Maharam of Rothenburg’s special dispensation to call up women to the Torah would be in effect only if the whole CITY is comprised of *kohanim*, but not just a single synagogue. While this *diyuk* is certainly intriguing and plausible, it is not incontrovertible. It rests on the assumption that the use of “*ir*” in this case is intentional, and that we are not simply talking about a single synagogue in a village or small city. Interestingly, the formulation “*Bet ha-keneset she-kula kohanim*” actually appears in the *Talmud Bavli, Sota* 38b in a discussion of the priestly blessing. The cognate discussion appears in the *Yerushalmi, Berakhot* 5:4, but it replaces “*Bet ha-keneset*” with “*Ir*.” *Shulban Arukh ha-Rav, O.H.* sec. 128, no. 38, actually uses the combined formulation: *Ir o' bet ha-keneset she-kulah kohanim*.” Hence one could well argue that both formulations are synonymous and interchangeable.

In his second comment, R. Henkin suggests that the restrictions against women being called up to the Torah refer to the first seven *aliyot*, but not to any additional *hosafot*. In his *Resp. Bnai Vanim*, IV, sec. 2, he suggests that this principle can serve as a possible basis for allowing women’s *aliyot* on *Simhat Torah*. We, however, take issue with this position in our 2013 paper on women’s *aliyot*; see: Aryeh A. Frimer and Dov I. Frimer, “Women,

Keri'at haTorah and *Aliyyot* (with an Addendum on Partnership *Minyanim*)” *Tradition*, 46:4 (Winter, 2013), 67–238, at p. 68 and notes 8–12 thereto; online at http://www.rcarabbis.org/pdf/frimer_article.pdf. We cite the many codifiers who conclude that *hosafot* and repetitions are all part of Ezra’s original enactment of *keri’at ha-Torah* and communal Torah study—inasmuch as the requisite number of *aliyyot* is merely a minimum number and not a maximum. Hence, there is no room to make any distinctions between the requirements and level of obligation of the first seven *aliyyot* and those of the *hosafot*. This conclusion is stated explicitly by leading *posekim* including R. Abraham ben Mordechai ha-Levi, *Resp. Ginnat Veradim, O.H., kelal 2, sec. 22–24*; and R. Solomon ha-Kohen (of Vilna), *Resp. Binyan Shlomo, sec. 20*. This indeed seems to be the accepted view of latter-day Halakhic decisors and scholars. See: R. Zalman Druck, *Mikra’ei Kodesh—Hilkebot Keri’at ha-Torah*, sec. 34; and R. Elyakim Getsel Pashkes, *Itturei Megilla* (5772 ed.), *Megilla 21a*, “*be-Shitat ha-Meiri*,” no. 7, 343. R. Asher Weiss (personal communication, May 31, 2012) confirmed this view as well, indicating that there was therefore no room to consider giving women *aliyyot* for the *hosafot*. Similarly, *Mishnah Berurah, O.H., sec. 282, no. 12*, rules that the present-day custom to disallow minors from receiving *aliyyot* (except *maftir*) makes no distinction between the first seven *aliyyot* and any subsequent *hosafot*.

Heartfelt thanks once again to R. Henkin, *Sblii”a* for his comments and creative insights.

Great American Eclipse

IN YOUR RECENT ARTICLE entitled “The Great American Eclipse of 2017: Halachic and Philosophical Aspects” by Jeremy Brown, a difficult Gemara is quoted from *Succah 29a* which explains reasons for a solar eclipse. The author quotes 4 opinions of the relationship between a solar eclipse and the reasons listed in the Gemara. I would like to suggest a reasonable explanation for this Gemara. The Gemara says:

תנו רבנן: בשביל ארבעה דברים חמה לוקה: על אב בית דין שמת ואינו נספד כהלכה, ועל נערה המאורסה שצעקה בעיר ואין מושיע לה, ועל משכב זכור, ועל שני אחין שנשפך דמן כאחד.

Our Rabbis taught: A solar eclipse occurs on account of four things: Because the Av Beis Din died and was not properly eulogized, because a betrothed woman was raped in a city and none came to rescue her, because of homosexuality, and because of two brothers who were murdered together.

One problem is that a solar eclipse is predictable, so how does that fit with the Gemara that implies that these 4 actions cause the eclipse? The second problem is

what is common about these 4 tragedies and that they should form the basis for God 'sending' an eclipse.

We can accept the idea that an eclipse is predictable, yet God can be sending a periodic message that is a reminder to us regarding improper behavior that although always present, must be vigilantly rejected by God-fearing people. These four things may or not be a comprehensive list, however they do have a common thread, and fit quite well with the idea of a solar eclipse. These four human actions are quite destructive to society, and represent lost potential of human activity. Because of the lost potential, we need to be aware and determined to make sure that it is minimized as much as possible. When an **אב בית דין** dies and isn't properly eulogized, it is clear that the Jewish community failed to appreciate a leader who died and his contributions to our people were not memorialized. As stated in *Shabbos* 10a, "Any judge who renders a judgment that is absolutely true... is a partner with the Holy One in the act of creation." We lost a role model and a Godly person and didn't learn from him. A **נערה המאורסה** has experienced a traumatic event from which she is likely to suffer to an unimaginable degree. In all likelihood her life will never be the same. She called for help and no one came to her assistance. She may go through life remaining single and never have a family. This also is a permanent loss to our people. Similarly, **שני אחין שנשפך** and **משכב זכור** are examples of how our

people may have lost two potential families.

God's response to our lack of consideration for our future is to cut us off, for a moment, from his everlasting sustenance, which is also our future. Without sunshine life cannot exist, and we should realize this when for a moment he cuts us off.

Alan Messner
Wesley Hills, NY

THE ABOVE-REFERENCED article cites and disputes a 1957 responsum from the Lubavitcher Rebbe that attempts to resolve the apparent contradiction between the Talmudic approach to solar eclipses and their scientific predictability based on the fact that while a solar eclipse is predictable, the local weather is not. It should be noted that the Lubavitcher Rebbe himself disputes this same approach for similar reasons as those proposed by Dr. Brown in his treatise regarding eclipses published in *Likutei Sichos* volume 15 p. 7ff. In the same *sicha*, the Lubavitcher Rebbe also presents and takes issue with the proposed resolutions of R. Yonason Eybeschutz and R. Dovid Pardo for similar (and additional) reasons as those advanced by Dr. Brown in this article. Further, the Rebbe proposes a totally different resolution that is not cited by Dr. Brown.

Also, the citations in fn. 6 and 11 in Dr. Brown's published article to

Iggeros Kodesh 15:1079 should be corrected to read *Iggeros Kodesh* 15:5579.

Regarding the second reason proposed by the Lubavitcher Rebbe for why no *berachab* is said on seeing a solar or lunar eclipse (because an eclipse is a sign of forthcoming disaster), which is also challenged by Dr. Brown—it should be noted that the Rebbe’s explanation is shared also by the Steipler Gaon (see *Orchos Rabeinu* vol. 1, p. 95).

Rabbi Moshe Wiener
Brooklyn, NY

Dr. Jeremy Brown responds:

I thank Mr. Wessner for his interesting explanation of the Talmud’s statement on the cause of a solar eclipse.

Mr. Weiner notes that in 1975 (*Likutei Sichos* 15:7–13) R. Schneerson forcefully rejected his own prior

explanation made in 1957 (אך הסבת זה איננו מתקבל... and which was discussed in my paper. R. Schneerson rejects the causation described in the Talmud, and suggests instead only a correlation between the eclipse and these four sins. When a solar eclipse occurs, he claims, it is an appropriate time for these four sins (and others) to be punished. However, this novel explanation cannot be squared with the plain meaning of the Talmud which expresses a simple causation: בשביל “The sun is eclipsed for [i.e., on account of] four reasons...”

I also wish to correct my paper on p. 176. The sentence four lines from the bottom should read: “To determine the time of any *molad* since then, we simply add 29 days, 12 hours and 793 *chalakim* for each month from the primordial Tishrei.” ❧