

## Orthodoxy and "The Gentile Problem"

[View PDF](#)



Dr. Menachem Kellner is Chair of the Department of Philosophy and Jewish Thought at Shalem College (Jerusalem) and Wolfson Professor Emeritus, University of Haifa. His most recent books are *Menachem Kellner: Jewish Universalism* (part of Brill's Library of Contemporary Jewish Philosophers), *Gam Hem Keruyim Adam: Ha-Nokhri be-Einei ha-Rambam* (They Too Are Called Human: Maimonides on Gentiles), and a Hebrew translation of *Must a Jew Believe Anything?* This article appears in issue 25 of *Conversations*, the journal of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

Not long ago someone near and dear to me asked me what I was working on. I said that I was writing a book proving that for Rambam Gentiles as well as Jews are fully created in the image of God. I was met with the amazed response: "Do you really believe that?!"

Yes, I really believe it, and so did Rambam. [1]

The person who asked me the question about what I was working on and I both come from long lines of rabbis. My grandfather, ordained at the famous Yeshiva in Pressburg, was the rav of a small town in Hungarian Transylvania. Descended through both his parents from generations of rabbis, he served as a chaplain in the Hungarian army during World War I. Blessed with more foresight than most, painfully aware of the anti-Semitism sweeping Central and Eastern Europe after the war, he sought to convince his congregants to leave Europe for Palestine or America. Taking his own advice, he came to Passaic, New Jersey, where he served for dozens of years as rabbi of "Congregation Hungarian Hebrew Men." He slowly managed to bring his children and then, finally, his wife, to the United States.

My father left Hungary with an ordination from his rosh yeshiva, came to the United States, and, after learning English, enrolled in Yeshiva College, ultimately

getting a second semikhah from YU. He also attended Columbia University, becoming an "ABD" (all but dissertation) in American History. Like many rabbis of his generation, he was both a fervent American patriot and a fervent Zionist. He spent his career in the Orthodox rabbinate and in the Jewish Day School movement, also serving in various important capacities in the Rabbinical Council of America, Torah Umesorah, and the Religious Zionists of America.

My wife was raised in the home of another YU graduate, born in Palestine, but raised in Philadelphia and Brownsville, Brooklyn. Her mother, my mother-in-law, was herself raised in the home of her uncle, yet another Orthodox rabbi (her father had died at an early age), who was the mesader kiddushin at our wedding.

My wife and I were both sent to Jewish Day Schools through high school (Hebrew Theological College in Skokie in my case, and Chicago Jewish Academy and then HILL in my wife's case). After high school, I spent a year at Mercaz haRav (1962–1963), housed at that time in the center of Jerusalem in what is now called "Bet haRav."

My wife and I were thus raised in the homes of American rabbis and rebbetizins with clear Eastern European and Eretz Yisrael backgrounds. Many of the teachers in our Orthodox Day Schools were drawn from refugees who had survived the Holocaust and were brought to America after the war. We have the impression that the YU-trained rabbinic teachers and colleagues with whom our fathers were close (the names "Reb Yoshe Ber" [Rav Soloveitchik] and "Manny Rackman" [Rabbi Emanuel Rackman] were constantly mentioned in my home) shared their basic values.

We never heard from our parents or from our teachers that Jews were in some innate fashion distinct from and superior to non-Jews.[2] We were certainly raised in homes in which great pride in Jews and Judaism was inculcated in manifold ways. The superiority of Torah was never doubted, but non-Jews as such were never denigrated, or held to be in any way less made in the image of God than Jews. We of course searched for Jewish names in TV and movie credits, in lists of Nobel Prize winners, etc., but realized that was a matter of justified ethnic pride, not metaphysics.

Every Passover we took drops of wine out of our wine cups during the recitation of the 10 plagues as an indication of our fellow-feeling for the sufferings of the Egyptians at the Red Sea—we were never told that other explanations were available (and so far as we could judge, our parents and teachers knew of no other explanations).[3] While not devoid of folk superstition ("keneinahora" was an expression we heard often, with no idea of what it meant), our homes were

devoid of magic, no red strings around wrists, and no (allegedly) wonder-working rabbis. In times of illness we were sent to physicians, not to check our mezuzot (which we were raised to kiss upon entering and leaving rooms and houses). [4]

Looking around me today, what do I see? A very different Orthodoxy. I want to focus here on only one aspect of the "new Orthodoxy": the emphasis on the metaphysical, innate, inherent, absolute difference between Jews and non-Jews. There is, admittedly, a long history to this idea, dating back at least to R. Judah Halevi (and, if one believes that the Zohar was written by R. Shimon bar Yohai, then back to the third century at least). In the Judaism in which we were raised, however, this history was unknown, ignored, or glossed over. [5]

Generally, Jewish thinkers who found it necessary to draw the universalist sting from the biblical teaching that all humanity is created in the image of God typically did so in one of two ways: by maintaining along with Judah Halevi that in the 10 generations from Noah to Abraham, a line of descent developed (or, perhaps more accurately, was caused to develop by God) of individuals capable of achieving prophecy. For Halevi this special subset of humanity, which came to be known as Israel, is related to the rest of the human race as the heart is related to the rest of the body: the core organ (and the seat of thought for medievals, following the Bible) without which the other organs cannot survive and which itself, if we take the analogy further, cannot survive without them. [6] The Zohar adopted a different view, according to which Jews and Gentiles are radically distinct from each other since their souls derive from different sources in the sefirotic tree. [7]

For both Halevi and the Zohar, conversion to Judaism must thus be a problem, and they have different ways of getting around it. [8] This approach is radically different from that of Maimonides, for whom conversion to Judaism is not a problem, but an opportunity, as exemplified in his famous letter to R. Obadiah the Proselyte.[9] Without knowing it, my wife and I were raised as Maimonidean universalists. I, for one, was quite surprised to discover that there were other forms of Judaism, forms that denigrated non-Jews as such (and denied the validity of secular studies and pursuits), or, at the very best, saw them as simply static in the background, of no possible interest to Jews and most likely to God as well.

The Maharal of Prague (c. 1520–1609) had his own twist on the particularist approach. In several places he states explicitly that after Sinai, the image of God in Gentiles was diminished.[10] This notion that Jews and Gentiles are in some real sense metaphysically distinct, and that to the degree that they are metaphysically distinct, Jews are by nature superior to Gentiles, has been a staple

of Jewish particularism since the Middle Ages. [11]

The particularism of Halevi, Zohar, and Maharal finds a muted but undeniable expression in Chabad writings. Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi's Tanya, the core text of Chabad Hasidism, maintains that Gentiles, because of the nature of their souls, cannot aspire to the level of holiness to which Jews can (and should) aspire. [12]

All religions, as I once read somewhere, venerate their canonical texts, but do not generally find all parts of those texts equally interesting. The line of thought about the special nature of the Jewish people as such briefly outlined here was simply not part of the Judaism in which my wife and I were raised, and, so far as I can judge, it was not part of the Judaism in which our fellow Baby Boomer Orthodox Jews were raised in North America. That form of Orthodoxy seems evermore a fond and distant memory.

The forms of Jewish particularism briefly summarized here should be understood for what they were: purely theoretical discussions, having no concrete consequences in the lives of their authors or those who read their works. These ideas did not appear to occupy a central place in the worldview of the thinkers mentioned here and can be understood as the reaction of a persecuted minority to their persecutors.

The same cannot be said, I fear, for a truly blood-thirsty contemporary expression of the view that Jews are ontologically distinct from and profoundly superior in every fashion to Gentiles. Recently a book was published giving these views the most extreme form I have ever seen. Torat haMelekh purports to be a disinterested and entirely theoretical halakhic discussion of the circumstances under which it is permissible to kill Gentiles. The authors of this profoundly disgusting book, Yizhak Shapira and Yosef Elitzur of Yeshivat Od Yosef Hai in the West Bank village of Yizhar, starting from the (largely uncontested in the halakhic tradition) assumption that the sixth commandment only outlaws the killing of Jews,[13] and from the astounding (and wholly unsupported in the halakhic tradition) assumption that the lives of Gentiles who are not "resident aliens" have no meaning and no legitimacy, spend more than 200 pages misusing Maimonides (and others, such as Bahya ben Asher) to examine (for them the limited) circumstances under which it is not permissible to kill Gentiles. One example of their twisted conclusions: that it is reasonable to assume that it is permitted (and perhaps required) to kill children "if it is clear that they will grow up to harm us." [14] Torat haMelekh appeared with the approbations (haskamot) of four rabbis: R. Yizhak Ginzburgh (author of Barukh haGever, a booklet memorializing

Barukh Goldstein, the murderer of Muslim worshippers in the Cave of Makhpelah Mosque in Hebron on Purim day, 1994), R. Zalman Nehemiah Goldberg, the late R. Ya'akov Yosef, son of R. Ovadiah Yosef (former Israeli Chief Rabbi and leading light of the Shas party), and R. Dov Lior, rabbi of Kiryat Arba near Hebron, who explicitly stated that the subject matter of the book is rather relevant (dai aktual) to our day and age. The claim that the book is a disinterested theoretical discussion is given the lie by this approbation, and in this we see its true danger. [15]

The publication of the book created a furor in Israel, leading to the arrest of one of its authors on the charge of "incitement." Rabbi Lior was "invited" by the police to answer questions concerning his approbation of the book, an "invitation" he declined. Rabbi Goldberg withdrew his approbation for the book; he is reported to have said that the book contains errors in Jewish law and things that the human intellect cannot accept (ein lahem makom baSekhel haEnoshi). In light of the police investigation into the rabbis who wrote approbations for the book, 50 leading rabbis in the "Zionist-Religious" community organized a protest meeting in Jerusalem's Ramada Hotel (18 August 2010).

They claimed not to be supporting the book *Torat haMelekh* itself, but protesting limitations on the freedom of speech of rabbis implied by the police investigations. Statements for and against *Torat haMelekh* continue to show up on blogs and in newspapers.[16] Rabbis are seen by many (and often want to be seen) as authoritative expositors of halakha and of Torah values. One would have thought that after Yigal Amir's murder of the late Yizhak Rabin, they would have learned to moderate the views they express in public, but such is not the case, more's the pity.

Let us turn to a much less extreme contemporary Israeli view of the innate inequality between Jews and Gentiles. No one can deny that in the world of contemporary Orthodox Zionism in Israel (*dati-leumi*), the voice of Rabbi Shlomo Aviner is heard loudly and clearly, through his many books, lectures, internet activities, and especially the multitude of "Sabbath leaflets" (*alonei Shabbat*) to which he contributes. Rabbi Aviner was born in France in 1943 and made *aliya* in 1966. He earned degrees in math and engineering and is an officer in the IDF reserves. After his *aliya*, he studied in Yeshivat Merkaz Ha-Rav Kook in Jerusalem and is considered to be a disciple of the late Rabbi Zvi Yehudah Kook (1891–1982). R. Aviner is the rabbi of the West Bank settlement Bet El and head of the yeshiva Ateret Kohanim in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City. Despite his being considered a political hawk, R. Aviner broke with many of his rabbinic

colleagues, and counseled soldiers not to disobey orders in connection with the Gaza withdrawal of 2005. This independent stand aroused considerable controversy in the world of Orthodox Zionism, earning R. Aviner many enemies.[17]

One of the issues to which R. Aviner often returns is the special nature of the Jewish people. Thus, in the pamphlet *Itturei Kohanim* 174 (Sivan, 5759), we find him writing the following:

We are the chosen people (*am segulah*[18] ), not because we received the Torah, but, rather, we received the Torah because we are the chosen people.[19] This is so since the Torah is so apt to our inner nature. Each nation has a special nature, character, public psychology, unique divine character, and the Master of the Universe formed this special nation—This people which I formed for Myself, they will tell My praise (Is. 43:21). There are those who claim against us that we are “racist,” Our answer to them is ... if racism means that we are different from and superior to other nations, and by this bring blessings to other nations,[20] then indeed we admit that we differ from every nation, not by virtue of skin color, but from the aspect of the nature of our souls (*haTeva haNishmati shelanu*), the Torah describing our inner contents. [21]

In this typical passage, Rabbi Aviner presents his position in the clearest possible fashion and takes issue with his opponents. Let us look more closely at his words. The people of Israel are the chosen people. Why and how? R. Aviner relates to two possibilities: the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob received the Torah and in consequence became the chosen people, or, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were the only humans capable (*mesugolim*) of receiving the Torah. Receiving the Torah was a consequence of their already having been the chosen people (*am segulah*). In so doing R. Aviner accomplishes several ends: He admits (barely, it seems to me) that there is controversy on the issue (as indeed there is—his view is that of R. Judah Halevi, as opposed to the view of Maimonides), takes a stand on this controversy, and hints that the opposing view ought not to be taken seriously, since he does not deign to argue against it.

R. Aviner continues and insists that the Torah is appropriate for the inner nature of the Jewish people—“Each nation has a special nature, character, public psychology, unique divine character, and the Master of the Universe formed this special nation—This people which I formed for Myself, they will tell My praise (Is. 43:21).” In making this claim he reifies the notion of “nation” and establishes that there are nations defined and demarcated one from the other by their inner

natures. In so doing he adopts the views of nineteenth-century German Romanticism and foists this ideology on Judaism.[22] Jewish people, he teaches, have an inner nature unique to it, a nature to which the Torah is particularly appropriate.[23] A number of things follow from this: R. Aviner takes a position in a tannaitic debate, over whether the Torah was ultimately intended for all human beings (kol ba'ei olam) or just for Israel.[24] He further raises a metaphysical problem with the conversion of Gentiles to Judaism: How can a person whose inner nature is not Jewish receive the Torah?[25] He also forces himself to adopt a particularist stance concerning the messianic era: If the Torah is appropriate only for those whose inner nature is Jewish, then the essential difference between Jew and Gentile must be preserved in the days of the Messiah. R. Aviner thus once again takes a stand in a controversial matter, without even admitting that there is a controversy on the issue. [26]

Rabbi Aviner is not only the rabbi of a settlement in Samaria, and not only the founder and head of a yeshiva deeply identified with the hopes for the actual construction of a Third Temple, he is also a man of the wider world. Born (during the Holocaust), raised, and educated in France, he holds academic degrees and served as an officer in the IDF. He knows what sort of an outcry his words are likely to arouse, and hence hastens to assure us that he is not a racist, at least not in the accepted sense of the word: "If racism means that we are different from and superior to other nations, and by this bring blessings to other nations, then indeed we admit that we differ from every nation, not by virtue of skin color, but from the aspect of our soul-like nature (haTeva haNishmati shelanu), the Torah describing our inner contents." His self-confessed racism is not biological—Jews come in all skin shades. No, his racism is spiritual. Jews are indeed superior to other nations, but their superiority is connected to their unique Jewish souls, souls whose "operating instructions" are written in the Torah. This superiority brings nothing but blessings to all other nations.

I think that fairness demands that we point out that Aviner is doing himself a disservice here. There is no doubt that he accepts the possibility of conversion to Judaism.[27] Thus, despite what he says about himself, he cannot be a racist in a contemporary sense of the term. He seems to be using "racism" here as shorthand for essentialism.[28]

R. Aviner is willing to accept the consequences of his position on Jewish superiority. In a book aimed at soldiers in the Israeli army he writes:

Death is ritual impurity (tum'ah) since its essence is the diminishment of the divine vitality in created entities. The measure of ritual impurity matches the

measure of the departure of this divine vitality. Gentile graves in an enclosure do not cause ritual impurity according to the basic law (ikkar haDin) since their souls are not so holy, and the difference between their bodies without a soul and their bodies with a soul is not all that great. Therefore the departure of the soul in their case does not constitute so terrible a crisis. And so also the opposite: the graves of the righteous do not impart ritual impurity (according to some perspectives, if not according to settled halakha) [29] because their bodies are holy and there is [thus] no diminishment of the divine manifestation [in them] with the departure of the soul. Jewish graves do impart ritual impurity since their souls are holy; however, their bodies without a soul is not holy and, therefore, the departure of the soul is the terrible crisis of the histalkut of the divine vitality from the body—and this constitutes the ritual impurity of death. [30]

According to this horrifying text, the difference between a live Jew and a dead Jew is immense; the difference between a live Gentile and a dead Gentile is much smaller. [31] R. Aviner neither says nor even implies that the killing of a Gentile is a light matter, but will all his readers understand that?[32] It is not my intention here to cry out against rabbinic irresponsibility, but, rather, to illustrate a certain, unfortunately widespread, view concerning the inner nature of the Jewish people. [33]

We have examined two examples from Israel. Let us now look at an example from the United States. I was surprised to find an echo of Aviner's view, which implies that Gentiles are in some sense less formed in the image of God than Jews, in an article written by one of the heads of New York's Yeshiva University. R. Herschel Schachter, distinguished professor of Talmud and Rosh Kollel at Yeshiva University, writes, as if it is totally uncontroversial: "Hashem [God] created all men B'Tzelem Elokim [in the image of God], and Bnai Yisrael [Jews] with an even deeper degree of this Tzelem Elokim—known as Banim LaMakom [children of the Omnipresent]." [34] Jews and Gentiles are alike created in the image of God, but Jews are more created in the image of God (whatever that might mean!) than are Gentiles (echoing Orwell, are Jews also "more equal"?).

It is obvious that R. Schachter is here (mis)interpreting Avot III.14 (17):

He [R. Akiva] used to say: Beloved is man [haAdam] for he was created in the image of God. As a gesture of special love, it was made known to him that he was created in the image of God, as it said, For in the image of God He made man (Gen. 9:6). Beloved are Israel for they are called [sheNikra'u] God's children [banim laMakom]. As a gesture of special love, it was made known to them that they are called God's children, as it is said, You are the children of the Lord, your



God (Dt. 14:1). Beloved are Israel, for they were given a precious vessel [the Torah]. As a gesture of special love, it was made known to them that they were given the precious vessel through which the world was created, as it is said, I have given you good instruction [lekah tov]; do not forsake My Torah (Prov. 4:2). [35]

In his commentary to this passage, Rabbi Marc Angel writes:

"...God loves all human beings and has a special love for the People of Israel, the recipients of the Torah...": Special love, but because the People of Israel received the Torah, not because they are more made in the image of God than non-Jews. [36]

Rabbi Schachter seems not to share Rabbi Angel's view that Jews and Gentiles share the same human essence. As my friend and colleague Professor Daniel J. Lasker has pointed out, views such as that held (in relatively moderate terms) by Rabbi Schachter, and in more extreme terms by the authors of *Torat haMelekh* and by Rabbi Aviner (and, I regret it add, it would seem by most Orthodox Jews today) see the distinction between Jews and Gentiles to be a matter of "hardware," while the view taught by the Torah and, among others, Maimonides, holds that the distinction between Jews and Gentiles is a matter of "software" only.

I hasten to add that it is a safe assumption that R. Schachter would be horrified to have his views connected to *Torat haMelekh*. [37] I cite him only as an example of the casual way in which many Jews assume some sort of ontological divide between Jews and Gentiles. I am confident (or naively hopeful) that few Jews who hold the view that there is some inherent, substantial, metaphysical, ontological distinction between Jews and Gentiles have actually thought through its implications. [38] A colleague of mine once asked three Roshei Yeshiva at Yeshiva University if God listens to the prayers of Gentiles. One said of course, a second said of course not, and a third said that he had no idea and did not care. The second and third views would have shocked my father, as they shock me.

When ancient or medieval Jews penned works describing Gentiles as less than fully human there was no danger that they would act on these views, nor is it clear that they meant it literally. On the contrary, it is easy to understand them as reacting to generations of persecution and denigration. [39] In our day and age, however, these views are not only disgraceful, and represent a rejection of the simple sense of the Torah, but they have proven themselves to be dangerous, dangerous in the ways in which certain Israeli Jews use them to justify outrageous

actions toward Arabs, and dangerous to Jews around the world who use these views to justify behavior that makes a mockery of our claim to be a light unto the nations.

One must wonder why so many contemporary Orthodox Jews are educated today to believe as true (and central to their Judaism) statements about non-Jews as such that run counter to what the Torah itself teaches, that are so obviously false (intelligence, altruism, decency, searching for God, etc. seem no more prevalent among Jews than among other human communities), and that are immoral? [40] To my mind, that question is best addressed by sociologists or historians, not philosophers. [41] But it is certainly a question that should be asked by parents when choosing schools for their children.

[1] A Frenchman, a German, and a Jew wrote essays on elephants. The Frenchman wrote on the love life of the elephant, the German on authority in the elephant community, and the Jew on the elephant and the Jewish problem. Proving that Maimonides held this view is the burden of my latest book, *Gam Hem Keruyim Adam: Ha-Nokhri be-Einei ha-Rambam* (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2016).

[2] My wife's grandmother, who had suffered greatly at the hands of Polish anti-Semites, used to refer to Gentiles as *yenem menschen*, those people.

[3] For other, far more particularist explanations, see Zvi Ron, "'Our Own Joy Is Lessened and Incomplete': The History of an Interpretation of Sixteen Drops of Wine at the Seder," *Hakirah* 19 (2015): 237-256.

[4] A friend who read a draft of this essay commented: "This sounds like the famous comment attributed to New Yorker film critic Pauline Kael after Richard Nixon was elected president to the effect that she could not understand how he was elected since she herself knew no one who voted for him." But I do not believe that my wife and I were raised in some sort of odd universalist bubble; rather, the *zeitgeist* of Orthodoxy at the time was indeed as I describe it.

[5] I do not mean to imply that there are no important rabbis today who share the values of our parents, the editor of *Conversations* prominent among them. So far as I can judge, however, these rabbis, however much I admire them, are not representative of the contemporary *zeitgeist* of Orthodoxy, both in Israel and in the Diaspora. See also, Marc D. Angel, "Rabbi Kook and Rabbi Uziel: Two Posekim, Two Approaches," in *Conversations*, issue 12, winter 2012, pp. 109-120.

[6] See Halevi, *Kuzari*, I. 27-27, 101-103, 96 and 115. See also Menachem Kellner, *Maimonides' Confrontation with Mysticism* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2006) (henceforth: *Confrontation*), pp. 216-220 and p. 263. I would like to note that all too many people read Halevi as if he were a Kabbalist,

or if his views were identical, for example, with those of the Maharal. For an example of such a conflation of views, see the lecture by Rabbi Herschel Schachter, cited below in note 38.

[7] See Moshe Hallamish, "The Kabbalists' Attitude to the Nations of the World," in Joseph Baruch Sermonetta Memorial Volume (Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought 14), edited by Aviezer Ravitzky, 289–312 (Hebrew). See further Elliot Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond: Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) and, importantly, Jerome Gellman, "Jewish Mysticism and Morality: Kabbalah and Its Ontological Dualities," *Archiv fuer Religionsgeschichte* 9 (2008): 23–35. For a depressing list of important figures not directly part of the world of Kabbalah who presented Gentiles as "separate but unequal" see Hanan Balk, "The Soul of a Jew and the Soul of a Non-Jew: An Inconvenient Truth and the Search for an Alternative," *Hakirah: The Flatbush Journal of Jewish Law and Thought* 16 (2013): 47–76.

[8] For Zohar, see Jochanan Wijnhoven, "The Zohar and the Proselyte," in *Texts and Responses: Studies Presented to Nahum N. Glatzer*, edited by Michael Fishbane and Paul Flohr (Leiden: Brill, 1975): 120–140; for Halevi, see his texts cited above in note 2.

[9] The text of Maimonides' letter may be found in Y. Sheilat, *Iggerot haRambam*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Ma'aliyot, 1987), vol. 2, pp. 231–241. For a discussion of the ideological import of some of R. Sheilat's readings, see M. Kellner, "'Farteicht Un Farbessert': On 'Correcting' Maimonides," *Meorot* 6, no. 2 (2007): 12 pp. (<http://www.yctora.org/content/view/330/10/>). A partial English translation of Maimonides' letter is found in F. Kobler, *Letters of Jews Through the Ages* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1978), vol. 2, pp. 193–196 and in Isadore Twersky (ed.), *A Maimonides Reader* (New York: Behrman House, 1972), pp. 475–477. Further on Maimonides' very positive attitude towards proselytes (and proselytization) see James Diamond, "Maimonides and the Convert: A Juridical and Philosophical Embrace of the Outsider." *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 11 (2005): 125–146; revised and reprinted in: Diamond, *Converts, Heretics, and Lepers: Maimonides and the Outsider*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.

[10] *Derekh haHayyim* III.14, end; for further sources in the Maharal see *Confrontation*, p. 220, note 10.

[11] In general, a history of Jewish particularism remains a scholarly vacuum, if not something to be desired. In the meantime, one can always make use of (Jewish) anti-Semites like the late and unlamented Professor Israel Shahak, many of whose writings are available online (courtesy of many anti-Semitic websites).

[12] Tanya (Likkutei Amarim), I.1, end. Some Habadniks go beyond the

particularism of the author of the Tanya, wondering how it is that Jews and Gentiles, for example, have babies in the same way, since Jews and Gentiles share nothing in common. For this and other pearls, see R. Joseph Karasik, *HaBayit haYehudi beMishnat haKabbalah ve-haHasidut* (np: Machon Nahalei Dvash, 5756), pp. 384–386.

[13] Which does not mean that the murder of Gentiles is permitted!

[14] I wrote these words originally under the shadow of the murder of the Fogel family in Itamar (11 March 2011), perpetrated by two Palestinian teenagers who agree with Torat haMelekh's reasoning, but apply it to Jews.

[15] Some of the "pearls" found in this book include the claim that the existence of a Gentile who is not a "resident alien" (and in this day and age, no Gentiles can achieve that status) "has no legitimacy" (p. 43); Jews and Gentiles share nothing in common, but, in effect, belong to different orders of reality (p. 45); a Gentile who violates one of the seven Noahide commandments (stealing, for example, even something of slight value, or, in the eyes of the authors of the book, undermining Jewish sovereignty over any part of the Land of Israel) is to be executed without advance warning. The Jew who witnesses the act can serve as judge and executioner (pp. 49–51); and so it goes in depressing and blood-curdling detail. Torat haMelekh's views are based on readings of kabbalistic texts mediated through the teachings of R. Ginzburgh, cited as direct inspiration by the authors of the book.

[16] Most recently in:

<http://www.bloombergtview.com/articles/2015-11-01/violence-in-the-name-o...>  
accessed 3 November 2015.

[17] There is even an internet site (<http://aviner.net>) devoted to attacking R. Aviner. It does not appear to be active. I last accessed it on 19 April 2015.

[18] A check of the Bar Ilan Responsa Project database shows that this expression shows up only 113 times in the entire body of Jewish literature covered by the database, and became popular only in the Middle Ages.

[19] Here R. Aviner reflects Kuzari II.56.

[20] How does Israel bring blessings to other nations? In his commentary on Halevi's Kuzari (Bet El: Sifriyat Hava, nd), vol. 1, p. 108, R. Aviner writes: "The Torah is the greatest divine light, and it belongs only to Israel, and from Israel drops of sanctity drip to each and every nation, according to its stature and state (inyano). R. Aviner returns to this theme often. Thus, for example, in answer to a question asked of him on the internet ("Why should we be a nation?"), he wrote:

...Indeed, what is the need for a special nation? But, just as a human being needs a heart, thus the human race needs a heart-like nation. Rabbi Judah Halevi wrote that the people of Israel are the heart of humanity (Kuzari II.36). Not a heart

which is disconnected [from the rest of humanity], not a condescending heart, not a heart frozen in a refrigerator, but a living heart which causes vitality to flow to all the limbs. Just as the heart's love is the love of all the limbs, thus love of the people of Israel is in essence love of all that is human. When we extend ourselves in our national efforts, in strengthening the settlement of the People of Israel in its land, in strengthening its army and state, we are essentially working for the good of all humanity. This is not egoistical love, but universalist love. (

[http://www.havabooks.co.il/article\\_ID.asp?id=632](http://www.havabooks.co.il/article_ID.asp?id=632))

[21] My thanks to Rabbi Dr. Ronen Lubitch for bringing this source to my attention.

[22] In this, R. Aviner follows in the footsteps of his teacher, R. Zvi Yehudah Kook; R. Zvi Yehudah follows in the footsteps of his father, R. Abraham Isaac Kook (to a great degree), and Rav Kook, in turns appears to follow in the footsteps of his teachers, Hegel and other romantic thinkers. On this intellectual pedigree, see Shlomo Fischer, "Self-Expression and Democracy in Radical Religious Zionist Ideology," PhD thesis, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2007, esp. pp. 66–126, 217–234. For a recent and very useful English language study of the elder R. Kook, see Yehudah Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic in a Time of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

[23] I tried to translate Rabbi Aviner's usages back into rabbinic Hebrew with no success. His ideas, I submit, largely come from the outside and cannot easily be traced to rabbinic texts.

[24] On this debate, see Menachem Hirshman, *Torah Lekhol Ba'ei Olam: Zerem Universalim beSifrut haTana'im veYahaso leHokhmat haAmim*. Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz ha-Meuhad, 1999. Hirshman summarizes the points in this book in "Rabbinic Universalism in the Second and Third Centuries." *Harvard Theological Review* 93 (2000): 101–15.

[25] I am aware of the many solutions offered for this problem. For Rabbi Aviner (and before him Halevi, not to mention the authors of the Zohar), conversion presents a problem. For Maimonides, in contrast, there is no problem which needs to be solved.

[26] See Menachem Kellner, *Maimonides on Judaism and the Jewish People* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991); *Maimonides' Confrontation with Mysticism* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2006), ch. 7 (henceforth: *Confrontation*) and "Maimonides' True Religion—for Jews, or All Humanity?" *Me'orot [Edah Journal]* 7.1 (2008) (<http://www.yct Torah.org/content/view/436/10/>). I wonder how R. Aviner would react if he heard me pointing out to my students that the Patriarchs and even Moses (before Sinai) were Noahide Gentiles (at best).

[27] See, for example, [http://www.havabooks.co.il/article\\_ID.asp?id=1185](http://www.havabooks.co.il/article_ID.asp?id=1185).

[28] Further on this, see Kellner, *Confrontation*, pp. 26–31.

[29] Rabbi Aviner cites as his sources Zohar, part one, p, 168a and Midrash on Proverbs 9:1.

[30] Aviner, *meHayil el Hayil* (5759), p. 230, cited by Yosef Ahituv, "State and Army According to the Torah: Realism and Mysticism in the Circles of Merkaz Ha-Rav," p. 466, in Aviezer Ravitzky (ed.), *Dat uMedinah baHagut haYehudit beMe'ah haEsrin* (Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute, 2005) (Hebrew). For a view similar to that of R. Aviner, see *Or haHayyim* on Lev. 20:26 and Numbers 19:2.

[31] Compare R. Aviner's words in his commentary on the Kuzari (part 1, p. 136): "In that we are the *segulah* of humanity, we are also the heart of humanity. We are more human than the others" (emphasis added). This is Aviner's view, not Halevi's. Among other sources, it probably draws from the Maharal of Prague, who held that at Sinai the image of God was diminished among the nations of the world, leaving only Jews as fully formed in the image of God. For the Maharal, see, for example, his *Nezah Yisrael* (Jerusalem: Makhon Yerushalayim, 1997), vol. 1, p. 305. For discussion, see Aaron Kleinberger, *haMahshavah haPedagogit shel haMaharal* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1962), pp. 37–42.

[32] Bear in mind that this text is addressed to teenaged inductees into the Israeli army.

[33] The paragraphs on R. Aviner here are drawn (with revisions) from a forthcoming essay of mine in a festschrift in honor of my esteemed friend and colleague, David Novak.

[34] See, p. 20 in Hershel Schachter, "Women Rabbis?" *Hakirah: The Flatbush Journal of Jewish Law and Thought* 11 (2011): 19–23.

[35] I cite from *The Koren Pirkei Avot*, with translation by Jonathan Sacks and Commentary by Marc Angel (Jerusalem: Koren, 2015), p. 78.

[36] *Tosafot Yom Tov ad loc.* seems to be addressing his comments directly against Rabbi Schachter. No surprise, I guess, that I am his direct descendant.

[37] I hope that he is not fully aware of the consequences of his spiritual essentialism and almost blind literalism. See the next note.

[38] Further examples of his casual acceptance of an ontological divide between Jews and non-Jews may be found in this online lecture (last accessed 20 November 2015): [http://www.torahweb.org/audio/rsch\\_050204.html](http://www.torahweb.org/audio/rsch_050204.html). Further on Rabbi Schachter's unfortunate views (and the even more unfortunate views of other contemporary rabbis), see Alan Brill, *Judaism and Other Religions: Models of Understanding* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 202–205. In this connection, I was surprised to find the following comment in an online lecture by Rabbi Ethan Tucker: "The Akeidah—the story of the binding of Isaac—is one of the most central narratives and texts in the Jewish tradition... As Jews, we invoke this chilling story of Avraham's near sacrifice of his son with pride on a daily basis, as we contrast our human worthlessness with our covenantal worthiness." Quoted by

Alan Brill at:

<https://kavvanah.wordpress.com/author/kavvanah/> - 8 November 2015 (accessed 20 November 2015). I trust that Rabbi Tucker did not mean to imply that those who are not bnai brit (i.e., everyone but the Jews) are humanly worthless—even though that is what he writes here. His statement also implies that Jews who do not honor the covenant in their lives are also humanly worthless.

[39] Further on this, see Menachem Kellner, "We Are Not Alone," in Michael J. Harris, Daniel Rynhold, and Tamra Wright, eds., *Radical Responsibility: Celebrating the Thought of Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks* (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2012): 139–154, repinted in *Menachem Kellner – Jewish Universalism*, ed. Hava Tirosh-Samuelson and Aaron Hughes (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 107–118 (*Library of Contemporary Jewish Philosophers*, vol. 12).

[40] In the essay cited in the previous note I suggest that part of the answer to this question is a lack of Jewish self-confidence, building on an insight of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks: "Those who are confident in their faith are not threatened but enlarged by the different faith of others." Of course, it could very well be that many Jews find the very openness of the world around us threatening and seek to hide behind the highest possible walls, instead of confronting that world. My thanks to Chaim Waxman for suggesting this line of thought to me.

[41] I very much appreciate the comments of Rabbi Amitai Blickstein, James Diamond, Jolene S. Kellner, Avrom Montag, and Chaim Waxman.