

Book Reviews

Women At Prayer: A Halakhic Analysis of Women's Prayer Groups by AVRAHAM WEISS (Ktav Publishing House, 1990).

Reviewed by
Gedalia Dov Schwartz

This book is a vigorous defense of the establishment of women's prayer groups and is part of the on-going controversy concerning the issue in certain sectors of the Orthodox community. As described by the author in his preface, this study was first presented in a course given at Yeshiva University's Stern College for Women, and additional chapters were added later. Unfortunately, it is weakened by a number of halakhic question marks, which this reviewer will address below.

Groups of women praying together are not totally without historical precedent; such gatherings are mentioned in the works of some medieval authors. A list of women cantors leading such female gatherings is found in the work of Shlomo Ashkenazi (*Ha'Isha beAspaklarit haYahadut*, I, 138). We have no particular knowledge as to the exact structure of this service, and we may assume that they followed the normal guidelines of *tefilla*. These sources merely cite different types of prayer and do not mention, within the framework of these groups, any form of Torah reading for the women.

However, to introduce a Torah reading without the normal *berakhot* which precede "holy matters" (*davar she-bikedusha*), and to consider this as a function of Torah learning from a Torah scroll, is problematic. Rabbi Weiss himself cites Rabbi J. David Bleich's objection to such reading: "Since use of a Sefer Torah is halachically meaningful only when it is used for purposes of fulfillment of the rabbinic commandment (to read the Torah in public), the use of a Torah scroll by women who candidly acknowledge that they do not thereby fulfill the rabbinic requirement borders on the farcical" (p. 83, note 44).

If, as Weiss emphasizes, women are halakhically not obligated to hear Torah reading as a *davar she-bikedusha*, and if they are excused from hearing this congregational reading, then the removal of a Sefer Torah from the Ark for a non-obligatory function is questionable, as it may involve *zilzul* (disrespect) for the Sefer Torah. Shulhan Arukh (Orach Haim 135:14) presents guidelines for the bringing of a Sefer Torah for reading to even an halakhically correct *minyan* outside the synagogue. If the reason, according to Weiss, is for Torah learning, why adopt this devious way of learning Torah? It would be better to engage in actual learning from a vocalized text, or to do intense study of the *parasha*. One of the reasons given for Torah reading on the night of Simchat Torah after the *hakafot* (although we do not ordinarily read the Torah at night) is that in order to show the proper respect for the Sefer Torah, a reading was established since the *hakafot* alone do not serve that function (see *Shaarei Efraim*, VIII, 57, and comment of *Shaarei Rahamim* 25).

It is also difficult to accept Weiss's interpretation of *Massekhet Sofrim* in regard to the *berakhot* after studying from a Sefer Torah. On page 81 he cites the source supporting the position that *asher natan lanu* is a separate *berakha* which may be recited by individuals after studying from a Sefer Torah, even in a private, individual setting. The source in *Massekhet Sofrim* 13:9 states:

And what does one say (when reciting the Torah blessings): Before ten they say: Bless the Lord who is to be blessed (*Borkhu et Hashem hamevorakh*). When alone, when rising to read (*keshehu mashkim likro*) (presumably from the Torah scroll) he says: “Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has given us the Torah from the heavens above (*asher natan lanu Torah min ha-shamayim*) for eternity. Blessed are you, O Lord, giver of the Torah.” He then rolls (presumably the Torah scroll) together and says (*vegolel ve’omer*), “Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has given us the Torah of truth (*asher natan lanu Torat emet*) and has planted everlasting life in our midst. Blessed are You, O Lord, Giver of the Torah.”

Rabbi Weiss interprets this text to mean that when an individual concludes his study of Torah from a Torah scroll, he recites the *berakha* “*asher natan lanu Torat emet*” even though there was no public reading of the Torah with a minyan. From this he draws the conclusion that, since “the reading from the Torah at a women’s *tefilla* group is a function of Talmud Torah, it follows that the final *berakha*—*asher natan lanu Torat emet*—may be said.”

As the author himself notes (p. 82, note 41), *Nahalat Ya’akov to Massekhet Sofrim* interprets the text that “*vegolel ve’omer*” refers to the reading before a minyan and not before an individual, and therefore ‘*asher natan lanu Torat emet*’ is recited only with a minyan. Concurring with this explanation is the comment of *Nachalat ’Ari’el* (R. Aryeh Leib Shapiro, Dayan of Vilna in the time of the Vilna Gaon) who adds that an individual cannot say a *berakha* after his study of Torah since he is constantly under the obligation of learning, “*kol shayte z’manei hu.*” Citing the *Levush*, he writes that of the two *berakhot* recited in the morning, the *berakha* of ‘*asher natan lanu Torat emet*’ is a *berakha* for the Torah studied the day before.

In view of the above commentators on the text in *Massekhet Sofrim*, it is most presumptuous to permit reciting the *berakha* after reading the Torah in a women’s prayer group as if the *berakha* were for learning in their particular Torah.

In his lengthy presentation of halakhic sources to legitimize women’s prayer groups, Rabbi Weiss has not fully considered the effects of bitter disputes that may arise in congregations where such groups may emerge. He mentions that although Rav Soloveitchik never objected to women’s prayer groups on halakhic grounds, he has nevertheless been seriously concerned about fragmentation in the Jewish community.

The issue of fragmentation is not to be taken lightly. This is clear from the response of the Gaon R. Aryeh Leibush Balachover (*Shem Aryeh, Orah Hayyim*, 5), in which there is a discussion about enlarging a certain *beit hamidrash* and the building of a women’s section in such a way that necessitated making holes in the existing walls to create openings to the women’s section. He presents valid halakhic reasons for doing this because of the mitzvah to make it possible for the women to have proper *tefilla*, even though it meant the breaking of the walls of an existing *beit hamidrash*, which is itself prohibited. However, at the conclusion of his *p’sak* he writes that if there will arise a communal dispute, it is proper to cease and desist from all this since the prohibition of *mahloket* far exceeds any prohibition of renovating the walls of the *beit hamidrash*. Thus the possibility of fragmentation is a serious issue outweighing what may seem to be halakhic formulations.

Aggressive promotion of women's prayer groups can result in a divisiveness and an unfavorable congregational climate which will be far more serious than any possible benefits to the group involved. The responsible *ba'al hora'a* (halakhic decisor), in reviewing this matter, cannot ignore such serious possibilities of polarization in the community, and consequently it remains an integral element of any halakhic decision.

It must also be pointed out that the establishment of women's prayer groups is counter to the clearly stated prohibition published and signed by five *roshei yeshiva* teaching at Yeshiva University. Rabbi Weiss' arguments are neither overwhelming nor convincing enough to set aside the objections of eminent Torah scholars. Further, as already noted, the serious possibility of community polarization suggests firm restraint on the creation of such groups.

It is this reviewer's personal opinion, based on more than three and a half decades of experience in the American pulpit rabbinate, that introducing a women's prayer group in the format described by Rabbi Weiss could lead to the erosion of authentic *minhagim* (customs) within the synagogue. Although Rabbi Weiss discusses aspects of *minhag* and new practices in synagogue custom (pp. 115-119) and responds to objections on the basis of a new *minhag*, he himself writes, "a full treatment of the principles of *minhag* which underlies this contention go beyond this study." Before seeking to establish such groups, all of the ramifications and aspects of *minhag* must be carefully considered and fully clarified by recognized halakhic authorities.

***Jewish Outreach: Halakhic Perspectives* by MOSHE WEINBERGER (Ktav, in association with the Association of Jewish Outreach Professionals, 1990. pp. xx+168).**

Reviewed by
Joel B. Wolowelsky

Kiruv—the attempt of individuals and institutions to reach out to nonobservant and/or unaffiliated Jews—is an important concern of contemporary Orthodoxy. *Jewish Outreach* is an attempt to give expression to these concerns and place them within a halakhic framework. It outlines what the author considers to be the major questions and presents some alternative approaches to this issue.

The introduction includes an approbation from Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg and quotations from Rabbis Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Adin Steinsaltz, and the late Abraham I. Kuk, Yitzhak Hutner and Bezalel Zolti—a choice that reflects in many ways the fact that the *kiruv* movement in America, which had begun with the pioneering work of Yeshiva University's Torah Leadership Seminars and the Orthodox Union's National Conference of Synagogue Youth (NCSY), has spread to a much wider circle within Orthodoxy. That there exists an Association of Jewish Outreach Professionals to cosponsor the volume is an indication of the maturing of a movement into an institution of American Jewish life.

Weinberger begins by investigating whether the halakha actually allows or encourages the *kiruv* movement. For many, the answer seems to be obviously positive. However, as he points out, that conclusion is not at all indisputable. There is a

mitzva of *tokhaha* (the obligation to admonish a sinner), the basis of which is the *arevut* (coresponsibility) that Jews have for one another. Yet, one is prohibited from admonishing others if certain that the protest will be ignored, and, according to some authorities, *arevut* does not extend to individuals outside the community of observance. There is a question to whether the requirement of *tokhaha* is an obligation of the community or the individual, and whether it may be directed to a person with whom one has no personal relationship. In addition, unsuccessful admonition might well turn one from being a *shogeg* (a person who errs out of ignorance) to a *mezid* (one who defiantly transgresses with full knowledge that he or she is sinning). This would make the whole enterprise counterproductive.

There is also the problem of the sacrifices outreach professionals might be called upon to make in *kiruv* activities. They might have to compromise the intensity of the Torah community in which they would prefer to live, the type of education they would choose for their children, or the standards they would demand of group activities (as many outreach programs are coed). But after examining all these issues, Weinberger proceeds along the assumption that current Orthodox outreach is generally halakhically acceptable and desirable.

Most people would consider the rewards of successful *kiruv* to be obvious: personal fulfillment, religious integrity, a life of Torah. Yet, there is sometimes anguish too that trails a *ba'al teshuva*. There can be estrangement from family, difficulty in marrying into the *frum* community, realization of problems of *mamzerut*, and so on. Resolving these personal problems requires an individual rabbinic judgement, but Weinberger aptly outlines them and quotes some general solutions. The far-reaching responsa of the late Rav Moshe Feinstein play a very significant role in addressing these predicaments.

Nonetheless, there is a defensive tone that expresses itself in the book. In a way, Weinberger is offering a justification of the outreach movement to those who would argue against its propriety or legitimacy. But the existence of differing halakhic opinions on these general issues notwithstanding, the fact is that (almost by definition) the mainstream Orthodox community that involves itself with *kiruv* work takes the permissibility and advisability of outreach for granted. What is missing from the book, then, is a more encompassing overview and orientation for those who are already committed to addressing the issue.

It might be illuminating to examine one specific problem discussed by Weinberger. May one invite a nonobservant Jew to Shabbat services or a Friday night meal when it seems obvious that the guest will use a car to get there? The hope is that he or she will be inspired to move towards Sabbath observance. But the very invitation invites the guest to sin—a violation of *lifne iver* (placing a stumbling block in front of the blind) or perhaps even *mesit* (inciting another to sin). May one violate the halakha in order to encourage its observance?

Weinberger had noted the willingness of some *poskim* (like the late Rav Yehiel Yaakov Weinberg) to invoke the principle of *et la'asot* to permit something that is actually forbidden in order to address a particular specific *kiruv* problem. However, all agree that is a most restricted principle that cannot be applied indiscriminately. With regard to the specific question of the Sabbath guest, Weinberger quotes a responsum of R. Feinstein discouraging a general announcement that children attending shul on Shabbat would receive a prize (as in the case of a *kiruv* organization directed to young children) because of the prohibition of *lifne iver*. Even if the

intention is that only children who live nearby should attend, one knows that others will be driven there. Indeed, he added, it is important to actually encourage those within walking distance to walk and not drive.

We are then immediately presented with a ruling by R. Moshe Sternbach—described simply as “remarkable”—that redefines *lifne iver* as applying only to cases where one actually intends the other Jew to sin. “If, however, one’s intentions are to help the other Jew, there is no transgression.” This is followed by a quote, given without any detailed analysis whatsoever, from an unpublished *responsum* of Rav Shelomo Zalman Auerbach:

Even an individual living far from the synagogue may be invited [by the yeshiva organizing an outreach program] to come for Shabbat, as long as he is informed that a room in the area has been reserved for him. Even if he openly denies any intention of taking up the offer, we are not obligated to retract the invitation nor must we warn him not to drive.

Weinberger does not offer any theoretical construct that explains these very different conclusions, nor—quite properly—does he feel qualified to decide between them. In contrast, the same issue is addressed vigorously by Rav Yehudah Amital, Rosh haYeshiva of Yeshivat Har Etzion, in a paper presented to the Orthodox Forum.¹ “Simply put,” he queried,

are we permitted to instruct sinners to violate minor infractions of the halakha in order to prevent them from committing greater sins or even just to bring them to observance and belief in general?

“At times,” he concluded,

in order to assist individual Jews to return to observance and to spare individuals from stumbling, there is a need to rule permissively and even to abet the violator indirectly [But] persuasion as an alternative to rebuke is a dangerous route “on which the righteous travel safely but the frivolous stumble.”

He notes that, while many people rely on formally offering a place to stay overnight when inviting a nonobservant guest for a Friday night meal, “there are situations, however, where such reasoning cannot be employed.” As an example, he cites the question of allowing a teenager who lives far from the central meeting place of the local Bnei Akiva to join the organization. Allowing membership encourages the youngster to spend Shabbat travelling to and from the meeting, often in violation of Torah as well as rabbinic prohibitions.

Yet *poskim* have allowed this in the realistic hope that the teenager will be positively influenced by the membership opportunity. There is a logic behind this, says R. Amital, and it was articulated by R. Auerbach, who had suggested elsewhere that

. . . while we do not allow someone to commit even a minor violation in order to save others from a greater sin, nevertheless, it is permitted to “put a stumbling block before the blind” (e.g., offer food to someone who will not make a *berakha* and thereby cause him to violate a particular detail of the law) in order to help

him avoid stumbling over an even greater “obstacle” (i.e., doing something which may result in distancing him entirely from Torah and *mitzvot*, the concern being that if he is not offered the food, he will totally reject Judaism). The reason is because “it turns out that there is no sin here at all, for in this case there is no obstacle being set. On the contrary, it is the removal of a very great obstacle, by actively exchanging it with a less serious one.”

Indeed, as R. Amital points out, the vast majority of rabbinic authorities follow the approach that the mitzva of *tokhaha* involves not simply an obligation to rebuke but encompasses all means of influence that could be brought to bear to help another person avoid sin.

How, then, we might ask, is the position of encouraging someone to attend Bnei Akiva different in principle from, say, the Conservative Movement’s opinion regarding riding to synagogue on Shabbat? That decision had rested to a large degree on the assessment that attending public worship on Shabbat was “indispensable to the preservation of religious life in America” and that the negative consequence of riding to shul was outweighed by the damage that would follow from being cut off from the community synagogue worship.²

The distinction is to be found in a subsequent paragraph (which Weinberger did not quote) in R. Auerbach’s *pesak*³ allowing the yeshiva to run an outreach program on Friday night:

The parking lot of the synagogue in which services are to be held must be closed for the entire Shabbat or Yom Tov.

We take this for granted, but it should be obvious why R. Auerbach thought it important to stress. Opening the parking lot undermines any possibility of a widespread perception of driving being forbidden on Shabbat. On the other hand, parking down the block on the street—viewed by some as hypocritical—actually creates a healthy tension. It forces the individual to be aware that driving is not part of the authentic Shabbat experience but is rather at best something being momentarily tolerated.

If the *posek* finds it acceptable to temporarily encourage or allow a specific violation as part of an overall *kiruv* approach, care must be taken to not present the forbidden as actually permitted. When an individual extends such a Shabbat invitation, the personal interaction may make clear to all the full demands of the halakha. Impersonal institutions, however, must be all the more careful in the impressions they create. The Conservative decision did not maintain that riding to shul was a prohibited act that was being tolerated for the purpose of eventually strengthening one’s religious commitment. Rather, it suggested that “when attendance at services is made unreasonably difficult without the use of automobile, *such use shall not be regarded as being a violation of the Sabbath.*”

This is not to say that the outreach workers must constantly stress that a particular activity is forbidden. On the contrary, R. Amital notes that

... one of the leading halakhic authorities in Israel instructed those who work in *kiruv* not to discuss the laws of family purity with those married individuals taking their first steps towards renewed observance. Furthermore, he suggested that even if the subject is broached by the penitent him- or herself, the instructor should plead ignorance.

This, of course, can be explained by the fact that the subject comes up in a closed private situation where the teacher is working with an individual and intends to eventually bring up this and other subjects at the appropriate time. Yet, R. Amital notes that Rav Israel Salanter had taken a more radical approach in a public forum.

R. Salanter had arrived in a port city where Jewish merchants who had business at the port would load and unload their goods on Shabbat as on any other day. Eventually delivering an inspiring sermon on the importance of the Shabbat at the synagogue attended by the merchants, he concluded that “while loading and unloading at the port is essential, writing is not.” His words were well received, and the merchants stopped writing. He continued his approach, telling them some weeks later that while unloading is essential, loading is not. And so on.

The significance of the story is not how R. Salanter gradually brought the merchants to full Sabbath observance; it is rather that he was prepared to publicly validate the integrity of the merchants by proclaiming some of their activities to be essential even though they were clearly forbidden. But, here too, despite the public nature of the pronouncement, in reality the dynamics were that of a closed system. He spoke to a defined limited community as part of a planned systematic program. Where to draw the line on such matters may be hard to determine at times; but leaving the parking lot open on Shabbat is on its other side.

R. Amital had argued that “removing the obstacle” is a legitimate aspect of the *kiyyum* of this mitzva in and of itself and not simply a technique that is justified retroactively if and only if it is successful. This has implications for evaluating various community programs. For example, secular Jews often view Torah as alien to themselves. Simply creating for them an appreciation of how religious traditions can be personally fulfilling removes a major obstacle to their eventual *teshuva*. Thus, for example, when a Federation conference opens its Saturday night program with *havdala*, we should applaud it as a major *kiruv* accomplishment for those whose programs created a receptive atmosphere, rather than focus on the fact that few of the participants were [yet] moved to become *shomer Shabbat*.⁴

Working out a valid approach to *kiruv* is one of the major challenges of contemporary Orthodox Jewry. R. Amital endorses Rav Ovadia Yosef’s admonition that just as one cannot make decisions regarding health care without consulting trained doctors, so one cannot plan strategies for healing the soul without consulting competent Torah scholars. He then concludes:

The major question for us is whether in our time, given the grave situation in which Judaism finds itself, the general strict considerations ... should be reconsidered, and, as a broad guiding principle, we should be required to adopt a more lenient posture, in order to draw the hearts of Jews nearer to God.

R. Amital clearly argues that the answer to this question is “yes.” Weinberger, having relegated to himself a more modest assignment of simply outlining some of the major halakhic problems that confront the outreach worker, does not move on to developing a “philosophy of *kiruv*” (other than to argue for its general legitimacy). But his book brings home the fact that outreach, like all areas of life, requires halakhic guidance. It provides interesting discussion for those who have not yet begun to think through its fundamental problems.

TRADITION

NOTES

1. The Orthodox Forum, convened by Yeshiva University President Norman Lamm, devoted its May 20, 1990 session (held at the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue-Congregation Shearith Israel in Manhattan) to a discussion of Rav Amital's paper, *Al Mitzvat Tokhaha*, which had previously been distributed to the Forum Fellows. The original Hebrew version of the paper will be published in a forthcoming jubilee volume. Quotes here are from an English version of the paper, prepared by Michael Berger, which will be published in the forthcoming volume of the Forum papers. I would like to thank Jacob J. Schacter, chairman of the conference and editor of the forthcoming book, for making the English version available to me.
2. Morris Adler, Jacob Agus, and Theodore Friedman, "A Responsum on the Sabbath," in Mordecai Waxman, ed., *Tradition and Change* (New York: Burning Book Press, 1958), p. 370.
3. Rav Auerbach's responsum to the executive of Yeshivat Ohr Sameah, dated 4 Nisan 5748, has been widely circulated among *kiruv* professionals.
4. Note the exchange between Irving (Yitz) Greenberg and Hillel Goldberg, *Jewish Action*, 51:1, Winter 1990/91, especially p. 33.

***Rabbi Eriel Hildesheimer and the Creation of a Modern Jewish Orthodoxy* by DAVID ELLENSON (University of Alabama Press, 1990. 211 pp.).**

Reviewed by
Marc B. Shapiro

Among nineteenth-century Jewish figures, R. Eriel Hildesheimer stands out as unique. He was a halakhic scholar, devotee of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, builder of institutions of learning, battler of Reform, and supporter of Jewish causes the world over. His legacy was a German Orthodoxy, complete with a first-class seminary, that combined the best the modern world had to offer with a strict observance of halakha. His practical accomplishments, as distinct from his intellectual legacy, were certainly greater than those of R. Samson Raphael Hirsch. Yet he has never been the subject of a serious biography. Thankfully, this has changed and we have to be grateful to Professor David Ellenson for this.

Ellenson has provided us with a very interesting book, both highly readable and carefully documented. It examines in close detail Hildesheimer's life and work with the emphasis on the institutions Hildesheimer built in Hungary and Germany which were the forerunners for what is today known as Modern Orthodoxy. In expert fashion, Ellenson describes the various struggles and successes of the man who was perhaps the loneliest of all of the great rabbis in the nineteenth century. He was one who had to stand alone against great opposition throughout his life and nevertheless refused to waver. He had the courage of his convictions to carry out what he viewed as his mission even if it meant arousing the ire of the entire Hungarian rabbinate or of the other two leading rabbis in Germany, Hirsch and Seligmann Baer Bamberger. At the end of his life Hildesheimer was able to look back at a wealth of accomplishments and see how he had molded a generation of Torah-true Jews by sticking to his guns. The moral of the story, which Hildesheimer himself noted, is that the masses of rabbis do not have a monopoly on truth. Since no *Bet Din haGadol* exists no authoritative decrees can be issued and each one has to follow his own conscience. Hildesheimer could have also added that the search for truth is not decided by democratic means. If he was right that meant he was in the majority.

Because Hildesheimer devoted his life to establishing modern institutions which pursued secular studies it is very easy to compare him to Hirsch. However, Ellenson shows clearly that Hildesheimer's attitude towards secular studies was utilitarian. Unlike Hirsch the philosopher, Hildesheimer the academician did not seem to place any intrinsic value in its study; an important fact that some in a later generation of German Orthodoxy did not seem to grasp.¹

Although Ellenson's book is a great contribution to German Jewish history, as a biography it appears to be somewhat lacking. For example, Ellenson provides an excellent portrait of Hildesheimer the builder, teacher and shaper of events, but one would also have liked to see some appreciation of Hildesheimer the scholar. Hildesheimer's most important contribution to Jewish scholarship, his edition of the *Halakhot Gedolot*, is not even mentioned in the book. Similarly, there is no mention of Hildesheimer's commentary to section three of the *Sefer Keritot* or to his study of the Herodian Temple as described in Josephus and *Middot*. In addition the author makes no attempt to examine Hildesheimer's *hiddushim* or *teshuvot* except when they have some bearing on the more public side of his career or tell us something regarding his relationship to Reform. Did Hildesheimer's independent thinking find an echo in the way he deals with halakha in general? Would Hildesheimer so easily reject the views of R. Moses Schick, R. Judah Aszod, R. Abraham Samuel Sofer, and the rest of the Hungarian rabbinate in a question of *hilkhot Shabbat* or where an *aguna* was concerned?

Only through an analysis of Hildesheimer's complete published writings would one be able to construct an intellectual portrait of the man. Further questions to be dealt with would be his attitude towards midrash, kabbala, and the historic value of stories preserved in the Talmud. One would also like to know if Hildesheimer had any great knowledge of, or interest in, Jewish philosophy. His attitude towards, and knowledge of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* must also be addressed. For example, did he consider *Wissenschaft* a form of *limmud Torah*? Ellenson mentions an article Hildesheimer wrote on the Septuagint but does not give the reader any information about Hildesheimer's knowledge of Greek. Thus it is unclear whether we are dealing with a sophisticated work of scholarship or rather mere apologetics or homiletics under the guise of scholarship.² Ellenson ably deals with this issue with regard to R. David Hoffmann but with Hildesheimer he does not go beyond a few general statements as to the nature of the Berlin Rabbinical Seminary.³

In addition, the book contains a few erroneous statements. Ellenson claims that the manuscript of Hildesheimer's doctoral dissertation has been lost and there is no evidence of his professors' attitudes toward him. Both of these assertions are mistaken.⁴ Referring to Hirsch, Ellenson writes that "he did not reform the liturgy" (p. 18). This is not entirely correct as Hirsch temporarily abolished the Kol Nidre service.⁵ In discussing Hildesheimer's attitude towards the possible removal of a *mohel*, Ellenson writes: "[H]e refused to declare the man unfit for his office and stated that such a decision depended on local conditions, that is, perhaps the Reformers would replace this man with an even less observant Jew" (p. 67). The reference given is *She'elot uTeshuvot Rabbi Ezriel, Yoreh De'a*, no. 231. However, in this responsum, Hildesheimer neither mentions nor even implies that his decision has anything to do with the Reformers. With regard to Hildesheimer's disdain for R. Zechariah Frankel's *Darkhe haMishnah* Ellenson writes: "[Hildesheimer] stated that were it not that God's name appeared in the work, 'then perhaps it would

be considered a commandment (*mitzvah*) to burn it' ” (p. 80). This is incorrect. The fact that the name of God appears in Frankel's book is shown by Hildesheimer to be irrelevant to the question of whether the book should be burnt.

Regarding R. Moses Sofer Ellenson writes: “To try to eliminate social intercourse with Christians, he labeled them halakhically as ‘idolators,’ harking back to an earlier trend in Jewish legal literature” (p. 19). Why must one assume that Sofer's reason was to eliminate social intercourse with Christians rather than being an objective description of the nature of Christianity? We must not forget that regarding Christianity as idolatry has a long tradition which was never entirely silenced.⁶ In addition, his portrayal of Sofer as being totally opposed to any secular studies needs to be clarified. There are distinctions that must be made with regard to the sciences and humanities, from what sources one obtains instruction, and one's particular circumstances and geographical location. It need not necessarily be anomalous that so many of Sofer's students became secularly educated.⁷ Ellenson further states that the traditionalism of the Hatam Sofer “had caused the Hungarian sage to be the first to promote secession of the Orthodox from the broader Jewish community” (p. 92). In truth, it was only in the generation following Sofer's death that the idea of Austritt was raised by the Orthodox.⁸

All that has been said up to now does not detract substantially from the fine work of scholarship that Ellenson has given us. His major purpose was to chronicle the public side of Hildesheimer and in this he has done admirably. Should Ellenson now decide to tackle some of the issues we have laid out he will put us even more in his debt as he continues to uncover new aspects of Hildesheimer's fascinating personality.

NOTES

1. See e.g. R. Yehiel Jacob Weinberg, “Rabbiner Samson Raphael Hirsch zum Problem Judentum und Weltkultur,” in *idem*, *Das Volk der Religion* (Geneva, 1949), pp. 71-72.
2. See Alexander Altmann, *Essays in Jewish Intellectual History* (Hanover, New Hampshire, 1981), pp. 288-289.
3. Fortunately the creation of a complete intellectual biography has been made easier by the bibliography of Hildesheimer's writings (not entirely complete) which appeared in *Alei Sefer* 14 (1987), pp. 143-162. Since that time more of Hildesheimer's writings have appeared in print. I am aware of the following recent publications which contain responsa or novellae. *Even Tziyyon* (Jerusalem, 1987), pp. 271-273; R. Avigdor Berger, ed., *Hesed leAvraham* (Bnei Brak, 1989), pp. 60-61; *idem*, ed., *Zekhor leAvraham* (Holon, 1990), pp. 129-131; *Netzer Mata'ai* (Jerusalem, 1990), pp. 322-326; *VaYa'al Eliyahu* (London, 1991), pp. 65-66. Incidentally, one interesting publication which, to my knowledge, no scholar has taken note of, is *Takkanot Hevrat Bahurim deKehillah Kedosha Eisenstadt* (Halberstadt, 1866).
4. Information pertaining to this will appear in *Alei Sefer* 17.
5. See Mordechai Breur, “Al Bittul 'Kol Nidre' shebeKehillah Kedoshah Oldenburg.” *HaMa'ayan* (Tevet, 5724), pp. 7-12.
6. Ellenson does not give a source for Sofer's view of Christianity and I do not know which one he has in mind. In *She'elot uTeshuvot Hatam Sofer* (Jerusalem, 1970), Yoreh De'a, no. 131, Sofer's characterization of Christianity as idolatry is clear. In *Kovetz Teshuvot Hatam Sofer* (Jerusalem, 1973), p. 93, Sofer rejects the authenticity of Meiri's tolerant statements vis-a-vis Christians. See also *She'elot uTeshuvot Hatam Sofer*, Yoreh De'a, no. 133 (end). Incidentally, although in this responsum Sofer refers to the idolatrous candle lighting that takes place in “India” there is no doubt that he is really referring to local Christians. R. Abraham Samuel Sofer. *She'elot uTeshuvot Ketav Sofer* (Jerusalem, 1984), vol. 1, Yoreh De'a, no. 84; R. Eliezer Deutsch, *Peri haSadeh* (Paks, 1913), vol. 3, no. 10; and R. Akiva Sofer, *Da'at Sofer* (Jerusalem, 1965), Yoreh De'a, no. 59, all see this as obvious. Therefore, as R. Hayyim Eleazar Shapira points out, it is shocking that R. Judah Aszod, *Yehuda Ya'aleh* (Lemberg, 1873), Yoreh De'a, no. 170, believed Sofer to really be

- referring to India, despite the fact that his responsum answers the question of a Hungarian rabbi! See Shapira, *Minhat Eleazar* (Brooklyn, 1991), vol. 1, no. 53:3.
7. See Eliezer Katz, *HeHatam Sofer* (Jerusalem, 1990), chapter 6.
 8. This fact is of great importance for opponents of *Austritt*; see e.g. Yosef Bramson, ed., *BeMa'arakha haTzibburit* (Jerusalem, 1986), pp. 60, 77. Supporters of *Austritt* view it as inconsequential since the supporters of Hungarian *Austritt* were for the most part students of the Hatam Sofer; see e.g. Benziyon Jakobovics, *Zekhor Yemot Olam* (2 vols., Bnei Brak, 1987, 1989). Indeed, from *She'elot uTeshuvot Hatam Sofer*, vol. 6 no. 89 (end), it is impossible to imagine that Sofer would not have supported *Austritt*.

REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

GEDALIA DOV SCHWARTZ is the Av Bet-Din of the National Bet-Din of the Rabbinical Council of America.

JOEL B. WOLOWELSKY is an associate editor of *Tradition*.

MARK B. SHAPIRO is a doctoral student in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at Harvard.