

Certificate of Kashrut

Tzvi Hauser's mention of the crucial role of Tel Aviv University Professor Asa Kasher in the drafting of a code of ethics for the IDF ("Spirit of the IDF," *AZURE 2*, Spring 1997) reminded me of an incident here in Seattle in January 1989 that may be of interest to *AZURE*'s readers. Upon the occasion of a series of lectures on the University of Washington campus by Noam Chomsky, I wrote a short essay in the university paper commenting on Chomsky's pathological hatred of Israel, his political collaborations with French neo-Nazis, and his apologetics for the genocidal regime of Pol Pot. Within hours of the essay's publication an incensed professorial acolyte of Chomsky's named Carlos Otero burst into my office. He insisted—among other absurdities—that Chomsky was really a lover of Israel. His proofs were that Chomsky had spent six weeks on a kibbutz in 1953, and that "a famous Israeli professor" had described him as "a great Zionist" in a letter that Otero offered to show me. But when he told me the

name of Chomsky's Israeli admirer, I did not insist on examining the document, for I had taught at Tel Aviv University for the previous four years and did not doubt its authenticity. The alleged signatory of Chomsky's certificate of kashrut was, of course, Asa Kasher.

Edward Alexander
Seattle, Washington

Swedish Activity

Your "New God of Palestine" (Editorial, *AZURE 2*, Spring 1997) was faxed to me by a friend, and made me want to find out more about your publication. After receiving the whole of *AZURE 2*, having as yet had only time to skim through it, I am thoroughly shaken as well as delighted. You certainly deserve the very best of luck!

For the last fifteen years I have been active with a few others as the Malmo Group for Israel, of which I am the chairman. We are fighting

PLO propaganda indoctrination against Israel and the Jews, consisting of a flood of lies and selective snippets of truth interspersed with fantasy that are being dished out to the people in Sweden. We have been active mainly through writing letters and articles in Swedish newspapers, but sadly the “Palestine Groups” here have been doing a thorough job with the (not unwilling) general public. Hopefully AZURE will help with the much to be done for Israel and Jews in this part of the world.

May your idealism, as well as that of all those who are fighting with the pen as their sword all over the world for the sake of a true Israel, prevail!

Rigmor Miriam Gadde
Malmo, Sweden

Making Movies

Yoram Hazony’s articles “The End of Zionism” (AZURE 1, Summer 1996) and “*The Jewish State* at 100” (AZURE 2, Spring 1997) very effectively articulate the absence in Israel of a “compelling national idea and a home for the aspirations of the Jews.”

Sharing his concern about our “conceptual wilderness,” I feel that we can and must devise creative ways to use popular culture to engage in a “re-forestation” process by which we can

finally achieve Herzl’s dream. Movies—the art form of our era—provide us with the most compelling way to win the hearts and minds so crucial for our survival. I suggest that a special committee be established whose members, representing various disciplines but all committed to fostering a compelling national idea, would provide the brain power and mobilize the funds to promote films, of excellent quality, with Jewish values in a feature film context.

It occurs to me that the Hollywood moguls of the ’30s and ’40s, almost all of them Jews, were the architects of the “American Dream” that created the values and shaped the fantasies of two generations of Americans. What you refer to as “a positive ideal ... capable of infusing an entire people with direction and meaning” could be realized through the medium of film. Certainly, when I reflect upon my own aliya, I realize that seeing the film *Exodus* when I was a child reinforced my Zionist ideals, and I carried those images with me until I could embark on my own journey.

Several months ago when I saw the critically acclaimed film *The Spitfire Grill*, a film with a Christian message, albeit subtle, I noticed that the film was a production of the Catholic Film Board. We need a board of philanthropic, concerned and committed members with funds to encourage our

own gifted screenwriters. Quality feature films can promote the values and communicate the message that will help us avoid the ideological disintegration about which you speak.

Roberta Chester
Jerusalem

Respect for Character

I found Dr. Yoram Hazony's article "*The Jewish State at 100*" very compelling. Its obvious respect for the character of American life is heartening and appreciated, and would that people here in the U.S. shared it!

More generally I think he is right in his reading of matters on both sides of the ocean.

Jacob Neusner
St. Petersburg, Florida

The Flaming Sword

I happened across a blue booklet called AZURE. At first I refrained from reading it, since I thought it was the journal of a movement, that is, the official organ of a political party. Obviously, I have nothing against any political movement in Israel, but I was searching for a forum for discussion on the question of what it is that essentially

splits and divides the Jewish people, without the response being in the categorical context of any one "camp."

I am an ongoing participant in group encounters under the aegis of B'sod Siah. After we conducted a protracted back-and-forth discussion of topics such as politics, the media, power struggles, etc., we reached the heart of the matter, that is, the essential division at the core of the Israeli experience—namely, the intercultural disparity between a world conducted in accordance with a Jewish paradigm, and that which operates through a western-Christian orientation. It seems to me that Ofir Haivry's "Act and Comprehend" (AZURE 1, Summer 1996) touched, to some degree, upon several aspects of this topic. I am of the opinion, however, that this deserves a fundamental clarification, since this is the flaming sword that splits the two worlds—the Jewish-religious versus the secular-Western, self-fulfillment and individualism versus mutual responsibility and a connection to the corporate Jewish soul. Or, as Haivry presented it in his article, the shortcut to attaining the principle, as opposed to the performance of small details that comprise a large picture whose significance is at times hidden from us. Nonetheless, I find it difficult to accept the conclusion to be drawn from the essay that the forging of a connection with the

historical parts of the land means adding another house and another goat, and that this will join the provinces of the homeland to the hearts of the people. We have done this to date, and we have not achieved the “settlement of the heart.” Perhaps we should now explore other avenues by which the people will find a connection with these areas. Possibly it is a good education that is needed to reveal the faith-based, almost mystical, elements of the ties between the people and its land.

Similarly, the article discussing the posing of questions to God (the “return to questioning” as a spiritual obligation; “On the Commandment to Question,” *Azure* 1, Summer 1996) is only an introduction, and it is necessary to continue the dialogue begun by that piece. I would be pleased to see in *Azure* additional articles dealing with such issues and raising additional lines of thought.

Ruti Avraham
Beit El

No Need for Revolutions

In his article “Tora of Israel, Tora of Exile” (*Azure* 2, Spring 1997), Yoav Sorek argues that the halachic discussion in exile became fossilized and “technical,” while ignoring the goals

and ends of the commandments. This is exemplified by the third Sabbath meal. The author maintains that the third meal, which was established for *oneg shabat* (the pleasure derived from the Sabbath), was transformed by the “Tora of Exile” into a symbolic meal whose importance lies in its symbolic nature, and not in any actual pleasure.

This example would seem to support the argument; but even a shallow examination reveals the example to be a false one. Two classical and central books of the “Tora of Exile,” the *Shulhan Aruch* (*Orach Hayim* 291:1) and the *Mishna Brura* (*ad loc.*), offer directives concerning the third meal which are quite different from what we might expect.

The *Shulhan Aruch* states: “Take great care to observe the third meal, and even if one is satiated, he may fulfill it with an egg’s worth [of food in volume]; and if he is incapable of eating it, he is not obligated to suffer.” The *Mishna Brura* adds: “The meal was given for pleasure, and not for suffering.” The *Shulhan Aruch* writes in the continuation of this discussion, “The wise one who has eyes in his head will not fill his stomach in the morning meal, in order to leave room for the third meal.” The *Mishna Brura* adds: “For otherwise, at times this would be gluttony and would not be regarded as [proper] eating.” In other

words, the rabbis who are regarded as the leading proponents of the “Tora of Exile” are fully aware of the meaning of the obligation, and are of the opinion that this meaning influences the carrying out of the obligation—even to the extent of canceling it in special instances. They do not, however, maintain that ordinary satiation is sufficient to override the commandment. In this as well, they are not “divorced from reality,” since members of our affluent society know how easy it is to enjoy tasty food, even when one is full. The position they offer is also in line with the original purpose of the third meal—the goal of celebrating the Sabbath by means of an additional meal, and not merely the addition of courses to the existing meals. Neither the *Shulhan Aruch* nor the *Mishna Brura* (both, again, among the pillars of the “Tora of Exile”) mention any symbolic aspect of the third meal. They must certainly have been aware of such an aspect, but did not regard it as being a relevant component of the legal discussion. It would therefore seem that the difference between the “Tora of the Land” and the “Tora of Exile” is really quite artificial.

In truth, in order to restore the “Tora of the Land” to its former glory, there is no need for revolutionary measures. It would be more productive to

join the discussion currently taking place in the *beit midrash*, both orally and in writing, on the basis of a broad store of knowledge and common sense.

Ruth Landau
Jerusalem

Yoav Sorek responds:

The first part of Ruth Landau’s letter is correct, and puts in focus an argument which may not have been made clearly enough in my article. The Tora of Exile finds its major expression in the realm of the *de facto*, and not in that of the *de jure*. Religious psychology, the popular approach toward the *halacha*, and the norms of Jewish society are the main underpinnings of the Tora of Exile, which in many instances later find some expression in the *halachic* literature as well. It should be recalled that the Tora of Exile preserves the Tora of Israel. The concept of the reformation of this world is learned and transmitted from one generation to the next, and, in the formal plane, no conception clearly belonging to the Tora of Exile can be anchored in the *halacha*.

As for joining the discussion conducted in the religious academies, with the proviso that this be done from a broad base of knowledge and common

sense—such a view is somewhat naïve. Broad knowledge, within the realm of the classical Tora literature, is a fundamental of the discussions in the *beit midrash*; but so is the understanding that there are laws which are not taught, and that the strength of the “spirit of the halacha” is greater than

is commonly assumed. These assumptions also are part of the *beit midrash* discussion. Anyone coming to the *beit midrash* waving Landau’s quotations from the *Shulhan Aruch* will find himself among the community of eccentrics who insist upon the application of the halacha solely as it is written.

CORRECTIONS: In the last issue, Elliott Abrams and Enrico Mentana were described erroneously. Abrams is President of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington; Mentana is the director of Italian television’s Channel 5 News. We apologize for the errors. —Ed.

AZURE welcomes letters to the Editor. Letters should be sent to: AZURE, The Shalem Center, 22a Hatzfira St., Jerusalem, Israel. Letters may be edited for length.
