

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Congratulations and Comments

MANY thanks for the new and exciting periodical, *Hakirah*. Your contribution is an important one. May you continue to publish Torah studies and the journal כדי להגדיל תורה ולהאדירה.

Shmayer Z. Leiman
Queens, NY

THANK you for sending me a copy of *Hakirah*. You deserve a special *יישר כח* for this project.

In the course of my teaching *Rambam*, I have had many occasions to refer to the *Yerushalmi*, since it is well known that *Rambam* often cites the *Yerushalmi*. There is a certain irony here: the *Rif* finally established the primacy of the *Bavli*, and *Rambam* went back to the *Yerushalmi*. Likewise, *Rambam* established the criteria and list for the 613 *mitzvot*, and *Ramban* went back to the *Babag*.

Hakirah is an important statement about the Flatbush community. It reinforces the idea that Flatbush is תורה וגדולה במקום אחד. I am glad to have had some small share in the development of the community.

Rabbi Milton H. Polin
Jerusalem

MANY thanks for the copy of your new journal. I must say how impressive the articles were especially those on the *Yerushalmi* and on Truth.

Shlomo Sprecher
Brooklyn, NY

THANK you for sending me a copy of *Hakirah*, but I don't know whether Flatbush has an interested market that makes a journal like that worthwhile.

Moreover, you are trying to reinvent the wheel. There are many academic journals that deal with some of these issues. Why another one?

From the first issue it is clear that the participants and the editors do not feel that they have to review all the work done on their subjects by other scholars. Why? There is a vibrant and flourishing academic field of Jewish studies "out there." True, it is burdened with the dross that all academic endeavors are: over-specialization, footnote mongering, too much stress on methodology, posturing. But it has unearthed and analyzed a lot of facts and proposed lots of (competing) explanations.

And even when it comes to non-academic journals, there is *Tradition* and *The Torah U-Madda Journal*. Is Flatbush such a hotbed

of research that it needs its own local neighborhood periodical. Is Flatbush research different from Teaneck's? Or the Five Towns'?

Finally, let me say something about your name. In modern, academic Hebrew, "research" is usually "*mehqar*" or "*beqer*." "*Haqirab*" would refer to a police investigation or, in some circles, a "Brisker *haqira*." So this too is a matter of reinventing the wheel.

I wish you all the luck in the world in cultivating intellectual curiosity in Flatbush and among *frum* people in general. Decades of experience have shown me how difficult a task that is. Good luck!

Yaakov Elman
Brooklyn, NY

The editor replies:

We wish to thank all those who wrote to congratulate us and comment on the inaugural issue of *Hakirah: The Flatbush Journal of Jewish Law and Thought*. Your interest and your feedback give us encouragement and tell us that our work is not in-vain.

Addressing the comments of Prof. Yaakov Elman: Does the community of Flatbush have an interested market that makes a journal like this worthwhile? Our answer is a resounding yes—both in the narrow sense of Flatbush as a geographic area, and in the wider sense as a universal community of Flatbushites from everywhere, as evidenced by the comments and

article submissions we received.

In the narrow geographic sense, a short anecdote will suffice. About two years ago the twelve volume set of *Dikdukei Sofrim* (by R. Raphael Nathan Nata Rabinovitz) was reprinted. How many people in Flatbush would spend \$200 to acquire a set of *seforim* whose purpose is to contrast our printed version of *Talmud Bavli* with that of the Munich Manuscript? Not many, I thought. Yet, when I went to purchase a set, the proprietor of a local *seforim* store here in Flatbush told me that he had ordered 100 copies and that almost all of them were sold within a few weeks!

Are we reinventing the wheel? No. The vast majority of quality Torah journals are affiliated with rabbinic, academic or other Jewish organizations. Each of these journals offers articles that conform to their own perspectives and flow from their mission. How is our journal different? In the Introduction to the first volume of *Hakirah* we wrote: "Our community is learned and diverse, steeped in traditional values and learning, and knowledgeable about the secular arts and sciences . . . *Hakirah* . . . was established to promote intellectual and spiritual growth within our community by . . . offering a platform to enable those who have been studying in depth to disseminate the results of their study for review, encourage others to join in this type of study, and create a forum for the discussion of issues of *hashkefah*

and *halakhab* relevant to the community from a perspective of careful analysis of the primary Torah sources.” We feel this makes us quite unique.

Our mission also directly addresses Prof. Elman’s statement that “it is clear that the participants and the editors do not feel that they have to review all the work done on their subjects by other scholars.” To encourage serious learners to become writers and share the fruits of their study with the greater community means at times to accept papers that lack the polish and thoroughness of articles penned by professional scholars. All manuscripts submitted to *Hakirah* are reviewed for accuracy and suitability by people familiar with the topics being discussed. When a manuscript is felt to have sufficient interest for our targeted readership it is included. Based on the number of unsolicited scholarly articles submitted for consideration for our second volume we feel comfortable in believing that our inaugural volume was favorably received by knowledgeable readers.

With respect to Prof. Elman’s comment about the meaning of *Hakirah*, indeed, we would be flattered to be identified with the “Brisker *derekh*.” Our objective is to bring back the wheel, not reinvent it.

We would like to thank Prof. Elman for his frank comments and his good wishes. We are always open to further improve our review and selection process and would be delighted if Prof. Elman

and others would volunteer to critique future article submissions that are within their areas of specialty. We look forward to hearing from all of you.

Three Commentaries on Talmud Yerushalmi

THE reviewer of the three commentaries on the *Yerushalmi* may be correct that R. Chaim Kanievsky should employ more recent manuscripts, but overall it is a very insightful commentary. The author of the article does point out corruptions in the extant text, but does not adequately explain how that adversely affects one who learns the *Yerushalmi*. One is never quite sure whether to figure out *peshat* based on the existent text or to emend it. R. Chaim Kanievsky’s commentary eliminates much of those concerns as his *peshat* appears to be the simplest based upon the flow of the arguments.

With respect to the comment by the article’s author that gaps in R. Kanievsky’s commentary make it difficult for the uninitiated to learn *Yerushalmi*, I strongly believe that the uninitiated should not begin with the *Yerushalmi*. They should first learn that *mesechet* in the *Bavli*, understand the governing principles, be familiar with Aramaic and then delve into the *Yerushalmi*. It is not, nor should it be, for the uninitiated.

Meyer Magence
Skokie, IL

FIRST, thank you for a most informative mini-article on *Talmud Yerushalmi*. You presented it in a beautiful manner.

Regarding note 5: yes, there is a contrast—it's called "different reasons." I am not sure why you would consider these different reasons an example of a ruling being "absent, in dispute, or unclear in the *Bavli*." The *mishum sakanah* reason is quite clear: tarrying at night was a dangerous business, so *Ma'ariv* shouldn't take longer than necessary.

Regarding note 18: is R. Goren saying that *bain ha-sh'mashos* is defined by a theoretical individual standing where no man can actually stand? I find that hard to believe. In defense of R. Bar-Lev, his explanation is the simplest, and the burden is on those who wish to provide a more complicated explanation to not only fit their thoughts into the text but also to demonstrate that such interpretations are necessary. In response to your ". . . is it possible that R. Yehudah ha-Nasi . . .?" it is not only possible but demonstrable that *Halakhab* follows human observation and not necessarily precise calculation—such that observing the moon rising while the sun sets, is sufficient backing for R. Yehudah ha-Nasi's *Halakhic*-universe statement.

Having said that, let's go back to note 14. Based on it (and on note 16) you rate R. Bar-Lev commentary lower than that of the other two authors. You are certainly entitled to your opinion,

but the length of time taken to write a commentary is not directly proportional to the "depth" of the commentary (never mind that R. Krasilschikov would likely have taken far less time to write his commentary if he had lived under the same conditions as R. Bar-Lev). The examples you choose for comparison of the respective commentaries do not reveal any relative lack of "depth" in R. Bar-Lev's comments (although each does reveal flaws in one or more of the three commentaries). If anything, the *Berakhot* 6d example reveals the relative quality of his commentary, as he explains what was meant by the phrase and doesn't just explain the phrase itself. On the other hand, a look at the three "Figures" in your review does reveal R. Bar-Lev's methodology such that his commentary could be said to be of less "depth" than those of the other two commentators in the same way that R. Qahasi's commentary could be said to differ from that of R. Ovadiah miBartenura: it's in-line rather than *nichtab b'tzido*. Quite frankly, I don't see sufficient evidence for your concluding rating based on the examples you cited. Based solely on them, I would say that all three commentaries suffer from fatal flaws in their respective *Berakhot*-tractate comments and don't match up well against R. Goren's commentary.

Last and not least, the third example was missing one sentence in the translation. Thankfully, your elucidation of the passage

translated “*Tamtzis Kush, Mitzrayim shosel*” quite clearly.

Michael Poppers
Elizabeth, NJ

I ENJOYED Heshey Zelcer’s tour of three recent commentaries that attempt to make the *Yerushalmi* more easily accessible. Rabbi Krasilschikov’s commentary is a most beautiful masterwork. The other two fall short.

I was most fortunate to have purchased a set of Rabbi Krasilschikov’s commentary covering all of Order *Zeraim* as well as Tractate *Shabbos*. At one point I was in contact with Rabbi Bronstein’s *almanah* who informed me that they are reprinting the balance of Order *Moed*. Since then, however, we lost contact, and I have been trying in vain to obtain the rest of the volumes. If you have any knowledge regarding additional volumes, please advise.

Morris Silberstein
Brooklyn, NY

Heshey Zelcer replies:

I am gratified that both Meyer Magence and Michael Poppers sent detailed comments on my review. It was my intent to generate discussion and interest in the study of *Talmud Yerushalmi*, and I hope that I have succeeded.

I agree with Meyer Magence that “overall [R. Chaim Kanievsky provides us with] a very insightful

commentary.” I also agree that “his *pesbat* appears to be the simplest based upon the flow of the arguments.” I would question, however, the implied assumption that the “simplest” is necessarily the best. I am sure Mr. Magence would agree that the words of *Hazal* are profound and that the simplest understanding is not necessarily the correct one.

In his final paragraph Mr. Magence quotes me as saying that, “gaps in R. Kanievsky’s commentary make it difficult for the uninitiated to learn *Yerushalmi*,” and then argues that one who is uninitiated should not begin with the *Yerushalmi*. In fact, what I wrote concerning R. Kanievsky’s commentary was that “it is too concise, and he sometimes assumes that the reader already has a lot of knowledge *about the Yerushalmi*. Someone *who never learned the Yerushalmi* will come across many phrases that will seem puzzling and which will not be addressed in his commentary.”

Michael Poppers faults me for implying in footnote 5 that the *Yerushalmi*’s explanation appears to be superior to that of *Bavli* when, in fact, they are merely two different explanations. In response, I would like to refer Mr. Poppers to *Drisha on Tur Orach Hayyim* 268. He, too, is bothered by *Bavli*’s explanation. He wonders: if the intent is simply to delay the congregation, so that those who came late to *shul* will not need to walk home alone, then why did *Hazal* institute *B’rakah M’ein*

Sheva, which is an abridged version of the Friday night *amidah*? They could have mandated that we say, for example, בְּרוּךְ ה' לְעוֹלָם *Drisha's* answer that we needed a *tefillah* that is said only by the *hazan* begs the same question—why specifically, *B'rakbah M'ein Sheva*? Only the *Yerushalmi's* explanation avoids this problem.

Mr. Poppers argues further, regarding footnote 18, that a simplistic reading of R. Yehudah ha-Nasi's statement suffices because, "*Halakbah* follows human observation not precise calculations." In fact, human observation would tell us that, even when the moon is full, the setting of the sun

and the rising of the moon often occur hours apart.

Mr. Poppers also faults me for implying in footnote 14 that one commentary is better than another because the former spent more time than the latter. I agree that that alone would not prove anything.

I thank Mr. Poppers for noting that, in my third example, I failed to translate a sentence of the *Yerushalmi*.

Lastly, I would also like to thank Morris Silberstein for his kind words. I too look forward to the availability of additional volumes of R. Krasilschikov's commentary. ✎