

Marc B. Shapiro

Scholars and Friends: Rabbi Jehiel Jacob Weinberg and Professor Samuel Atlas

Any history of the Torah u-Madda philosophy must include R. Jehiel Jacob Weinberg (1884-1966). As one of the outstanding Talmudists and *poskim* of this century, who was equally at home in modern Jewish scholarship as in traditional Torah learning, he is almost unique. Not so well known is that R. Weinberg also had one of the most extensive and wide-ranging correspondences of any *gadol be-Yisrael*. Although many of these letters are of lasting value, particularly significant is R. Weinberg's correspondence with Professor Samuel Atlas, probably his closest friend.

R. Weinberg first met Atlas in the early 1920's in Lithuania, and from that time on they became very close. Before World War II they also corresponded, but these letters were destroyed in the German bombing of London.¹ However, when Atlas published *Hiddushei ba-Rabad on Bava Kamma* (London, 1940), he was able to include Weinberg's many important notes. What makes the Weinberg Atlas correspondence, and friendship, so significant is that Atlas was a professor at the Reform Hebrew Union College. This fact is enough to raise one's attention, for it is very unusual for a *gadol* to even be friendly—not to mention on intimate terms—with instructors at such institutions. When one realizes that it was only with Atlas that R. Weinberg felt comfortable in revealing his innermost thoughts, feelings, and frustrations,² it becomes apparent that we are confronted with a relationship the likes of which is unknown in the history of *gedolei Yisrael*.

While R. Weinberg had a completely negative view of the Reform movement, believing it to be akin to Christianity, his attitude towards individual Reform rabbis was very different. He recognized that many of these rabbis were positively serving the Jewish community and he treated them with respect. Significantly, unlike many of his colleagues, he was not philosophically opposed to his students becoming members of the *Allgemeiner Rabbinerverband* which comprised rabbis of all denominations and was the pre-war German equivalent of the current New York Board of Rabbis.⁵

There is a great deal which can be said about these letters, and I have dealt with them in my dissertation⁴ and forthcoming biography of R. Weinberg. Here I present in translation from the Hebrew significant selections from these letters, which give us a glimpse into the inner thoughts of this modern Orthodox sage. Among the many interesting things readers will notice, two are of particular significance. The first is R. Weinberg's great pessimism about the character and fate of the Jewish people. This aspect of R. Weinberg's personality is found throughout his correspondence and hints to it are also forthcoming in his public writings. The other interesting aspect, which because of its sensitive nature is not found in his letters to other scholars, and probably could never have been expressed to most of his Orthodox colleagues, is Weinberg's thoughts about areas of Jewish law which discriminate against Gentiles. In his great honesty, he could not deny that these laws troubled him to his core, but because of his great loyalty to tradition, he could not reject them. Herein lay the tension, which was particularly wrenching being that it was not merely a theoretical concern since R. Weinberg had a very close friendship with a non-Jew, his teacher Paul Kahle. Again, it hardly needs to be said that such a close friendship with a non-Jew is also very unusual in the history of *gedolei Yisrael*. In this regard, it is worth quoting a passage from his letter to Kahle after the death of the latter's wife, as it shows R. Weinberg's sensitivity to Gentile piety.

Whenever I had the chance to meet with her, I was strongly impressed by her deep religious devotion, her calm nature and her solid judgment—the fundamental qualities of a strong, great woman. The death of this noble, pious Christian woman, besides being a tragedy for her own family, has a historic resonance as well. She was one of the few German women, perhaps the only one, who found the courage to defy the criminal regime where it counted, committing herself to the protection of the innocent victims of persecution. In the Israeli newspapers her heroic deeds have been recounted and praised, and I am certain that many among us cherish grateful memories of her.⁵

The Weinberg-Atlas correspondence is stored in a restricted collection in the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, and I thank the library of the Seminary and Mrs. Samuel Atlas for giving me permission to make use of this collection.

December 24, 1946

It is impossible for me to describe in words my great joy at receiving your letter. It is the first sign of life which I received from you after many years of separation. In the meantime, I was totally removed from life and viewed myself as having departed this world. I did not have even a small hope that I would rise up from the grave in which I was buried. And then came your wonderful letter, a voice from the world before the destruction, bringing joy to my frozen heart. It is as if I'm dreaming. I read and reread your letter and am coming to believe that, in truth, not all life has been destroyed. A remnant still survives. Perhaps I shall once again be part of the living.

My family, my sisters and their families and everything they had, my brothers and their families, my other relatives, close and distant, have been totally destroyed. Only one sister remains in Hartford with her husband and children. They were able to escape from the land of blood [Germany] before the war. I also have some relatives in America, relatives who went their own ways decades before the war and with whom I have never had any relationship. They are now writing to me, trying to establish a connection. It appears that this is due to a feeling of pity on their behalf, and because of this their letters are not able to provide me with even a drop of comfort.

March 25, 1947

With great joy I received your book. Your edition of the Rabad [on *Bava Kamma*; London, 1940] makes a great impression. Your *hid-dushim* and notes excel in their clarity and profundity. It must have made a wonderful impression in the world. I thank you for including my notes and thereby attaching my name to the work of one of the great *Rishonim*.⁶ . . . Regarding my trip to America, it has been delayed by my sickness. After Passover I will begin to prepare for it. In truth, I hesitate greatly. I fear this crass and tumultuous land. I feel loathing when I browse through newspapers and magazines and encounter the exaggerations and the vociferous declarations. In Erez Yisrael my students and friends press me to go there. They promise me good possibilities, but I see that the Land of Israel is becoming a Hebrew version of America. Also there "advertising" rules. "*Geonim*" sprout up there as grass in the field. Those who were emissaries of the yeshivot and unimportant *mashgihim* have overnight become

outstanding *geonim*. The partisan extremism also poisons the atmosphere. Whoever isn't a fighting zealot must of necessity be a flatterer and crawl at the feet of the powerful in order to survive. The filth of the *gahut* is becoming more powerful, and there is no escape for those who are refined. This is the emotional reason behind my hesitations. Here I am removed from all the fraudulence.

August 4, 1948

I have nothing against printing my article in the jubilee volume for Rav Za'ir [Chaim Tchernowitz]. We are all obligated in his honor. He was the first, *in Russia*, to develop critical investigation of the Talmud and *poskim*. He brought scientific understanding of this ancient literature to those in the field of Hebrew law, who [previously] knew only "songs and stories" or [engaged in] poor journalism which lacked all talent. Even though I disagree with him in many basic issues, and a number of points in his books deserve criticism, I don't shut my eyes before his great importance as a sage and writer in Israel. Also, even when he differs with accepted views, he does so with respect, awe, and a pure and faithful heart. . . .

You must have studied in depth my article which is in your possession. The article sheds light not only on the historical conditions in the days of the Mishnah, but is an in-depth study of the Talmud's perplexities and illustrates a proper mode of research. Talmudists from the old school and so-called modern Talmudists of the sort at the Hebrew University and others of this variety will not understand this article. Very few will be able to appreciate it properly, and for these few, in which you my friend are included, I write and work. . . .

I saw a few "diplomats" here during the time of the world congress.⁷ They cry and express regret over the troubles of our people, and enjoy all that is good in first-rate hotels. Their faces are like those of pig-breeders.⁸ We are guiltier than any other people?⁹ Have you read my article on Herzl?¹⁰ In it I also speak of the strength and holiness of the warriors of Israel in the land of Israel—my only comfort.

August 22, 1948

Your article "Ha'aramah Mishpatit,"¹¹ made an excellent impression. It is a combination of profound logic and sharp criticism, and a good illustration that not all who wish to adopt the title "talmudic researcher" can do so. A scientific-critical sense is not enough. Profound traditional talmudic learning is an essential prerequisite for critical research.

September 20, 1948

During my researches I used . . . 's book on the Mishnah and saw that most of it is fraudulent and full of plagiarisms (heaven is between us!²). I was shocked to see how he craftily uses the works of others and puts a slightly different spin on the material he took from Frankel, I. H. Weiss, Halevy and Hoffmann. He acts as if he made new discoveries, and the readers don't sense it.

In general, we are afflicted with a despicable charlatanism which is not found among any other peoples. When I see this I become depressed and ask myself: "For whom am I working?" . . . Furthermore, in the new Hebrew state they give out high positions only to friends and people who know how to flatter properly. . . . The Jewish world has always acted and will continue to act in this fashion.

You are in doubt as to whether Rav Za'ir is best described as a writer or a scholar. One can make from him twenty professors for the Hebrew University. The prattler [Joseph] Klausner did not reach his ankles and the other "sages," who are they? It is true that he did not analyze the sources with a critical-philological method, but no one compares to him when it comes to describing events and phenomena in a historical-philosophical spirit. The nations of the world know how to distinguish between different fields of study. But we, a poor and weak nation, request original genius from everyone. There is also the matter of the abhorrent belittling which is common among us. [Jacob] Klatzkin, of blessed memory, belittled all our writers and philosophers, while others regarded him as insignificant. Also, everyone is jealous of the other. In truth, everyone has some measure of achievement, but they must be described in a fashion which suits them, rather than characterizing them as something they are not.

January 14, 1954

Dr. Heschel surprised me with a letter in which he mentions his "sin" [of not writing] and apologizes. . . . He also gave me his articles and pamphlets such as *Pikuah Neshamah* [New York, 1949], "R. Gershon Kotover,"¹³ "Ha-He'emin ha-Rambam she-Zakhah li-Nevuah,"¹⁴ and others. He certainly has a wonderful writing style and a strong poetic feeling, but I doubt that this is "philosophy." He appears to follow in Buber's footsteps and embellishes his writing with a fancy style. I question whether the *Hebrew Union College Annual* should have printed a large study on R. Gershon Kotover, with a large number of footnotes and other scholarly apparatuses. Who was R. Gershon Kotover? The brother in law of the Baal Shem Tov,

and this, and no more, is his only significance. The stories about him are apocryphal, of the same genre as the stories in *Sbiuhei ha-Besht*. I am concerned that Dr. Heschel is wasting his time and strength in "scientific study," producing a detailed and boring study of the life of R. Gershon Kotover. People make use of the scholarly approach for insignificant matters.

March 7, 1956

In general, I see that you judge others from a subjective standpoint. You are part of two worlds. You are a philosopher and a talmudic researcher, something not everyone is able to achieve. L. [Saul Lieberman] is a commentator in accordance with the simple sense, and he has a feel for proper interpretation. He knows how to make use of the entire talmudic literature, the rabbinic and scientific, in his commentary. He does not have a sweep of vision nor does he consider all the problems in one survey. He confines himself to establishing texts and exact interpretation. Such a confining task is good for him and the world, for through it he contributes greatly with his many books. Professor Tchernowitz of blessed memory was—or wanted to be—a philosophical historian. He failed because of his false imaginings which detracted from his scholarly method.

I strongly rejected the offers from the new university [Bar Ilan] and the new rabbinical seminary.¹⁵ At my age I cannot involve myself in disputes, and the *rashei yeshivah*, with the Rabbi of Brisk [R. Isaac Ze'ev Soloveitchik] at their head, have begun sending out letters of denunciation against this [proposed] seminary.¹⁶ Furthermore, the decisive power there will not be me but the heads of the [Mizrachi] party.

May 5, 1957

I have nothing to add to what I have previously written [*Seridei Esh*, Vol. 2, 198-99], and you needlessly attempted to explain your words. I did not express disagreement with your logic, which is very good, but only stated that you cannot insert it as an "explanation"—not in the Mishnah, the Jerusalem Talmud, or Maimonides. You are not a teacher at one of the yeshivot and do not need to show your sharpness. Rather, you should explain in a scientific fashion and in accordance with the simple meaning.

August 1, 1957

I received your letter and am sorry that I will not have the further opportunity to spend time with you and enjoy the company of you and your esteemed wife. I lack people who are close to my heart and with whom I can speak as I wish. Here I am totally alone. Even

though there are many people who listen to my words, and are full of praise for me, they are in my eyes like the buzzing of flies. A decree of spiritual and emotional exile has been placed on me. I am afraid to go to the Land of Israel. There are different worlds there, which reject and hate one another. I am part of two worlds, and which one should I choose when I go there? In the end, I will have to remain in solitude. Therefore, it is better for me to be alone in an empty desert than in a noisy and raucous atmosphere.

It is true that work causes one to forget about the world, but it also removes one from life. Our Sages have said that the words of Torah are not firmly held except by one who kills himself for it [*Berakbot* 63b]. The meaning [of this passage] is "death" as related to "natural life." "Natural life" means to enjoy the beauty of nature, "how beautiful is this tree etc" [*Avot* 3:9]. Our Sages said, "companionship or death" [*Ta'anit* 23a]. What is companionship? To engage in sophistry with insignificant people or with those who are like wild animals? Moral, enlightened people and intellectuals with clear insight are not in my company. I am full of hopelessness and pain at the loss of life, and there is no one with whom I can even share my pain.

*September, 19, 1957*¹⁷

We continue to be orphaned, our best friends have passed away. . . . I have never heard of Professor Israel Bettan, but every great man who dies leaves a vacuum. Who can replace Dr. [Leo] Baeck? When they are alive we criticize them and search for faults, but when they die we feel what we have lost.

I am very distressed at the great fanaticism which has increased in strength in the Orthodox camp. Read the last issue of *Ha-Ma'or* [Tamuz, 5717] and see the blindness which is afflicting it [i.e., the Orthodox]. The Satmar rebbe forbids studying Hebrew and others say that the formation of the Hebrew state was a sin which cannot be repented for. In *Sbe'arim* [30 Av, 5717, p. 2], one writer protested that R. Saul Lieberman was given the Rav Kook Prize, due to the fact that he works with the Reformers. See the article; you will enjoy it. On the one hand, they proclaim every "rebbe," whom everyone knows is not outstanding in Torah knowledge, as *gaon* and *rosb kol benei hu-golah*. For the members of Agudah, every unimportant rabbi who joins them is considered a great *gaon*.

In *Sbe'arim*, they proclaimed a ban against participation in the Congress for Jewish Studies in Jerusalem.¹⁸ On the other hand, they argued, why didn't they [the organizers] invite the *geonim* in Israel and the Diaspora, who know so much more than all the [academic] scholars of Israel and the Diaspora? They made this argument to

Professor [Ben Zion] Dinur, and he responded that the rabbis are not involved with academic studies of Judaism. They poured ignorant scorn on this answer. I see that in the end there will be a split in the body of the nation. They also invited me to come to the Congress and sent me an airplane ticket, but due to my weak health I was prevented from going. However, in Jerusalem it was publicized that I intended to come, and I was flooded with letters strongly urging me not to come and participate in a gathering of deniers and heretics. I did not pay attention to these warnings and sent a letter of blessing and apology that I could not come. This letter was read in public¹⁹ . . .

The spiritual state in all circles brings sadness and hopelessness. I have bitter thoughts about the very existence of the nation and its hopes for the future. The entire world hates us. We assume that this hatred is due to the wickedness of the nations, and no one stops to think that perhaps we also bear some guilt. We regard all the nations as similar to an ass. It is forbidden to save a Gentile,²⁰ it is forbidden to offer him free medical treatment,²¹ it is forbidden to violate the Sabbath to save his life,²² his sexual intercourse does not render a woman forbidden to her husband according to R. Tam²³ because *their issue is like the issue of horses*.²⁴ Can the nations resign themselves to such a deprivation of rights? It is permitted to deceive a Gentile and cancel his debt²⁵ as well as forbidden to return his lost object²⁶ What can we do? Can we uproot our Torah teaching with apologetic formulae or clever deceptions. God knows that I have written this with the blood of my heart, the blood of my soul.²⁷

December 19, 1958

My responsum [*Seridei Esh*, Vol. 3, #25] concerning women whose husbands apostatize was "daring." I was worried that the *mahmirim*, who like to wear the crown of "righteousness," would attack me, but many of the leading sages agreed with me. . . . Last summer my sister from Hartford with her two sons visited me. None of the sons know anything about Judaism. They are Americans through and through, even though they regard themselves as good Jews. One of them said to me seriously, "God doesn't mind what one puts into his stomach. The important thing is the heart, and the Jew, as with all people, has to be a decent man who involves himself in making the world a better place." I would be very grateful if you could invite my nephew, who is now at the university in New York, to your house, so that he could hear from you words of wisdom about Judaism and its place in the world of the spirit.

October 16, 1959

Dr. Segal from New York came here and brought regards from you. He told me that you and your household are well. I visited this Liberal rabbi in his hotel and was thrilled to see that he is a wonderful man, honest in heart and mouth. I have already quipped before the men who surround me that this Liberal rabbi causes a "*hillul Ha-shem*," because in him we see that one can be an upstanding and noble man, full of the spirit of love for Israel, its Torah, and its language, even if one does not belong to the community of zealous Hasidim and is not punctilious about laws and customs. Yet with those fervent zealots we see the opposite.

February 24, 1960

Your letter made me very happy. I always read your letters with special enjoyment since they are invariably full of wisdom and understanding, my only pleasure in life. Here I am completely isolated. I have "admirers," as it were, but no one with whom I can have even an insignificant, non-boring conversation. There is no one to look after me and my needs. Thank God I have more [money] than I need, but there is no one to look after me and make use of this money on my behalf. The one thing that keeps me going is that people write to me from all over the world. Even the rabbis in America present me with their questions, and I am busy writing responsa. This is a difficult task, but one which causes me to forget my loneliness and overlook my feelings of despair and doubt.

I read the papers which arrive from Israel and America and see the fraudulence, hypocrisy and flattery which fills our world. For example . . . certainly was talented and had a great memory, but his . . . behavior was disgusting. Yet the writer Agnon tore his garment at the open grave, crying loudly, and the writer [Barukh] Kurzweil wrote about him that his "righteousness" compared to the Hafez Hayyim of blessed memory and his brilliance to the Vilna Gaon. In Israel flattery is used in an exaggerated and ugly way. Concerning the rabbi of Pressburg [R. Akiva Sofet] of blessed memory, the Hungarians wrote, "*Rosh kol benai ha golah*, as one of the early geonim, holy of holies etc. etc." Why all this?

On the other hand, they demean all who are not in their group in a murderous fashion. In *Ha-Ma'or*, which appears in New York, they wrote that Dr. [Simon] Federbush and the military chaplain, the *gaon* R. Shlomo Goren, are heretics, sinners who cause others to sin. I wrote to the editor asking where he found permission for the sins of *lashon ha-*

na, public embarrassment, and libel), and what did he reply? The Torah did not cover up the sins of Korah and King David cursed his enemies.

And now to the "sages of Jerusalem." I regard Professor [Efraim] Urbach as a very honorable man.²⁸ He truly wages the war for ethical standards in the field of academia. What did . . . do?—pour unspeakable abuse on him in *Sinai*.²⁹ Did you read . . . 's article? Ears have never before heard such degrading talk. When I read his article I began to think that if he met him [Urbach] at an inn where no one could see anything, he would literally kill him. This article is literally murder. . . . The editorial board of *Sinai* were partners in this despicable act. Phenomena such as this cause me great pain. I saw Dr. Segal from New York, who is a Reform rabbi, *ktivakbol*, and he is full of grace, etiquette, simplicity and love of Israel and Judaism. But the others just use Judaism for their despicable desires. We are guiltier than any other people!³⁰ I have never seen among the wise men of the nations such unethical ones. . . .

From Jerusalem they sent me a work entitled *Ha-Torah ve-ha-Medinah*³¹ by A. Gitlin. In it the author proves that the very existence of the State is in opposition to our holy Torah, and the revival of Hebrew is a desecration of our holy tongue. He brings a proof. When one asks in Hebrew "how are you," the reply is "very good." However, when one asks in Yiddish the reply is "blessed be God." Changing the character of *lashon ba-kodesh* to Hebrew, he continues, is an attempt to create a substitute for those who are desirous of some "spiritual content" in order to fill the vacuum in their heart which is due to their forsaking the Torah. Do the Catholic extremists even have this type of fanaticism?! My heart shrinks with pain and I must stop. . . .

I would recommend to Rabbi Soloveitchik not to take the position [of chief rabbi of Israel] if he wishes a long life and spiritual comfort. They will embitter his life as they embittered the life of Rabbi Herzog. What is R. Reuven 'Trop doing? Do you know about the great friendship between me and his father [R. Naftali 'Trop], the *gaon* of blessed memory? True love!

March 2, 1961

I am sorry that your student, Dr. [Julius] Kravetz, did not find me at home. Your student [Jack] Bemporad visited me with his wife and I enjoyed speaking to them. I don't deny that people of this sort are more beloved to me than those who are akin to a "donkey laden with books,"³² yet whose heads are empty and hearts desolate, and who are as crafty as foxes. Yet, meeting people such as this raises grief and sorrow, doubt and despair. I ask, where is the ethical combination of Torah and *mizvot*?

You mentioned . . . of blessed memory. I knew him well. For a time we were great friends. Afterwards I separated from him. I could not bear his cunning. Even his so called scientific works were full of this cunning, by which he covered up his plagiarisms. You will find hints to this in my *Mehkarim ha-Talmud*. However, I judge him favorably. It seems that this cunning is a national characteristic of ours, and this causes the nations of the world to hate us. I have deep thoughts concerning this but am afraid to express them orally, all the more so to put them into writing.

I am now reading a small book entitled. . . . It arouses in me spiritual revulsion. You must read it and see if Martin Buber and Agnon, the preeminent writer, as it were, and many other sages and writers are correct in greatly praising these rabbis as outstanding religious philosophers. We have innumerable *geonim*. Every *mesbulah* is a *gaon* and *zaddik*, and everyone with an imagination who knows how to express his thoughts in a literary manner is a philosopher. Yet the outside world does not know how to evaluate us properly. The world's hatred of them is due to jealousy over their superiority, of course³². . . . There is a complete story concerning the relationship between Rabbi Soloveitchik and R. Hayyim Heller. The former came to Berlin to marry R. Hayyim Heller's daughter. The engagement was cancelled and Soloveitchik fell in love with the woman who is now his wife.³³

January 1, 1963

The battle against the Conservatives is being waged by the Orthodox with great anger. The leader of this battle is . . . R. Yehezkel Abramsky in London. Rabbi Dr. [Louis] Jacobs, who was set to be President of Jews' College and Chief Rabbi [Israel] Brodie's replacement, gave a public lecture in which he stated that the Torah of Moses was not written by Moses of blessed memory and that it is a collection of documents from different times. The speech was printed in the *Jewish Chronicle* and caused a great tumult in English Jewry. I see that in the end the [Jewish] nation will split into different factions. The English nation is unified despite its large number of heretics. The English heretics are well-mannered men of culture, and do not assault the feelings of the religious. The religious themselves are not quarrelsome. However, among us they fight with one another. This is one of the reasons why I am afraid to settle in Israel.

Our Sages decreed that one must not expound the story of the Chariot in public [*Hagigah* 2:1]. Scientific investigations must be restricted to limited circles. What is worst is that we do not have religious sages who can respond properly. I do not remember an era as

lacking in outstanding intellectual and spiritual figures as our era. We proclaim anyone who can offer a *pitgul* as a *gaon*, and the new literature declares that every one who has a good writing style is a poet or the leading writer of the nation. I was asked from Israel to give my opinion concerning the apostate [Oswald] Rufeisen (Father !!! Daniel). I did not answer and shall not. The solution to this question lies with Ben Gurion and his crowd, and the more one flatters him the more praiseworthy one is.⁵⁵

January 9, 1965

Confusion reigns in our world. I was told that Professor Heschel was in Israel and achieved fame there as *the* religious philosopher who who has arisen after Maimonides and R. Hasdai Crescas. He observes the *mizvot* and conducts himself as one of the Hasidim. He is the grandson of a great rebbe. On the other hand, there is a great deal of unfavorable talk about Professor Dr. [Alexander] Altmann, according to which he is a complete heretic. R. [Hillel] Medalie, previously of Leeds and now in Antwerp, visited me and told me that Mr. Wechsler, the editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*, related that Dr. Altmann informed him that he agrees with Dr. Jacobs of London but does not want to speak or write on this topic.

Have you read the book of Dr. Jacobs?⁵⁶ I have not read it and do not know his heresy. During the dispute with Chief Rabbi Brodie, Dr. [Isidor] Grunfeld, a distinguished *dayan* who is close to Chief Rabbi Brodie, asked me to write a letter supporting Chief Rabbi Brodie, and they would publish it in the *Jewish Chronicle*. I did not comply. I said that this is a question of *dinei nefeshot* and I do not want to judge based upon rumor and the conversation of simple people who spread rumors without discernment or judgment.

I do not believe a compromise is possible between the religious and the secularists of Ben Gurion's sort, or between Mapai and Poalci Agudat Yisrael.

April 4, 1965

I don't have the strength to put my ideas in writing, so I will say just a few things in praise of your wonderful essay⁵⁷ which is characterized by sharp logic and its ideas are formulated in a wonderfully clear and exact way. In my opinion you should publish this essay as a separate booklet for the students of Torah and the scholars of Israel. They will enjoy it and learn from you how to formulate *lomdishe* ideas in precise scientific language. . . .

I do not agree with you that it is preferable to insert a good intention into the words of the Talmud and *Rishonim*, and based on this,

establish their words on logical foundations, rather than being tied to their words alone. This was the way of those who created *hiddushim*, but this is not the way of [scientific] investigation. The yeshiva students say: "One doesn't die from a difficulty."³⁸ In the Talmud there are many difficulties and problems which can be answered in other ways, but I can't elaborate now. Why not say that the *sugyot* dispute one another? See Tosafot, *Bava Batra* 176a, s.v. *govab*, where they write this. Maimonides followed this path, and, based upon his understanding, sometimes decided in accordance with one of the *sugyot*. This is my opinion in general, but from the standpoint of keen logic your essay will astound the reader with your great strength in refuting and answering [problems] with profound logic. . . . Therefore, I recommend that you publish your essay as a separate booklet, and if you do not want to do so, please send me a copy of both my [previous] letter to you as well as this letter, and perhaps I will publish them in the third volume of my book. This volume includes matters of *Even ha-Ezer* and *Hoshen Mishpat*, and there still is room in the section of *Hoshen Mishpat* which has not yet been completed. Naturally, I will include your comments in your name, even though by doing so I will arouse against myself the anger of the complaining zealots, who have not forgiven me for including your words in volume 2 of *Seridei Esb* [no. 78].

November 15, 1965

In Switzerland, even among the German Jews, the extremist *hasidut* has become strong. They despise academic studies and run to every rebbe who is dressed in a *streimel* and white stockings. Also in Israel there is an increase in fanaticism and the despising of academic studies in the yeshivot and circles close to them. There are a few psychological reasons for the strengthening of this spirit. One of them is the wish to raise up the destruction of the past, that which was destroyed by the Nazis. Second, the secular nationalism is empty and barren, and those who stand at its head are petty and insignificant, lacking any exalted, enthusiastic spirituality. Despite this I am planning on visiting Israel this winter and seeing if it is possible and proper for me to settle there.

The chief rabbis of Israel treat me with honor. Rabbi [Isser Yehudah] Unterman writes me his *hiddushim*, doubts and problems. He is burdened with the duty of defending traditional life, and his mind is not free to think deeply about Judaism. In Israel they speak with excitement about Rabbi Dr. Soloveitchik. He protested against those who wish to approach the Vatican and are attempting to secure from it words of conciliation with regard to Judaism.³⁹

In my opinion it is fitting to put an end to the hatred of the religions for each other. More than Christianity hates Judaism, Judaism hates Christianity. There is a dispute if stealing from Gentiles is forbidden from the Torah,⁴⁰ everyone holds that deceiving a Gentile and cancelling his debt is permitted,⁴¹ one is not to return a lost object to a Gentile,⁴² according to R. Tam intercourse with a Gentile does not render a woman forbidden to her husband,⁴³ *their issue is like the issue [of horses]*.⁴⁴ According to Maimonides, if a Jew has sex with a Gentile [woman], the Gentile is killed because the Jew stumbled into sin through her. The law of a Gentile is the same as that of an animal.⁴⁵ Maimonides derived this law on his own. It is not found in the *Bavli* or *Yerushalmi*. We must solemnly and formally declare that in our day this does not apply. Meiri wrote as such,⁴⁶ but the teachers and *ramim* whisper in the ears of the students that all this was written because of the censor.⁴⁷

Undated

I am not at fault. In the past winter I suddenly became sick and the doctors worked with me a great deal. Even though I am now up and about, I have not regained my previous strength. I am weakened, both in my ability to analyze as well as to write in an ordered fashion. Most importantly my memory has greatly deteriorated. I no longer remember my novellae, sermons, and my *own teachings*. The doctors say it is old age. This distresses me greatly. I do not want a life such as this. I greatly desire to go on *aliyah* and spend the rest of my days there; yet I don't have the strength to make the financial arrangements.

I am alone and isolated here. I have many people who respect and esteem me but no true friends. I have learnt that people befriend only those from whom they are able to receive some benefit. This is part of man's nature, as Hillel said, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me" (*Avot* 1:4). There are of course exceptions, but they are few and far between. Among the Hasidim, the rebbes conquer the hearts of their Hasidim and are the recipients of their devotion. They hope for the rebbe's assistance in the next world. Among [non-hasidic] sages there are students who are devoted to their teachers, who warm to their light and feel deep gratitude towards them. However, this feeling lasts only when it does not carry any practical obligations.

In short, I have reached the stage of life when one fights with oneself. This is the end of all men. Only the pure righteous ones are at peace with death, because they believe that it is a gateway from life to life, from degraded life to exalted life, and even they do not want to die. They say about the Vilna Gaon of blessed memory that he

cried greatly when his time came. He explained his crying as follows: "In this world one can perform great *mizvot* with only a *peritab*." This is the saying of the *tanna*. "Against your will you live," but "against your will you die" [*Avot* 4:29]. Man does not want destruction. This is one of the forces of life. No belief and no philosophy can comprehend the feeling of dread in the face of destruction.

Appendix

ב"ה יום ג' כ"ז בתמוז תשל"ז

כבוד הרה"ג החכם פרופ' ד"ר א. א. אורבך שליט"א

אני מודיע לכת"ר כי בשל תמוסת כריאותי אי אפשר לי לבוא ולהשתתף בקונגרס העולמי השני למדעי היהדות בירושלים. דבר זה מצעיר לי מאד, אבל הרופא גזר עלי בהחלט להסתלק מרעיון זה של נסיעה רחוקה העלולה לסכן אותי. קנה קויתי כי אוכל להתגבר על מחלתי ותקותי זו נכזבת. עיני ולבי מופנים כלפי כינוס זה של חכמי ישראל וכרכה חמה בפני תחוקנה ידכם להגדיל תורה וחכמה בישראל ויקיים בנו כי מציון תצא תורה וכו'. רצוני חזק לקיים את הקשר עם הקונגרס ומאד אודה לכת"ר אם יואל לפקוד על פקידיו וער"ר שימצאו לי את הדור"ח על ההרצאות ועל ההכרעות ועל כל מה שייעשה בה ואם יחליטו ליסד איגוד באיזו צורה שהיא, של העוסקים במדעי היהדות, ולהטיל על החברים חובת תרומה כספית שנתית – נא תא לכל יסירחו ויעתם ממני. חבר אני לכל אורהי חכמת ישראל וברצון אני נמנה עם העמלים בעבודתה ונושאים בעולה.

בהוקרה והערצה אישית לכת"ר שיח"ו וברכה למפעלו הגדול

היזאל יעקב וויינברג

Notes

1. S. Atlas, "Ha-Gaon Rabbi Yehiel Ya'akov Weinberg zc"l. Kavim li-De'muto" *Sinai* 58 (1966), 281.
2. In his letter to Atlas, dated January 17, 1950, R. Weinberg writes: "You know that there is no one else besides yourself to whom I can reveal my innermost thoughts."
3. Richard Fuchs, "The 'Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums' in the Period of Nazi Rule," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 12 (1967): 22; Atlas, "Ha-Gaon Rabbi Yehiel Ya'akov Weinberg zc"l. Kavim li-De'muto," 286; R. Weinberg's letter to Atlas, dated October 16, 1959; *Ha-Ma'ayan* 34 (Tevet, 5754), 13; personal interview with Professor Alexander Guttmann (R. Weinberg is mentioned in the preface to Guttmann's book, *The Struggle over Reform in Rabbinic Literature* [Jerusalem, 1977], xii); *Seridei Esh*, Vol. 3, #100; R. Weinberg, "Zu Frage der Bestattung nicht-jüdischer Ehegatten auf einem jüdischen Friedhof," *Jüdische Rundschau Maccabi*, April 29, 1955, pp. 1-2; my "Between East and West: The Life and Works of Rabbi Jehiel Jacob Weinberg" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1995), 304-05. See also *Seridei Esh*, Vol. 3, p. 42, where R. Weinberg is concerned that negative gossip not be spread about a Reform rabbi, surely an uncommon sentiment among Orthodox decisors. In his letter to

Atlas, dated January 25, 1949, he mentions that he prevented publication of an attack on Leo Baeck, the prominent German Reform rabbi, which accused the latter of collaborating with the Nazis.

4. Cited above, n. 3. Only after completing my dissertation did I discover the following comment of R. Weinberg, which is very relevant to the *raison d'être* of this journal.

If it were, God forbid, as the opponents of secular education say, it would be a disgrace for the "wise and understanding nation" that it is not able to simultaneously digest halief and secular education, while other peoples with their foolish beliefs can do so. The Catholics, *le-havdil*, have professors, intellectuals, researchers and great scientists, and they are strong believers and defend their religion with all the weapons of modern philosophy. . . . I am afraid that this fear of secular studies will lead, God forbid, to a disgrace of the Torah. Might one then be able to say that our great divine Torah cannot endure the conjunction of Torah with so-called secular studies, with a little grammar, geography, history, mathematics?

See his "Undzer Klumukh," *Undzer Veg* (Paris), April 13, 1951.

5. Letter to Kahle, dated January 25, 1949 (Paul Kahle Archives, University of Turin). As with Atlas, R. Weinberg was able to express himself with Kahle in ways he could not do when in correspondence with more traditional scholars. Thus, in his letter to Kahle, dated February 18, 1949, he writes: "The Kabbalistic vision of the Messiah as the redeemer of all mankind is the Jewish counterpart to Christ, yet the question must still be solved as to who influenced whom."
6. It is worth comparing what R. Weinberg writes with R. Menasheh Klein, *Mishneh Halakhot* (Brooklyn, 1992), second series, *Yoreh De'ah*, #212, who discusses whether it is halakhically permissible to even read Atlas' notes.
7. He is apparently referring to the twenty-second Zionist Congress, which took place in Basle on December 9-24, 1946.
8. See *Berakhot* 55a (and parallels). Rashi explains that the faces of pig-breeders shine for they make a very good living without much effort.
9. The phrase appears in the confession for the Ten Days of Penitence.
10. "Der tsoyber nomen—Herz," *Undzer Veg* (Paris), July 23, 1948.
11. *Sefer ha-Yovel li-Khvod Levi Ginzberg* (New York, 1946), 1-24.
12. See *Nedarim* 11:12. What R. Weinberg means to say is that his accusations cannot actually be proven, but their truth is known in heaven.
13. *Hebrew Union College Annual* 22 (1950-1951): 17-71 (Hebrew-section).
14. *Sefer ha-Yovel li-Khvod Levi Ginzberg*, 159-388.
15. In the 1950's, the Mizrahi explored the possibility of establishing a rabbinical seminary, modeled after the Berlin *Rabbinerseminar*. It was never established, in large part because R. Weinberg, probably the only suitable candidate, refused to be its rector.
16. See their manifesto in *Iggerot mi Bet ha Lev* (Bnei Brak, 1993), 125-26.
17. The complete letter is printed in my dissertation (above, n. 4), pp. 340-42.
18. See the article of Ben Zion Furer, 1 Av, 5717, p. 2 and Yaakov Katz's articles, 3 Av, 5717, p. 2 and 16 Av, 5717, p. 2.
19. See Appendix for the text of R. Weinberg's letter to Ephraim E. Urbach.
20. *Avodah Zarah* 26a; *Mishneh Torah, Hil. Roge'ah u-Shemrat ha Nefesh* 4:11; *Shulhan 'Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 158:1; *Hoshen Mishpat* 425:5.
21. *Avodah Zarah* 76b; *Mishneh Torah, Hil. Akum* 10:2; *Shulhan 'Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 158:1.
22. *Yoma* 83a, 84b (it is explained here that one violates the Sabbath for a doubtful Jew, but not for one who is certainly Gentile); *Avodah Zarah* 26a; *Mishneh Torah, Hil. Shabbat* 2:12; *Shulhan 'Arukh, Orach Hayyim* 329:2.
23. *Tosafot, Yoma* 82a, *Ketubot* 3b, s. v. *ve-Jahrab*; *Sanhedrin* 4b, s. v. *ve-hu*.
24. *Ezekiel* 23:2. See *Yevamot* 98a. Even though R. Weinberg has moral qualms about R. Tam's view, he was willing to make use of it in order to allow a woman who

- committed adultery with a Gentile to remain with her husband. See his responsum in R. Isser Yehudah Unterman, *Shevet mi-Yebudah* (Jerusalem, 1992), 264-65.
25. See *Enzyklopedyah Talmudit*, Vol. 5, 493, s. v. *gezel ha-goy*, that not all halakbic authorities agree with this.
26. *Beva Kamha* 113b; *Sanhedrin* 70b; *Mishneh Torah*, *Hil. Gezeilah ve-Avedah* 11:3; *Shulhan Arukh*, *Hoshen Mishpat* 266:1. R. Joseph Katz, *Beit Yosef, Hoshen Mishpat* 266 (uncensored version) writes as follows: *משנתא דתפיסא עסק הניח שמים בזה בין עובדי כרים בין שאינם עובדים דהא לכו אחיך מיטרו ורבינו שכתב עובדי כרים לכו דוקא*.
27. Cf. Yaakov (Gerald) Hildstein, *Gilyon*, Heshvan 5754, p. 25: "I remember that in Israel there was a real problem, do you save a Gentile on the Sabbath? One evening during this time I was with the Rav [Joseph B. Soloveitchik] and he said, 'I have been in Boston many years and I always rule that one saves the lives of Gentiles, because if we don't permit this, they won't treat our sick ones.' I asked him if this reason satisfied him from an ethical standpoint, and he replied, 'No, from an ethical standpoint it does not satisfy me.'"
28. With regard to Urbach, Professor Yaakov Sussman has called my attention to the following: When the otherwise fine publishing house, Mossad ha Rav Kuk, reprinted R. Weinberg's *Mehkarim ha-Talmud*, it engaged in a bit of censorship. In *Mehkarim ha-Talmud*, 114, Weinberg refers to Urbach as *omni* and *omni*. In the reprint, *Seridei Ish*, Vol. 4, 82, these odes were omitted!
29. "Bikkoret o Ikshut," *Sinai* 46 (1960), 235-55.
30. See above, n. 9.
31. *Yehudit ha-Torah ve ha-Medina* (Jerusalem, 1959).
32. This phrase first appears in Jewish literature in Babiyah Ibn Paquda's *Iyyot ha-Levanot*, *Sha'ar Avodat Elokim*, chapter 4. See R. Solomon Judah Rappoport, *Nahalat Yehudah* (Lemberg, 1873), 30.
33. R. Weinberg is being sarcastic in this last sentence.
34. Members of the Soloveitchik family assert that there is no truth to this, and that R. Weinberg was only repeating a rumor.
35. R. Weinberg is being sarcastic in this last sentence.
36. *Principles of the Jewish Faith* (London, 1964).
37. "Ha'ada'at 'Edm ve-Ileleh," *Sefer ha-Yovel to Professor Avraham Weiss* (New York, 1964), 73-90.
38. *מן א קשיא שטארבט פון נישט*.
39. See his "Confrontation," *Tradition* 6 (Spring-Summer, 1964): 5-29. See, however, Walter Wurzburger, "Rav Joseph b. Soloveitchik as *Posak* of Post Modern Orthodoxy," *ibid.*, 29 (Fall, 1994): 16, who writes that R. Soloveitchik did not oppose all attempts at cooperation between Jews and Christians. Wurzburger concludes: "While he looked upon interreligious discussions of purely theological issues as exercises in futility, he approved of discussions devoted to socio-political issues, in spite of the fact that as he noted in a footnote to 'Confrontation' (p. 5), for people of faith such issues are not secular concerns but are grounded in theological convictions."
40. See *Enzyklopedyah Talmudit*, Vol. 5, 487-88, s. v. *gezel ha-goy*.
41. See above, n. 25.
42. See above, n. 26.
43. See above, n. 23.
44. See above, n. 24.
45. *Hil. Issurei Biah* 12:10. *Maggid Mishneh* writes: *זה לא מצינו מבואר תוספת דהא שכתב רבינו שיהיה חייב*.
46. See Jacob Katz, *Halakha ve-Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1984), 291-310.
47. Today they do not whisper. See David Zevi Hillman, "Lesbonot ha-Meiri she-Nikhtem li-Teshuvot ha-Mimir," *Zefunot* 1 (Tishrei, 5749): 65-72; J. David Bleich, "Divine Unity in Maltonides, The Tosafists and Meiri," in Lenn E. Goodman, ed., *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought* (Albany, 1992), 245-46.