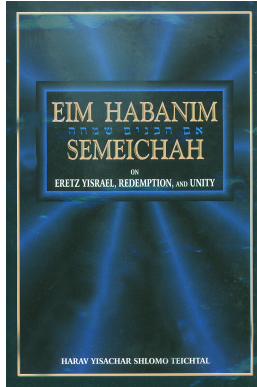


Eim Habanim Semeichah:

*On Eretz Yisrael,
Redemption, and Unity*

By Rabbi Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal

Translated by Rabbi Moshe Lichtman



Kol Mevasser, 2000

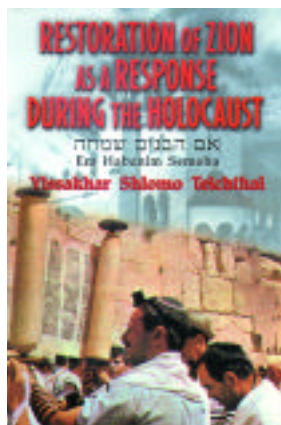
542 pages

Em Habanim Semeichah:

*Restoration of Zion as a Response
During the Holocaust*

By Rabbi Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal

Translated by Dr. Pesach Schindler



Ktav Publishers, 1999

415 pages

Reviewed by Berel Wein

Rabbi Berel Wein is director of the Destiny Foundation, a media outreach organization, a Talmud lecturer at Yeshivat Ohr Sameach in Jerusalem, and a columnist for The Jerusalem Post.

There is an enormously powerful book about the Holocaust, Orthodox Jewry, the Land of Israel, Zionism, Jewish unity and hatred and the Messianic Era, that has been in circulation for the past number of decades. Written in difficult and scholarly rabbinic Hebrew, it is called *Eim Habanim Semeichah* (The Mother of the Children is Happy), a phrase taken from Psalm 113. The author is Rabbi Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal, a noted scholar, author of three volumes of responsa, and rabbi in pre-World War II Slovakia and Hungary. Rabbi Teichtal was murdered by the Germans during the forced evacuation of Jewish and Ukrainian prisoners from Auschwitz to the Mathausen concentration camp, at the end of January, 1945. He was barely sixty years old at the time of his death.

Since over six million Jews perished in World War II, and each one of them was special and unique in his or her own way, what makes Teichtal's tragedy so especially significant? The answer lies in *Eim Habanim Semeichah* that he wrote in 1943 while living in Budapest. Having escaped from the Germans in Slovakia in 1942 and finding refuge in then as yet German unoccupied Hungary, Teichtal fulfilled a personal pledge that he had made to write a book in honor of the Land of Israel. But this book is much more than a paean of praise for the spiritually imagined Holy Land that has always dominated Jewish religious thinking in the long exile of the Jews. This work candidly, almost brutally, confronts the terrible issues of shaken faith and loss of tradition raised by the rise of Zionism and the terribly unimagined events of the Holocaust. Writing from within the hell of Hitler's Europe, without books or research material, Teichtal wrote a work of enormous Torah scholarship and erudition and of searing pain and challenge. The book is literal-

ly written with blood for its ink.

Before World War II, Rabbi Teichtal was an adherent of the Rabbi of Munkacs, Rabbi Chaim Elazar Shapiro. This rabbi of Munkacs was the fiercest foe of all types of Zionism. Rabbi Shapiro also opposed and bitterly criticized the non-Zionist Agudat Yisrael for its alleged cooperation in certain areas with the Zionists in building the Land of Israel. Teichtal was as committed an opponent and as strong a critic of the Zionist movement, its aims and achievements, before the war as was Shapiro. It was only during the German destruction of the Slovakian Jewish community, which Teichtal was forced to personally witness and endure, that he began to draw conclusions diametrically opposed to his pre-war views on Zionism, Messianic times and secular Jews. In *Eim Habanim Semeichah* Teichtal humbly and yet proudly confesses to his previous errors of judgment and misguided interpretations of Jewish faith. The purpose of his work now is to call on his fellow, learned Jews, strictly observing of Torah precepts, to recant their blind and wrong opposition to Zionism. Rather, they should join with all Jews, irrespective of their level of Torah knowledge and observance, in a unified effort to build the Land of Israel and the Jewish people. This effort of united Jewry is to be carried forward on the basis of Jewish activism and initiative. The lesson of the Holocaust is that the Jews are to forego the passive attitude of the Jewish exile that relied solely on Divine intervention and supernatural Messianic deliverance. Instead, the active programs of settlement and building in the Land of Israel, coupled with the declared abandonment of the Jewish exile in any foreign country as a solution to the problems of the Jewish people, and enhanced by a determined effort to deal with all Jews in toler-

ance, understanding and even love, are the methods for the successful initiation of the Messianic Era.

Rabbi Teichtal's change of heart and attitude did not receive universal approval. He was driven from certain Hungarian synagogues and not allowed to conduct his regular Torah classes and sermons in other study halls, due to his now "heretical" views. This opposition to him personally, only caused him to write and disseminate his book and ideas with even greater impetus. Teichtal was especially incensed by the statements of certain rabbis in Hungary that Hungarian Jewry would be spared the fate of German, Polish and Lithuanian Jewry because of God's presumed approval of its fiercely anti-Zionist, anti-Enlightenment stance. They claimed that their "Munkacs" attitude stood in sharp and correct contrast to the prevalent popular Jewish attitudes in those other lands, where even the Orthodox leadership was corrupted in advocating Zionist ideas — i.e. immigration to the Land of Israel and the active rebuilding of the country by Jewish efforts, sweat and resources. Of course, history tragically proved Teichtal correct, since in 1944 Hungarian Jewry met the same fate that earlier decimated its Eastern European brethren.

Teichtal's book was intended for an audience composed mainly of the rigorously Orthodox members of the Jewish community. The book has never reached that audience. Most of the present students of the yeshivot and members of the Chassidic communities are unaware of its existence, let alone of its contents and challenges. In the aftermath of the Holocaust and the rise of the State of Israel, many of the attitudes in the Orthodox world that Teichtal so criticized and blamed as being contributory to the Holocaust — insularity, open opposition to the rebuilding of the Land of Israel through Zionism and now the State of Israel and its official bodies, sanctioned and institutionalized intolerance and even hatred of other Jews, a sense of fatalism and inaction in the face of

changing social circumstances, a glorification of the 'easy life' of exile in lands outside of the Land of Israel, a mistaken dogma that preaches a passive dependence solely upon Divine aid that paralyzes any Jewish national initiatives — have in fact hardened. A new generation has arisen that knows not the circumstances of the Holocaust or of the founding of the State of Israel and thus is unable to draw any historic lessons from these cataclysmic events. It is to this new generation of committed Orthodox Jews that *Eim Habanim Semeichab* should speak and argue its case.

In Israel, the book has become a second Bible for the Gush Emunim/Mercav Harav camp. The authoritative Torah arguments marshaled by Rabbi Teichtal served as a needed support of the correctness of the ideology of settlement of the Land of Israel everywhere and against all odds, practical and diplomatic considerations and objections. Because of the fervor of Gush Emunim in adopting Rabbi Teichtal (together with Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook) as their spiritual father, the other camps of Orthodoxy, most notably the non-Zionist yeshivah and Chassidic world, have almost automatically ignored or rejected Rabbi Teichtal and his book. The irony is that Rabbi Teichtal intended the book and its message precisely for the non-Zionist Orthodox world and not necessarily for the committed Religious Zionist Gush Emunim section of the Orthodox world. Nevertheless, in spite of this limited political appeal, the book has been republished in its original Hebrew format many times in Israel and tens of thousands of copies have been sold and distributed in Israel and worldwide.

Within the past two years, *Eim Habanim Semeichab* has been translated and published in two English editions. The first translation appeared in 1999 and was authored and edited by Dr. Pesach Schindler of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The second translation was published in 2000. It was translated and edited by Rabbi

Moshe Lichtman of Israel. Both books face the great task of translating an extremely difficult, scholarly, heavily nuanced book written in a Hebrew that is itself somewhat obtuse, into clear, interesting and readable English. Both authors have done nobly in their translations, albeit naturally with different readings and style. Schindler's translation is not quite as literal, and omits portions of the book. Lichtman's translation is unabridged. Schindler's translation also has more copious and informative footnotes that are most helpful in understanding Teichtal's work and thoughts. He has paraphrased Teichtal, and done some important editing in order to make the book much more readable. Both the print and the format of Schindler's book are very attractive and user friendly.

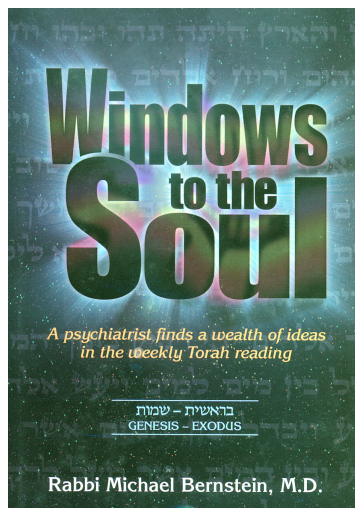
Lichtman's book has very helpful paragraph and subject headings in the margins of the page, thus allowing the reader to know instantly where Teichtal is heading with his words and ideas. The rendering of the Hebrew text in this English translation is most faithful, the footnotes are spare and simple and not only the words but the mood of the author comes through very clearly. Each of the translations has its own style and rhythm. Choosing one over the other is in my opinion simply a matter of subjective taste. What I do believe is that thoughtful Jews, interested in hearing the opinion of a great Torah scholar on the crucial matters of faith and policy that face world Jewry today, must read one or both of these translations if they are unable to read the original work in Hebrew.

The attitude of Diaspora Jewry, especially Orthodox Jewry, towards the role of Israel could stand improvement in the current times of crisis and challenge in Israel. We here in Israel do not hear the call for the love of the Land of Israel and our unquestioned right to the Holy Land in a strong voice emanating from our Diaspora brethren. I think that Rabbi Teichtal would be heartbroken to see that even after the Holocaust and the events in the Land of Israel of the last fifty five

years, much of the same attitudes of the glorification of the Exile and the negation of building the Jewish home in the Land of Israel that he so decried still remain dominant in much of the Orthodox Jewish world. Both Pesach Schindler and Moshe Lichtman have done the Jewish English-speaking world a great service by bringing Rabbi Teichtal and his message to its attention and study. It is our task to truly make our mother — the Land of Israel — happy with her children — the people of Israel. **JA**

Windows to the Soul:

A Psychiatrist Finds a Wealth of Ideas in the Weekly Torah Reading
By Rabbi Michael Bernstein, M.D.



Shaar Press
New York, 2000
320 pages
Reviewed by David L. Berkovitz

Chumash and its study, as we learn from Rashi very early on, is much more than a book of laws and *mitzvot*. Inherent to Torah study is following and understanding the experiences, character development, and driving

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forces of the *avot* and their later generations. In turn, this is intended to help us further develop good *middot*. It is well established that the transmission of Torah, as described in *Pirkei Avot*, handed down from Moshe Rabbeinu to Yehoshua to the *Zekeinim* to the *Nevi'im*, and so on, is transmitted from mind to mind and from heart to heart. Psychology is the science of the mind and of the heart. What drives a person? What motivates him to pursue his goals? What stymies him? In the contemporary world, *musar* and modern psychology are often portrayed as similar tools of self-improvement. The difference lies in discerning not only man's relationship to himself, as psychology would have it, but also his relationship with God, as the *musar* movement would have it. Psychological awareness is critical to the individual's understanding of self and the world around him. As such, any book on psychology and Torah is approached with interest and anticipation.

Dr. Michael Bernstein, in his new book, *Windows to The Soul* has undertaken to apply his training in psychiatry to explicate the narrative portion of the books of Genesis and Shemot from a psychological perspective. The reader should understand, however, that first and foremost, Dr. Bernstein's book is a commentary on the Torah, not a Torah/psychology instructional guide to daily living in the vein of the writings of noted psychiatrist and rabbi Abraham Twerski. It is clearly not intended as such. As described on the dust jacket, Dr. Bernstein's book "makes the reader think, reflect, and then say to himself, 'Why didn't I think of that?'" If and how the reader applies these insights to his daily life is up to him. For the reader interested in a comprehensive psychological approach to the Torah and its personalities, this is not the book. Rather, it presents the author's psychological *p'shat* coupled at times with selected traditional commentators. *Windows to the Soul* is often informed by keen insights into the Torah narrative from which the reader can frequently mine

nuggets as will be evidenced below.

Dr. Bernstein has divided each *parshah* of the first two books of the Torah into anywhere from 3 to 15 small sections. He introduces the basic content of each *parshah*, provides a short synopsis, and then endeavors to examine particular events or personalities. Included in many of these small sections is his psychological "take." His presentation is straightforward and readable. Its focus is on how the Torah presents its message, with particular focus on the turn of a phrase, word nuances, repeating patterns, and commonalities often taken for granted. The use of the word *begeid* for example, in the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, tells us more than we realized about Joseph's psychological and moral development. Dr. Bernstein writes, "the word for garment, *begeid* is also the three letter root-word for betrayal. In this instance, the double entendre of the word *begeid* reflects a profound insight into the nature of sin." In discussing the description of the serpent as *arum*, Dr. Bernstein explores what he considers the strong correlation between "craftiness" and "nakedness" and the resulting psychological insight. "A crafty person is someone who takes advantage of another person's instinctive trust ... Conversely, when dealing with someone they do not know, people are more circumspect and wary of unexpected problems. A crafty person presents himself as a known quantity ... figuratively naked, with nothing to hide... Craftiness is the ability to project the illusion of nakedness."

Dr. Bernstein applies a wider angle lens to a trait that transcends any particular *parshah*, namely, jealousy. He describes jealousy as "mankind's first egregious flaw after the expulsion from the Garden of Eden." He finds this pattern repeated throughout the first book of the Torah and ultimately tested in the final section of Genesis, which "fittingly describes how the seeds of Jewish nationhood were planted in the hostile Egyptian soil, [and] focuses on the capacity of Jacob's chil-

dren to overcome jealousy. Jealousy and its resolution are important themes of Genesis.” Dr. Bernstein then applies his knowledge of human behavior to define the workings of jealousy: “Clearly, people do not become jealous because they themselves are lacking something. Rather, it is being excluded from what others have that brings on feelings of jealousy. This may be called the ‘why me?’ syndrome. Why should I be treated less favorably than someone else is?” More of this kind of approach would have been welcome.

Rashi’s commentary is also open for analysis. For example, the *midrash*, as quoted by Rashi, tells us that when Sarah heard that Isaac “had nearly been slaughtered”... “her soul burst from her and she died.” As is commonly assumed, it was either mental anguish or heartbreak that caused her death. Dr. Bernstein, based upon his novel reading of the *midrash*, suggests just the opposite. “Sarah’s overriding purpose in her life was to raise Isaac... When God showed that He considered Isaac worthy of being a perfect sacrifice, and when Isaac showed he was ready to offer himself up with a perfect heart, Sarah realized she had accomplished her purpose in life. She experienced such a spiritual expansion that ‘her soul burst from her and she died’... Apparently her soul was no longer able to maintain its tenuous connection to her physical body. Her life was not terminated. It was completed.” Use of the original Hebrew when analyzing a text such as this would be helpful and further enhance the reader’s own ability to delve deeper into the meanings of the text.

In the book of Shemot, Dr. Bernstein analyzes the deeper meaning of religious rituals. For example, the *ketoret* service of Yom Kippur atones for the sin of *lashon han*. What is the connection? *Lashon han*, he says, arises from hatred and jealousy. The *Kohain Gadok* entry into the holiest, innermost place of the temple “signals the need of each individual to penetrate to the deepest recesses of his own

heart and personality, to uproot the mean-spiritedness that causes him to speak *lashon han*.” Other psychological areas touched upon by Dr. Bernstein are man’s subconscious and unconscious, the inherent relationship between man’s mortality and anxiety, the challenge of channeling sexual impulses as depicted in the relationship between Adam and Chava, Lot and his daughters, and Yehudah and Tamar, sibling rivalry (as epitomized by Joseph and his brothers), names, numerology, prayer, money, and parenting. Indeed, an index would have been helpful to reference topics according to psychological category. In this regard, the interested reader might have benefited from discussion of alternative schools of psychological thought — if not in the text proper, then in an appendix. Furthermore, while psychological terms are familiar to many and are part of everyday speech, their technical meaning can vary in clinical application. A glossary of terms might have helped.

An astute eye for patterns and juxtapositions is also demonstrated. For example, after becoming viceroy, Joseph accuses his brothers of being spies when they appear before him in Egypt. Judah eventually stands up and resists. It is only appropriate, Dr. Bernstein asserts, that the descendants of these two brothers, Joshua and Caleb, are the ones to resist the conspiracy of the spies in the desert. Why? As Dr. Bernstein explains, the individual’s moral and psychological battle within himself often pays its own rewards. “Arguably, the central characters in the process of reconciliation between the brothers... are Judah and Joseph. They struggle most over the deed, and *they gain the most from their struggle*.” (italics mine) Dr. Bernstein identifies an unusual juxtaposition of verses to convey an insight into the parent-child relationship. We find, he says, interspersed between the prohibitions against hitting and cursing a parent, the prohibition against *kidnapping* (Shemot 21:15-17). This provides Dr. Bernstein the opportunity

to explore the idea that when a parent pushes a son or daughter to a particular goal or occupation in an attempt to live vicariously through this child, the child often feels trapped and exploited, in other words, *kidnapped*. By juxtaposing verses in this way the Torah teaches us a subtle lesson: “It is no wonder that if he [the child] becomes so rebellious and angry towards his parents he might even go so far as to strike or curse them.”

Dr. Michael Bernstein’s *Windows to the Soul* provides a valuable contribution to the study of the weekly *sedrah*, advocating as it does for a more nuanced, sensitive, and psychological re-reading of the text. We look forward to Dr. Bernstein’s psychological insights as applied to the remaining books of the Torah. **JA**

Yosheiv Ohel:

A Compendium of the Relevant Halachos When Experiencing Difficulty Traveling Erev Shabbos
by Rabbi Avrohom Ot



1997

166 pages

Reviewed by Matis Greenblatt

A friend spent one summer in a hotel in the Catskills. Rav Moshe Feinstein was staying in the same hotel. It was my friend’s habit to arrive about one hour before Shabbos. One Friday he greeted Rav Moshe as

he came off the bus. Rav Moshe gently rebuked him saying, "*duchst mir es iz a bissel shpetlach*" ("I think it is a bit late"). Next Friday my friend took the same bus, but the bus broke down and never reached its destination.

Many a Friday afternoon it seems that our obligations to our jobs are in conflict with our obligations to the upcoming Sabbath. The long afternoons appear to afford plenty of time to arrive at our destinations, assuming travel conditions are ideal. However, occasionally unforeseen circumstances prevent our timely arrival and we are forced to spend Shabbos in less than ideal conditions. Then numerous halachic questions present themselves. What if there is not enough time for the *erev Shabbo* traveler to reach his destination? How can he establish his *tchum* enabling him to walk to his destination after the arrival of Shabbos? When can he use a non-Jew to drive his car on Shabbos? For example, if he has valuables in the car and is fearful they may be stolen on Shabbos, may he ask a non-Jew to drive the car to a safe place? What can he substitute for *Kiddush* and the Sabbath meal? How far can he walk to pray with a *minyana*? These, and many other questions, are answered authoritatively by Rabbi Ort in *Yosheiv Ohel*. The volume is divided into two parts: a Hebrew section containing an elaborate discussion of the pertinent issues, and a succinct 37 page English section. It contains an enthusiastic approbation by Rabbi Dovid Feinstein, son of Rav Moshe Feinstein, whose advice, if heeded, will prevent many an unhappy Shabbos. 