

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Adversity and Authorship

ONE ADDITION might be in order to Marvin J Heller's fascinating tour of our history of *bitachon* in the face of tragedy, as found in the introductions of Torah works ("Adversity and Authorship," Spring 2018). Don Isaac Abarbanel writes about the comfort and well-being he achieved in the employ of a benevolent Don Alphonso of Portugal, and how quickly it evaporated when his successor turned against his own siblings, and those who had been loyal to his father. A tip allowed him to flee for his life, leaving his possessions and (initially) his wife and children behind, with the king's agents in hot pursuit. Crossing the border into Castile, he does some soul-searching. What sin or sins had he been guilty of that could explain why Hashem had turned the tables of fortune on him? He decides that his professional life had taken too great a toll on his study of Torah, and committed himself to turn over a new leaf. Remarkably, rather than rue the cruelty of his new fate, he resolves to throw himself more deeply into Torah study, which was more dear to him than the fortune he left behind. He resolved to begin with a commentary to the early Prophets. It is in the introduction to that work that he tells his story.

Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein
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Marvin J. Heller responds:

You are certainly correct in what you write. Abarbanel is a truly remarkable and inspiring figure in Jewish history and biblical commentary. Thank you for your response.

In Search of Nimrod

GEULA TWERSKY'S article *In Search of Nimrod* called to mind my own article, *In Search of the Biblical Hammurabi*, published by the Jewish Bible Quarterly in 2011 (39:3 July-September). Not only is Twersky's title strikingly similar to my own, but many of the sources I cited in my article also appear in Twersky's. In fact, Twersky's opening sentence speaks of studies focusing on Nimrod and the "task of identifying him with an extra-biblical, known historical figure." The entire point of my article was to identify Nimrod with just such an extra-biblical, known historical figure—Hammurabi.

Ms. Twersky's biographical note says she has published before in JBQ. My article was not only published by JBQ, but it has also been cited many times since, in both academic publications and traditional *sefarim*. If it was used by Ms. Twersky in writing her article, it should have been acknowledged. If it wasn't, it should have been.

David Farkas
Cleveland, OH

Geula Twersky Responds

David Farkas' article focuses on identifying Hammurabi with biblical Nimrod. Whereas my article did devote a single sentence and one footnote to the scholarly attempt to identify Nimrod with a known historical figure, I clearly stated my desire to steer clear of such speculation. Citing an exhaustive list of possibilities for the identity of Nimrod would have been off topic. As far as the name of my article is concerned, the popular phrase 'In Search of' yields hundreds of academic articles.

*Rav Hildesheimer and
Ultra-Orthodoxy*

I MUCH ENJOYED Rabbi Student's article on "Rav Hildesheimer's Response to Ultra-Orthodoxy" (vol. 24). I must call attention, however, to an error of citation in one of the footnotes (24). Rabbi Student refers to the book *The Sanctity of the Synagogue*, crediting it to a Baruch Levine. The actual author is Baruch Litvin, my wife's great-grandfather, who chronicled his successful court battle to maintain the mechitza in his shul in Mt. Clemens, Michigan (an earlier suit on similar grounds that my grandfather Alex Bass was party to in Louisville, KY was, alas, not successful).

There is a 3rd, revised & expanded edition of the book published by Ktav (1987), which includes new material on the subject of *mechitzah*, a translation of all the *teshuvos* available on the subject of

mechitzah by Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, זצ"ל, four Los Angeles *mechitzah* stories, an intro and conclusion by Lawrence Schiffman, and an appreciation of Baruch Litvin by his granddaughter Jeanne Litvin.

Dr. Marc Schramm
Columbus, OH

The Mitzvah of Tefillah

I had the pleasure and the benefit of reading Rabbi Buchman's great essay "Reinterpretation and Resistance to the Mitzvah of Tefillah" (*Hakirah* 24) regarding the difference of opinion between Rambam and Ramban. He certainly clarified for me the distinct position of Rambam as to the meditative state of the individual, deepening his awareness of the Divine Presence, while placing the expectation of G-d fulfilling his requests to a secondary role. Not so Ramban who places the emphasis on deepening faith in *hashgacha*. [By the way, the author translates that as "overlooking," which to my knowledge also has negative connotations such as to miss seeing, to fail to notice. Wouldn't it be better to translate it as conventionally, Providence?]

I would place the debate as between a Theocentric world versus an Anthropocentric one. The reference to the *Moreh Nevuchim* (Book three chapter 51) was of great value to me.

In my opinion Rambam's view has the "upper hand." In Tractate *Avodah Zara* 7b the debate between

Rav Eliezer and Rav Yehosua regards *Yishal Tzrachav Ve-Yitpallel*. The word *yitpallel* is equivalent to *shevachim*, and not to *tzrachav*.

I also enjoyed the comment that to infer that *Sifrei* quotes the Biblical verse only as an *asmachta* is odd, since we don't habitually see that usage in *Midrash Tannaim*.

I would also add that I believe Rambam's view is more solidly based, since although on the face of it Bavli dismisses *Tefillah* as *MeDrabanan*, the Tannaic source (*Sifrei*) says unequivocally that it is *Deoraita*. So better to give "forced answers" as do *Lev Sameach* and *Kinnat Sofrim*, *Kesef Mishna* and *Seder Mishna* (the son of the author of *Machzrit HaShekel*) and to remain with the Tannaic source.

I also enjoyed Rav Soloveitchik's stand on *Tzara Temiddit*.

However, no need for that to support Rambam, as mentioned above.

Thank you for clarifying matters for me.

On a separate note, I am happy that you publicized the wonderful foreword to the *Malmed HaTalmidim* (*Hakirah* 24). The author was a great rationalist and it is important for the public to know his writings and benefit from them. As is known, Meiri in his *Hibbur HaTeshuva* often utilized his teachings, as pointed out by Rabbi Professor Mirsky in his foreword.

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