




Shima | שמא
S H M A . C O M

the millennia? Is what we are doing now serving what we perceive to be God's purpose in the world? As the new president of a seminary with a long and vibrant history, I am keenly aware that the techno-civilization we build can reach new audiences, inspire greater commitment, and welcome new adherents. I hope to use technology in support of enhanced education for our students, alumni, congregants, and the greater Jewish world. But I am keenly aware of the potential costs to such utilization, and I know that we must ensure that technology

nurtures rather than obscures God's presence in the world. Such concerns must inform our every action, hovering over us partially unanswered and challenging all that we do.

Technology (*teknia* + *logia*, in Greek, originally, "the study of an art or craft"), ultimately has enormous power to change us in both positive and negative ways. But such power must be tempered and shaped by theology (*theos* + *logia*, "the study of God"), to ensure that it is used for good. Only then will we ensure that it remains a tool for bringing the presence of God into our world. 

A Response by Arthur Green

I thank *Sh'ma* and its editor for the rich assemblage of responses to my essay. It is a pleasure to have stirred up a moment of relative consensus that ranges across the lines from Kabbalah scholar to Modern Orthodox *rosh yeshiva* and on to leaders of Reconstructionist and Reform Judaism. Maybe our post-denominational *mashiach* is indeed on the way. I gladly accede to Asher Lopatin's call for attention to community; I am a *havurah* person from way back, after all. So, too, do I recognize the importance of Aaron Panken's call for adapting to the world of technology, though I personally am an unlikely contributor to that effort.

However, Tzemah Yoreh sits outside that consensus. I really don't know what he wants of me. I find it more than a bit of postmodernism run amok to say that invalid claims about scientific matters are not self-delusional, but are as legitimate as any other point of view. If he wants to be a *halakhah*-observing self-proclaimed secularist and agnostic, I send him my blessing. But whether many will be convinced to follow such an eccentric path remains unclear.

I want to add a few words of explanation to my claim that this mystical and neo-mythical approach may make the claims of tradition "more powerful rather than less." In doing so, I need to take a step back into the context in which I propose it. Two of the most exciting intellectual adventures of our time are the philosophical/spiritual meeting of east and west and the growing scientific study of the human mind, rooted in brain physiology but reaching beyond it. The combination of these two endeavors challenges our conventional western notions of both self and consciousness. Spirituality as a journey inward (rather than upward, as I have insisted), through the multiple levels of human

consciousness down to a core where individual ego is transcended and the universal self or Godhead is encountered, will be as familiar to readers of Indian mystic Sri Aurobindo or Sufi poet Rumi as it is to devotees of Hasidic masters Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav and Sefat Emet. The tradition, with all its forms, is a chariot in which to undertake that journey. Spiritual claims are meant to address a level of mind different and more profound than the narrow ridge of ordinary consciousness that we have deemed to crown as "rational." Yes, there are dangers in plumbing those depths; Rabbi Nahman himself broadly hinted that mystics and psychotics have something in common. But we have the guideposts of historical experience and community, the Yakhin and Boaz, twin pillars of our inner Temple, to help keep us safe.

In our post-critical age, historical claims based on *peshat* (literal reading) are lost to us and philosophical *remez* (allegory) is awfully hard to sustain. We are left with a religion of *drash* and *sod*, creative, imaginative, and esoteric re-readings of tradition. (Here, I nod to my friend Michael Fishbane, who leads us to see these four as a fulcrum, indicating an ultimate meeting of *sod* and *peshat*.) Fortunately, it turns out that *drash* and *sod* are where most of the fun lies. Creative reinterpretation is once again our lifeblood.

The path I lay out here is indeed an elitist one, requiring mental suppleness and stability as well as knowledge and patience. But it can be translated for popular consumption, much as the vaunted mystical intellectuality of Dov Baer of Mezritch was wrought by his disciples into a dynamic religious movement that brought light and joy to the hearts of many thousands some 250 years ago. It's worth the challenge. 