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Rabbi Chaitowitz Memorial Lecture, Stanmore, Tuesday, 23rd January '07
"Rabbinic Judaism and the challenge of sectarian and heretical views"

Having been instrumental in establishing the Rabbi Avrom Chaitowitz Memorial Lecture as a forum for scholarly presentations, it is a particular privilege for me to have been invited to give this particular lecture.

The name of Rabbi Chaitowitz z"l is still much revered by the older generation of Stanmore members who remember him as a most devoted rabbi and pastor, a man who was happy – in the words of the psalmist – *shivti beveit Hashem kol yemei chayyai* – to dwell in the house of God all the days of his life. He was to be found in this building throughout the day, loving his calling, loving every member of his community and loving the very fabric of the building. I have it on good authority that he would regard it as his privilege and sacred task to mend doors that were off their hinges, to do clerical work and to change the Torah mantles ready for cleaning. Like the young prophet Samuel who ministered as a mesharet in the Temple, and who was described as a roeh, a seer, or overseer, Rav Chaitowitz was the last of a generation of Anglo-Jewish pastors for whom no single area of synagogal life was beneath his dignity to perform, men who were content to be truly servants of their community.

Theirs was a truly dedicated calling, and although the emphasis and self-perception of the rabbinate has changed dramatically since those days, their contribution - and that of Rabbi Chaitowitz's in Stanmore in particular - to the up-building of the United Synagogue in general and their own communities in particular - was profound. May his memory be for a blessing, and may his dear wife and family be spared in good health to enjoy many blessings.

I am privileged to be giving this lecture as part of the Stanmore Learning Centre. The SLC is a worthy tribute to the memory of Dr Benjamin Angel, a sorely missed and much loved young man of rare quality. His life's mission was to heal the sick, and to make the world a better place in which to live. He was a role model and inspiration to all who knew him: to his family, his friends, his fellow students, to his lecturers, and to Gloria and me. I know that the family who adored him and who enabled him to enjoy as much quality of life as there was on offer, as a small compensation for the quantity they knew would elude him - I know that they miss him more with each passing day, and I can only wish them continued comfort and fulfilment from the good works that they are doing in his memory.

I have chosen to lecture on early rabbinic reactions to sectarians and heretics, but both of those terms are, in fact, vague, dependent upon what is construed, and by whom, as the norm, as the establishment view, from which the sectarian is perceived to have deviated. Thus, the term inevitably has to be placed squarely in the domain of the subjective. One man's sectarian outlook is another's mainstream; one man's Orthodox is another's heretical.

Where there is a written corpus of formulated rites, rules, customs and ideology, to which the initiated agree or are covenanted, to be bound, it is much easier to determine deviation, though even then, the slightest imprecision in the draughting will inevitably open the door to the possibility of quibbling over nuances, intentions and parameters of application. The Torah was *michtav Elokim charut al ha-luchot*, 'a divine text engraved on the Tablets.' The rest – the Talmudic commentary, was not only transmitted orally, but was also transmitted in the form of a debate, with wide ranging differences between the main Talmudic disputants on matters of textual philosophy, hermeneutics (rules of interpretation), and even in the sphere of legal and religious principles.

Such differences of opinion on matters of tradition arise in the first instance from human forgetfulness, followed by inaccurate attempts at re-construction of the original quotation, and, on occasions, by wilful distortion on the part of those who wish to change the direction or emphasis of the religious practices. The Talmud itself admits that hundreds of halachot were forgotten during the mourning period for Mosheh Rabbeinu. Add to this the very lengthy period over which that oral tradition was transmitted and the turbulent history of successive experiences of conquest, exile and return suffered by those charged with being its custodians, opening the door to inevitable lacuna in its transmission down the ages.

This is apparent from *Pirkei Avot* ch.1, which heroically sets out to demonstrate an uninterrupted Chain of Tradition stretching over some 1600 years from Moses (circa 1340 BCE) to the 1st and 2nd century scholars of the Mishnah. *Avot* ch. 1 tells us that the Oral Torah was entrusted to Moses who handed it down to Joshua who passed it on the elders, whose heirs were the prophets, who, in turn, entrusted it 'the men of the great assembly,' the last of whom, Shimon Ha-tzadik, handed it on the religious leaders of the Greek period, men with Greek names, such as Antigonus, who, in turn, entrusted it to their Pharisaic or rabbinic heirs.

We have only to consider that formulation to realise just how sketchy and inadequate it is, and how much it fails in its objective of proving an unbroken chain of custodians of Judaism down the ages. Just consider that, from Moses, Joshua and the elders (13th century BCE) to the Greek period, 4th-3rd century - a period of nearly 1000 years - all we have enumerated in *Avot* , to bridge that massive period, are the institutions of the prophets (which ended with Malachi in the 5th century BCE) and the 'Men of the Great Assembly' an institution which is placed in the Persian period during the succeeding century.

It goes without saying that we do not have an uninterrupted, generational line of prophets spanning 1000 years. It is also not widely appreciated just how little information we even have about that 'Great Assembly,' although the Talmud frequently regards it as a legislative body which had a formative influence on the systematisation and development of Jewish oral law, as well as in the creation of such rituals as *kiddush*, *Havdalah*, blessings, etc.

Now, although tradition attributes its foundation to Ezra the Scribe (444 BCE), who came from Babylon to teach, reprove and spiritually galvanise the Judean pioneers who had returned from exile 80 years earlier to found the Second Commonwealth, and although tradition numbers among its members Malachi, the last of the prophets, and Mordechai in the succeeding Persian period (4th cent BCE), yet it is totally mystifying that the contemporary books of the *Tanakh* make not so much as a passing reference to such an important institution.

Then there is a further gap, of at least one century, between the Persian period (circa 440 BCE), in which the putative *Anshei Kneset Hagedolah* is placed, and the Greek period of Antigonus. We have such little knowledge of what took place in Judea during that period, that, once again, the claim that, in the absence of any network of day schools, yeshivot or ordained authorities, an uninterrupted chain of oral tradition nevertheless existed and was sustained by a supreme legislative body, is most difficult to sustain.

Hence critical historians cast doubt on that institution's very existence, and believe that the Pharisees, and their heirs, the Talmudic sages, were constrained to invent such an institution as the Men of the Great Assembly in order to rebut the Sadducean charges that they had actually concocted their oral traditions off the tops of their heads. By postulating the existence of such an institution the Pharisees were bridging the centuries and enabling themselves to demonstrate, albeit not too convincingly, the existence of an unbroken tradition.

But the fact that there may be no 'proof' of an uninterrupted tradition does not necessarily disprove the existence of such a tradition. Nor does it mean that there did not exist a group of people who zealously preserved and passed down those oral principles within their own select circle.

If we consult the book of Malachi I believe he actually discloses the identity of those custodians while denouncing them for failing to administer the law effectively utilising those principles. This is what has to say: *Ki siftei khohein yishmru da'at v'Torah yevakshu mi-pihu*, 'For the lips of the priest should preserve knowledge, and Torah (that is, 'wider instruction,' interpretation and application of the law) they should seek from his lips. But you have departed from the way and *have caused many to stumble at the law* (2:7-8). This latter phrase suggests a wilful misrepresentation of Torah, a failure to apply its principles in the accepted manner.

It is clear that Malachi is addressing here the priests who had returned from Babylonian exile, and condemning them for their failure to apply those broader (oral) principles inherent in the system in order to guide the settlers on religious matters that concerned them but which were not clearly enunciated in the written Torah.

The current scholarly view is that Israelite society did indeed possess oral codes, in areas such as matrimonial law which are only sketchily enumerated in the Torah. They view the Torah's statutes as representing no more than augmentation, taking the form of 'emendations and additions to bodies of existing unwritten common law that [were] in need of reform...Clearly, there existed in Israel a body of unwritten common law, orally transmitted from generation to generation, knowledge of which is assumed. What is described in the Torah is a series of innovations to existing laws' Nahum Sarna, *Exodus* (1991), p.275.

The Torah itself alludes to supplementary legislation or accepted practice that it has not included in the written text, such as the corpus relating to 'the dowry of virgins' (Exodus 22:16). In the book of Ruth, it sees fit to include a gloss referring to the practice of confirming an agreement or contract by the taking off of one's shoe. This is described as *ha-te'udah b'Yisrael*, 'a testimony (or long-established, orally transmitted) tradition, in Israel' (4:7).

But, do we, in fact, have any clear reference to a priest actually engaging in the activity of expounding oral tradition in that period? We do. Not long after Malachi was the period of Ezra the Scribe, who was also a priest. It is stated that, when he arrived to aid the beleaguered returnees from the Babylonian exile, *Ezra heikhin levavo lidrosh et Torat Adonai v'la'asot ul'lameid b'yisrael chok umishpat*, 'Ezra concentrated his mind **to expound** the law of God and to implement and teach in Israel law and justice' (Ezra 7:10). 'Concentrating the mind' means going far beyond the implementation of the Written text. It denotes the application of a supplementary body of oral principles, considerations and traditions.

Malachi confirms then that it was the priests who were the expounders of oral tradition and its custodian down the ages. The failure of the priests of Judea, as opposed to those, like Ezra, left behind in Babylonian exile, to rise to the demands of the hour, was rightly regarded by Malachi as a wicked dereliction of duty. Why they were remiss is not stated, but in the light of subsequent history and the rise of the priestly Sadducean party that rejected the concept of oral interpretation altogether, it seems clear that it was those returnee priests who constituted the first manifestation of a break with their (oral) tradition, thereby 'causing many to stumble at the law.'

Perhaps they lacked the confidence or felt that they were insufficiently schooled in the oral principles to apply them to the manifold religious problems that their new pioneering community in Judea had to face while resettling and reclaiming the land, re-building the Temple, and coping with widespread intermarriage and the political and religious obstruction of other sectarians such as the Samaritans. Or maybe they themselves had doubts about the validity of reliance upon oral traditions that the ages may well have distorted.

Those renegade priests in the time of Malachi (circa 500 BCE) were, I contend, the forerunners of, and inspiration for, the later priestly Sadducees who similarly rejected the entire notion of the Oral Law. The irony was, however, that the Sadducees argued that they were the traditionalists, holding fast to the authority of the Written Torah, and not departing one iota from its literal sense, while their opponents were what they called 'Pharisees,' *Perushim*, which means 'dissenters,' 'defectors' from the tradition, reformers and heretics who were forcing out of the words of Torah outrageous new traditions and interpretations, and new laws that went far beyond the implication of the Written Law. The Pharisees, in turn, would have pointed to Moses' stay on Sinai for 40 days and asked why he would have required that lengthy period if it was merely to receive a ready-made written Law? They would also have charged the literalist Sadducees with having placed the Torah inside a straight-jacket and restricted its development as a *Torat Chayyim*, a way of life. ,

And throughout Jewish history that point of issue has reared its head, as the limits of Torah flexibility have been tested, and as theologies, philosophies and mystic doctrines have been created, viewed by their proponents as flowing naturally, as tributaries, from the Torah's source, and by others as constituting - to quote the Mishnah's metaphor - 'bitter waters,' pollutants, wantonly added to the rich and pure original source.

The Pharisaic approach, that viewed Torah as flexible, not just capable of, but demanding, adaptation and development to meet the needs of every hour and situation, eventually won the day. The Sadducees, being a priestly party and having amassed great estates and wealth, lost everything with the destruction of the Temple in the year 70 CE. As priests, they lost their power base and *raison d'être*; and as upper classes they lost their wealth and their status. They therefore vanished from the scene with the destruction.

But even within the later Talmudic-Pharisaic tradition different schools of thought arose, motivated by the degree or otherwise to which the text allowed for interpretation. Some schools, led by such distinguished scholars as Rabbi Akivah, viewed the occurrence of every conjunction, every *vav*, every word *et* or *gam*, as a challenge to include a wider set of legal categories or circumstances; others believed that the text could not possibly yield such an unrestricted quantity of new meanings and legislation.

But, inevitably, as a reaction to that fixation with text and interpretation, there develops a more extreme approach, which took the form of antinomianism, or rejection of the authority of both written as well as oral law. This is where Christianity came in, with such sentiments as 'the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.'

It replaced the traditional revelation and the Torah's world view with that of its own making. It saw and exploited a golden opportunity, in the form of a vast Roman world that was searching for spiritual values to replace a discredited pagan system, and which was attracted to the ethics and morals and way-of-life of Judaism but, in the main, was unwilling to commit itself to the stringencies of the law and the difficulties of observance of Sabbath and circumcision in particular.

Christianity offered the ethics and morals of Judaism without the law. But, more troubling for establishment Judaism, it had special appeal to many Judeans, who after a century or two of Roman occupation and persecution, culminating in the destruction of the Temple and the loss of Jewish hope, pride and cohesion, were only too ready to offer allegiance to a charismatic leader who, though crucified, had been resurrected to fulfil God's purpose and restore the fortunes of Zion.

This belief in the imminent arrival of a messiah was not so fantastic, and many references to the imminent arrival of *ben David*, 'the son of David' are contained in the Talmudic literature of the subsequent centuries. This was even expressed in the one of the blessings to be recited after recitation of the haftarah: *Samcheinu...b'Eliyahu ha-navi avdekha uv'malkhut bet David meshichekha*, 'Make us to rejoice in ...the kingdom of the house of David, your messiah. The illustrious R. Akivah, who espoused the cause of Bar Kochba in 135 CE., actually hailed him as the long-awaited redeemer. Christianity also captured the imagination of the Roman emperor Constantine (early 4th cent.) who ultimately embraced it and made it the official religion of the empire. Christianity began as a sect, and developed into a religion when it totally severed its roots in Judaism and formed a totally separate community.

But there was a transition period, during the first few centuries of its existence when Christianity had not yet totally cut the umbilical cord with its mother religion. The largely illiterate, or at least uneducated, masses of Jewish adherents of the new faith could deceive themselves into thinking that they were still part of the historic Jewish tradition, and that their divergence from the mainstream was insignificant. As regards the Trinity, they would probably have confused it with the tripartite concept of God, *Shechinah* and *Ruach Ha-kodesh* that they had heard their own former Orthodox rabbis expounding. As for the former Roman pagans, they would have found the doctrine of the Trinity a tremendous improvement on the vast number of gods of the Olympian pantheon that they had previously to conjure with.

So although Christianity dispensed with the laws of the Torah, its theology was sufficiently close to Judaism's not to trouble the unsophisticated would-be adherents, and its moral and ethical code was also almost indistinguishable. Where it particularly scored was in its social welfare appeal to the impoverished masses. It made a virtue out of poverty; it swept away the social and intellectual class distinctions, and it emphasised, above all things, the religious value of *gemilut chesed*, of tending to the needs of the less fortunate, and of cultivating qualities of pacifism, sacrifice and tolerance. Sadly much of that was lacking among the Judean community, as the rabbis themselves readily admitted. As missionaries, Judaism could not hold a candle to the new faith – nor, sadly, had it any interest in so doing. At the beginning of the 4th century, when Constantine declared Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, it was declared a capital crime for any other religion to missionize. And this explains why Judaism became – and has remained – more than reticent to accept converts.

Another group of Jews, who felt alienated by the emphasis on wealth, pomp and ceremony associated with Temple Judaism and Judean society, found a different solution, and fled from that entire environment, seeking refuge, solitude and spiritual fulfilment well away from the urban centres. These became known as the Essenes, a group of which formed communes in the Judean desert, about which we know so much from the theological writings of Qumran's Dead Sea Scrolls, as well as their Manual of Discipline which sets out the objectives, rules governing entry, apprenticeship, daily spiritual exercises and general way-of-life.

In a sense, however, they also constituted a threat, as representing an alternative life-style (wherein women were, in the main, excluded from the scene), and a radically different belief- and educational system from that of normative Judaism. Another difference between the two was, interestingly, that unlike rabbinic Judaism, which, long before the destruction of the Temple, had turned its back on everything the Jerusalem priesthood represented, elevating the scholar to the highest rank of societal leadership, the Qumran communes, or *chavurot*, brought the priestly emphasis with them and divided their communities into groups of ten, over which a priest presided. The notion of the minyan most probably derives from that context. The priest also presided at table and led Grace, which practice also infiltrated mainstream Judaism, and hence the one leading the *mezuman* before Grace defers conventionally to the priest, and thanks him for giving him *reshut*, permission to usurp his privilege of leading it.

Now, it is quite beyond the scope of this lecture to describe all the varieties of Pharisaic, Sadducean, mystical and early Christian sects that challenged what we can only loosely call normative Judaism, since, against the background of what I have been describing, I must now move to the title of my lecture which is how rabbinic Judaism reacted in the face of the many and varied threats or perceived threats posed to its establishment status.

We have already described the attempt of *Pirkei Avot* chapter one to demonstrate, however unconvincingly, that the oral law, the Mishnah and later the Talmud, the cornerstone of the rabbinic tradition, had existed since Sinai. This was hotly denied by the Sadducees. Being a priestly party, their entire objective was to ensure the Temple's continued existence as the supreme centre, focus and place of pilgrimage for world Jewry. They were also zealous to maintain its financial viability. Their own individual wealth – and it was considerable – depended on their ability to rein in the rapidly growing rabbinic influence, the rise of localised synagogues as rivals to the Temple, and of prayer as a substitute for Temple sacrifice.

This goes a long way towards explaining why the priestly Sadducees rejected oral tradition, which moved the entire focus of Jewish life away from Temple pomp and ceremony towards learning. In a situation where schools had been established and literacy was becoming the norm, the mystique of the Temple priests would necessarily vanish. In a situation where everyone could pray for themselves or lead a service as *hazzan*, why would they want to come to the Temple to stand as a passive spectator and watch an outmoded sacrificial cult.

In a situation where the *talmid chakham*, the scholar, reigned supreme, where did that leave the priests? Within a system that gave total allegiance to a supreme rabbinic leader or *Nasi*, 'Patriarch,' what authority was left for a *Kohein Gadol*, 'a High Priest?' The two institutions were clearly on a collision course. Hence the priestly Sadducean's rejection of everything the Pharisaic 'rabbis' (as they were later called) stood for, particularly the hermeneutic rules for interpreting the text and for reading into it (*eisogesis*) or out of it (*exegesis*) anything that was not literally implied and textually apparent.

The most well-known example of this is the law of Shabbat which states *lo ta'aseh kol melachah*, 'thou shalt do no manner of work.' Rabbinic Judaism understood *melachah* as any manual activity that had been required for the erection of the desert Sanctuary, and they enumerated 39 such acts, *Avot melachah*, that still form the basis of Sabbath prohibitions. But that is not all: Mountains of *toldot*, subsidiary prohibitions, were also revealed by the Pharisees as flowing naturally from each of the 39 main acts. The Sadducees hotly rejected all that as a distortion and unwarranted expansion of the simple biblical prohibition against *melachah*, 'physical work.'

On the other hand, there were also examples of interpretations which ranged the Sadducees on the side of stringency and the Pharisees on that of leniency. Such as in the interpretation of the Sabbath text, *Lo teva'aru eish bekhof moshvoteikhem beyom ha-Shabbat*, 'Kindle no fire in all your habitations on the Sabbath day.' That was the interpretation of the text given by the Pharisees and later rabbis. Hence only the act of 'kindling' was prohibited by the text, but not enjoying the heat of a fire that had been well stoked before the onset of Shabbat, or keeping food hot throughout Shabbat by means of a heat source created before Shabbat came in.

The Sadducees, on the other hand, translated *lo teva'aru eish* as, 'you shall not have fire *burning* in all your habitations.' Hence they extinguished the lamps and sat in darkness on Friday night and Shabbat, and ate cold food.

My late teacher, Professor Naftali Weider was fond of saying that ideas never die; they can survive for generations in subterranean channels until the moment when circumstances allow them to re-surface and burst forth. He demonstrated how the 8th century Karaite sect resurrected many of the theological perceptions of sectarian Judaism of the early Pharisaic period, and especially ideas espoused by the Dead Sea Scroll community.

There was much variation as regards rabbinic reactions to such sectarian views. The most uncompromising approach was simply to ban association with sectarians and the reading of sectarian literature under pain of forfeiture of one's place in *Olam Ha-ba*. And the Talmud resorts to that in several passages, wherein *sefarim chitzoniim*, euphemistically called 'external books,' are placed under ban. This influenced the Catholic Church to compile a far more comprehensive *Codex librorum prohibitorum*.

The 1st century Patriarch, Rabban Gamaliel, was constantly pestered by *minim*, sectarian defectors, and was called upon to defend and justify normative Jewish beliefs and biblical interpretations.

He ministered at the time when the early gospels were being written and disseminated (circa 90CE), and because many ordinary Jews were confused as to works that were and were not representative of their Orthodox belief, Gamaliel clarified the situation by convening a synod in the year 90 CE to determine which books were to be regarded as Holy Writ, and which were to be excluded. Sectarian or heretical influences on many theological tracts determined their exclusion.

He was an authoritarian figure, and one of his approaches to sectarianism was to invoke divine help in order to rid the world of the sectarians and heretics. To that end Gamaliel made strenuous efforts to standardise the liturgy in the period following the destruction of the Temple, enabling the synagogue to step into the breach at an official level, and to ensure that, with a fixed liturgy, no adherents of the new faith could infiltrate the synagogue and offer prayers with sectarian references. He also formalised the inclusion in the *Amidah* of a *Birkat Ha-minim*, 'imprecation against the heretics,' specifically referred to in the (original) form of our *Velamalshinim* blessing which he commissioned from a colleague, Shemuel Ha-Katan. The blessing remained, though the specific reference to *minim*, heretics, was subsequently removed when Christianity and other heretical sects finally broke away from the mother religion and had no further interest in challenging it or justifying their own heresies.

On the other hand, Gamaliel was sensitive to the Sadducean rejection of resurrection and to the fact that many ordinary Orthodox Judeans were sceptical about it, both on that score and also because of the lack of any clear reference to it in the biblical text. In order to buttress its belief, he sanctioned a formula of the second blessing of the *Amidah*, *Attah Gibbor*, which we still recite, which contains a six-fold reference to the doctrine of resurrection.

Another approach, much favoured by the later, illustrious Sa'adia Gaon, in his battles with the Karaites, was to counter sectarian views head-on, and to publish works demolishing the entire basis of their arguments. In the earlier Talmudic period the purveyors of those views were themselves placed under ban, men such as the arch heretic Elisha ben Avuya, teacher of the great Rabbi Meir. Interestingly, when Meir was chastised for associating with his former teacher and making himself vulnerable to the pernicious effects of his views, he answered crisply, *tokho akhalti klipato zarakti*, 'I ate the fruit and spewed out the husk.'

But, in general, rabbinic Judaism favoured the less confrontational and far more subtle approach, and that was either to play down or even totally ignore theological concepts that the opposition placed at the centre of their thinking; secondly to remove entirely those hallowed rituals that had been taken over by those schismatics; and thirdly to over-emphasize the validity of their own oral tradition by exaggerating the mode of its performance, investing it with much greater intrinsic importance and inflating and expanding it into a public ceremonial. The rest of my lecture will provide examples of each of these approaches.

Let us start by returning to the Sadducean interpretation of *lo teva'aru* which did not allow for any light or heat to be enjoyed on Shabbat. Pharisaic-Rabbinic Judaism reacted by applying a concept from Isaiah, when he said *Vekarata leshabbat oneg*, 'And you shall proclaim the Sabbath a delight.' They therefore declared it a positive mitzvah, under the rubric of *oneg Shabbat*, to enjoy the day to the maximum, by eating three *seudot*, three meals, and by lighting up the home as much as possible, and even devoting an entire chapter of oral tradition to the types of oil and wicks that may and may not be used to avoid infringing Sabbath law.

Saadia Gaon, when countering the Karaite resurrection of that Sadducean interpretation of the Sabbath law, refers to the practice not only of having extra light on Shabbat, but even of reciting a special blessing over those additional and special 'Sabbath lights.' The blessing effectively states that 'God has commanded us to light the Sabbath lights.' You couldn't have a greater authority than that! To further cut the ground from under the feet of the Karaites on this issue, the Mishnah *Bameh Madlikin*, dealing with the type of Sabbath wicks, oil and lights that were recommended for use, was prescribed to be inserted into the Friday night liturgy. Hence our practice of having Sabbath lights, over which we recite *Lehadlik ner shel Shabbat*, may be seen to have originated out of the context of an ancient sectarian struggle.

Let us now attempt to demonstrate why biblical Judaism does not refer to the doctrine of *Olam ha-Ba*, the World to Come, or *tehiyyat ha-meitim*, 'life after death,' notwithstanding that most Jews affirm this as a central doctrine in Judaism, to the extent that Maimonides climaxes his "Thirteen Articles of Faith" with *Ani ma'amin be'emunah sheleimah shetih'yeh tehiyyat ha-meitim*, 'I believe with perfect faith that there will be a resurrection of the dead at a time of the Creator's choosing.' The absence of any clear reference to this in the *Tanakh* is, I believe, the earliest example of a biblical polemic, that is a gesture of objection to the inordinate emphasis on this belief on the part of the ancient Egyptians. Their obsession with after-life is apparent from their bible, referred to as the Book of the Dead, with its many formulae and incantations for ensuring the safe arrival of the departed to his proper place in the hereafter. So passionate was their commitment to that doctrine that the ancient Egyptians invested a vast amount of thought, energy, manpower, and wealth into the building of sphinx and pyramids, entombing the Pharaoh's servants alive at his death in order that they might attend to his every need in the hereafter.

Biblical Judaism, with its passion for life, was revolted by all that, and, as a reaction, suppressed any reference to the hereafter. It was hitherto to be accepted as a belief, but one that was not intended to be dwelt upon. We confront death only *after* it has become a tragic reality. It is a necessity, not a theology. It is something that we leave to God; it is not part of the God-man dialogue. We serve him through the joy of our lives, not through the experience of our after-life. Indeed, unlike the Egyptians, the Torah makes the dead body not the crown of life, but, on the contrary, the highest degree of *tum'ah*, ritual contamination, to the extent that a priest cannot even be under the same roof. We meet many such examples of this approach, of according no formal recognition of doctrines which, though valid in themselves, have become tainted by idolatrous or sectarian adoption.

This suppression of the doctrine might explain the famous episode of Elisha ben Avuyah, teacher of R. Meir, who lost his faith when he saw a person ascend a palm tree, drive away the mother bird from her nest before seizing her young, in conformity with biblical law that promised longevity as a reward for such an act, only to be bitten by a snake and die as he descended the tree. Elisha viewed that as totally undermining the truth of the biblical promise. But he was clearly unaware of the way R. Akivah had expounded that verse, namely, "*lema'an yitav lakh*, 'that it may be good for you' - that is in the world that is wholly 'good,' *v'ha'arachta yamim*, 'and you shall prolong your days' - in the world that is unending." Had the doctrine of resurrection been popularly taught and widely disseminated, there is no doubt that Akivah's explanation would have been universally accepted.

Significantly, In opposition to the view of Maimonides, Orthodox Jewish philosophers, like Hasdai Crescas and his disciple, Joseph Albo (15th cent.), did not include resurrection among Judaism's cardinal beliefs, only as a derivative and "generally accepted view."

Let me offer you another context wherein the Pharisees exaggerated an element of their own tradition in order to counter a Sadducean view rooted in their literalist understanding of Scripture. According to the *Shibbolei Ha-Leket*, the Sadducees fasted two days of Yom Kippur. Why? Because the Torah actually makes two references. In the first it states, *Akh be'asor lachodesh hashevii hazeh yom ha-kippurim hu,*

'On the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement (Lev. 23:27).' In verse 32 , however, it states, 'And you shall afflict your souls - - *betisha lachodesh ba'erev* - 'on the ninth of the month in the evening, from evening until the following evening, you shall observe a total rest.' The Sadducees could not ignore the second formulation, 'you shall afflict your souls on *the ninth,*' and they claimed therefore that both days were in fact being prescribed as fast days. The Pharisees, on the other hand, asserted that the phraseology *betisha lachodesh ba'erev* means nothing more than that it is observed, 'on the evening *following on from* the ninth of the month until the following evening.;

Only against that backcloth can we understand why the Babylonian Talmud makes the perplexing statement that 'whoever eats and drinks heartily on the ninth of Tishri is accounted by the Torah as if he had eaten both on the ninth and the tenth. (Tal. *Ber.8b*). It is a perplexing statement since it begs the question, what possible merit could there be in fasting on the ninth? Whoever prescribed that? But now, against the Sadducean-Pharisaic dispute, we can appreciate that that statement was directed against the Sadduceans.

The Pharisees were commending eating a full *seudah* on the ninth – the day the others were fasting – with the single objective of demonstrating how convinced they were of the folly of the Sadducean interpretation. They were saying in effect: 'Not only need we not *fast*, but, quite the contrary, we must make it into a veritable Yom Tov. And if any of you brother Pharisees feels that there might be some merit in the Sadducean interpretation, and that the ninth should be included in a two-day period of fasting - or that, as Babylonians, we should be observing Yom Kippur for two days, as we do in the case of all the other festival days - our answer is that if you eat and drink heartily on the ninth, with a view to being more able physically to sustain a fervent one day of whole-hearted penitence, the Torah will consider it as if two days – the 9th and the 10th - had indeed been celebrated. The first as a physical preparation; the second as the spiritual exercise.

Speaking of abstruse rabbinic statements, that can only be understood against the backcloth of sectarian allegations, we must mention the incredible and totally unsubstantiated Midrashic comment that *Noach nolad mahul*, 'Noah was born circumcised.' This has to be viewed in the context of the Pauline rejection of circumcision. Paul's disciples pointed to Noah, described as *tzaddik tamim bedorotav*, 'righteous and perfect in his generations,' and used it to prove the validity of their rejection of circumcision. After all, circumcision was only introduced to Abraham, ten generations after Noah. So Noah is proof that one can be 'righteous and perfect' in the eyes of God without circumcision! The Pharisaic answer – however weak – was to assert that *Noah nolad mahul*, that circumcision is, indeed, essential to the righteous way of life, but that Noah did not require it since he was already born without a foreskin. God had circumcised him before birth. Whether or not the Pauline Christians were impressed with that answer, it seems to have been the best the rabbis could offer.

A classical example of Pharisaic-rabbinic anti-Christian polemic was the removal of the Ten Commandments from the daily prayers. The Mishnah *Tamid* relates that in Temple times the priests recited it each morning, but that because of the *tar'omet ha-minim*, 'the allegations of the heretics,' it was removed. We know from Christian sources that their allegation was that only the Ten Commandments has authority, having emanated from God on Sinai, but that the rest of the Torah has no such authority, having been mediated through Moses. This enabled them to claim that a new testament had been revealed and a new dispensation bestowed, superseding all the other Torah laws.

The rabbinic way of dealing with that allegation was interesting and characteristic. They actually demoted the Ten Commandments, removing it from the liturgy in order to demonstrate that it was, in fact, no more significant than any other part of the Torah, and that the Christian allegation was totally flawed. An interesting relic of that ancient Temple practice of reciting the Ten Commandments lies in our custom of printing it at the end of every Morning Service, though not reciting it. It is frequently printed in a smaller font, again to indicate its lesser liturgical significance.

Let me refer briefly to some other examples of rabbinic reactions to sectarian or heretical views. The Talmud tells us *Ein onin Amen bamikdash*, that the formula *Amen* was not used in the Temple. Instead, when they heard a blessing recited they used the formula, *Baruch shem kevodo l'olam* (psalm 72:19). The reason for this was clearly because, for a lengthy period, the Temple was in the hands of the Sadduceans who rejected the Oral traditions of the Pharisees. The latter could not bring themselves to recite *Amen* after a prayer or blessing of the Sadducean priests or High Priest, since they were not convinced of the validity or purity of the latter's intentions.

Amen connotes a blanket and unreserved concurrence with whatever was in the mind of the one reciting the blessing. Such a response was unacceptable to the Pharisaic authorities, for which reason they only sanctioned and permitted themselves to recite that well-focused psalm verse, 'Blessed be His glorious name forever.'

Most interesting is the subtle, one word addition to that short response, *Baruch shem kevodo l'olam*, that was inserted later, and with which we are so familiar. The added word was *malkhuto*, to create the response, *Baruch shem kevod malkhuto*, 'Blessed be the name of His glorious *malkhut*.' The reference to God's *malkhut*, 'kingdom' or 'kingship' was inserted as an anti-Roman sentiment. Rabbinic literature contains a vast number of references to Rome, which is referred to universally by the term *malkhut*, 'the kingdom,' as opposed to Judea which was as near as we get to a republic. Thus, some early rabbis slipped into that response the word *malkhuto* to indicate that it is only *God's malkhut*, 'His kingship,' that is acknowledged, affirmed and blessed forever, not the Roman *malkhut* which is transient, cruel and cursed.

The Romans regularly enlisted the services of Jewish informers (also execrated in the original version of the *Velamalshinim* blessing of the *Amidah*) who were ever on the alert for expressions of sedition. They were consequently most interested in innovated synagogue prayers, and would immediately have reported on that new addition of the derogatory reference to *malkhut* in the *Barukh shem kevod malkhuto* response to the first line of *Shema*. And now we can understand why that verse is recited in an undertone.

But the story does not end there. Another group of liturgical innovators seized the opportunity to slip into that slightly-expanded formula a further reference, this time an anti-Sadducean one, promoting the belief in the World to Come, proof for which, we have shown, rested on a shaky foundation. They tacked on the word *va'ed* to *Barukh shem kevod malkhuto l'olam*. Thus, instead of merely declaring God's glorious name blessed - *l'olam* – forever, that is for the duration of human history, they declared it blessed *l'olam va'ed*. *Va'ed* is an abbreviation for *ve'ad ha'olam*, 'and to the world beyond.' It is subtle, but for the initiated it was a powerful theological statement which they wished to include in that *Shema* statement of the Jewish creed.

Let me offer the women something relevant to take away from this lecture. Those who have read my book, *1001 Questions & Answers on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur* will find there an exposition (p.119) of why there is a custom, inadequately explained, for women to flail their arms out three times before covering their eyes to make the blessing over the Shabbat lights.

I demonstrate there, with examples, the ancient Pharisaic-Rabbinic custom of exaggerating the importance, or adding extra flamboyance to, the ritual celebration of certain religious practices that needed special justification in the face of challenges to them articulated by sectarians. Such challenges were generally based on the paucity of textual evidence surrounding certain important details of their observance. A classical example is the way the Pharisees added dramatic ritual, pomp and ceremony to the biblical mitzvah of cutting the *Omer*, the first ripening sheaf of barley on the night following on from the first day of Pesach. This is graphically described in Mishnah *Menachot* 10: 3) as follows:

*All the townsfolk from the surrounding towns would assemble in the field at nightfall. The reaper would call to the spectators, saying, 'Has the sun set?' And they would all respond, 'Yes.' He would then ask, 'Is this a scythe?' and they would all respond 'It is.' He would then ask, 'Is this a basket?' and they would all respond, 'yes.' He would then ask, 'Shall I reap?' And they would reply, 'yes, reap.' He would ask and they would respond to each question **three times**.*

This entire exaggerated public ceremony was introduced purely in order to counter the Sadducean view that when the Torah said, 'You shall offer the Omer *mimachorat Ha-shabbat*, 'on the morrow of the Sabbath,' it was meant to be taken literally. The 'morrow of the Sabbath' is Sunday, they claimed, following their literalistic approach. Hence they reaped and began counting the Omer on the first Sunday after the opening Yom Tov of Pesach. The Pharisees had an ancient oral tradition, however, that *Ha-Shabbat* in that context refers simply to 'a day of rest.' So *mimachorat ha-Shabbat* must mean, 'the morrow of the first day of rest of Pesach,' namely the day following on from the first Yom Tov of the festival. Hence, to underscore their difference with the Sadducees they created a high profile and dramatic ritual presentation to accompany the biblical mitzvah.

Now, as we have seen in the repetition precisely three times of each phrase of the accompanying questions and answers, whenever the Pharisaic sages wished to make a protestation of the validity of their view, as opposed to that of sectarians, they always employed a three-fold repetition. Another example, well-known to us, is the three-fold repetition of *Kol Nidrei*, and those men who attend shul on the eve of Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur, will know of the ritual of *Hatarat Nedarim*, annulling vows. This entire ceremony came in for severe condemnation by the 8th century Karaites, since nowhere in the Torah is there any hint of a ritual of granting absolution for vows.

The only reference in the Torah is to a father annulling the vows of his unmarried daughter and a husband the rash vows of his wife. The rabbis themselves admitted, *heter nedarim ;porchin b'avir v'ein alav mah sheyismokhu*, 'Absolution of vows hangs in the air, with no Scriptural basis.' Yet they were in possession of an oral tradition to that effect'; and hence the rabbis created a special ritual whereby a court of at least three laymen is convened in synagogue, and the congregants stand before them to petition for absolution of any vows made and not fulfilled. Each formula of petition and absolution is repeated – you've guessed – three times.

And now, I suggest, we can understand why the woman extends and covers her eyes just three times in a rather ritualistic and dramatic manner, clearly suggestive of a polemical expression. This smacks clearly of another anti-Karaite gesture, a blatant and defiant rabbinic challenge to those sectarians (and the Sadducees before them) who prohibited any light on the Sabbath. The woman defiantly extends her arms three times, drawing extra attention to the fact that she is lighting lights for Shabbat, and re-affirming her Orthodox affiliation and her confidence in her oral rabbinic traditions.

The tremendous pomp and ceremony that accompanied Succot week's *Simchat Bet HaShoevah*, Water-drawing extravaganza, in Temple times, as described in the Mishnah, was introduced, quite simply, in order to make a public and national gesture of rejection of the Sadducean criticism of that ceremony. The Torah makes no reference to the Pharisaic oral tradition of pouring a water libations over the altar. It speaks only of wine libation. The Pharisees knew, therefore, that they were on a sticky wicket, and hence their sensitivity on that score. Hence their desire to over-emphasize the significance of the ritual by garlanding it with pomp and ceremony.

The rabbinic prohibition against writing down any orally transmitted traditions was an anti-Christian gesture. Hence the Mishnah was not written down until centuries after its compilation, and is referred to as *mystorin shel Yisrael*, Israel's secret code. The reason for that secrecy was to protect it from the fate that attended the written *Tanakh*. Since the Christians had laid claim to that, reading into it and squeezing out of it their own Christological theology, the rabbis were determined to bar access to our Oral tradition to prevent similar distortions.

A more subtle anti-Christian polemic is contained in the *Elohai neshamah* prescribed in the Talmud (*Ber.* 60a) for recitation every morning upon awakening from one's sleep. 'O my God, the soul which you gave me is pure.' This is a clear and categorical denial of the Christian dogma of Original sin. The soul cannot be polluted by the so-called fall of man, as 'they' claim, since *attah barata attah yetzarta attah nefachta biy umeshamra bekirbi* - it is divinely created, divinely bestowed and God at all times protects it while it is part of me.

You will notice how the polemical element is greatly under-stated. The points are there to be inferred by those who lived within such a climate of conflicting religious ideas. The Christians might have resorted to informing against the Jews, to burning Jews at the stake, to forced conversions, to Crusades and the exiling of Jewish communities, but the Jewish response was always muted, always dignified. It was to fight for the justice of our cause with the mouth and the pen, to merely dig at their erroneous doctrines and to fight them within the synagogue rather than on the streets.

Let me give you a further example of that light polemical touch by demonstrating how the popular *Yigdal* hymn, a 13th century poetic version of Maimonides' Thirteen Articles of faith, contains within almost every line an implied critique and broadside against most of the heresies we have referred to in our lecture...

Line 1: *Nimtza v'ein eit el metzi'uto...* 'He exists and his existence is beyond time.' This is aimed at the first two elements in the Trinity, the Father and the Son. Our indivisible God existed from eternity to eternity. He cannot 'give birth' at any point in time to a 'Son,' an aspect of His divinity that was not previously present.

Line 2: *Echad v'ein yachid keyichud...* 'He is One and there is no unity like His.' This continues the attack on Christianity's doctrine of the Trinity. Our God is a total Unity, indivisible in every aspect of His being. He simply cannot and will not subdivide into other manifestations that are not an intrinsic part of his essence.

Line 3: *Ein lo demut ha-guf...* 'He has neither bodily form nor substance.' Re-stated here is Judaism's implacable rejection of the notion that God became incarnate in the person of Jesu. This is also an attack on the Eucharist, with its investment of the bread and wine with the power of the body and blood of Jesu.

Line 6: *Shefa nevuato..:* 'The rich gift of his prophecy he gave to His treasured people in whom He gloried.' Israel, it is here affirmed, continues to enjoy the status of God's spiritual elect in whom He continues to glory, as opposed to the Christian claim that we forfeited that relationship when we rejected the divinity of Jesu.

Line 7: *Lo kam b'Yisrael keMosheh...* 'There has never arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses.' His Torah will forever remain authoritative and unchallenged, unlike the New Testament which purported to have supplanted it. This is also an anti-Islamic reference to their "prophet," Mohammed, who laid claim to having replaced Moses as chief of the prophets. This is reiterated in the next line:

Line 8: *Torat emet natan le'ammo El...* 'God gave Israel a "law of truth".' The truth is never cancelled out, never dates and is never superseded. This is reiterated in the next line:

Line 9: *Lo yachalif Ha-El v'lo yamir dato...* 'God will never exchange or alter his law for another.' Claims on behalf of the New Testament are therefore without foundation.

Line 11: *Gomeil l'ish chesed k'mifalo...* 'He rewards people with lovingkindness according to their deeds, punishing the wicked according to their wickedness.' This is a clear statement of the normative Jewish belief in reward and punishment in the hereafter. It is aimed against the freethinkers who rejected the idea of reward and punishment, and against the Sadducees and their offshoot, the *Boetusim* (Boethusians), in particular, who rejected the notion of a final judgment in the hereafter.

Line 12: *Yishlach lekeitz yamim meshicheinu...* 'He will send at the end of time our Messiah.' A clear rejection of the Christian claims that Jesu was the messiah. Only 'at the end of time' will the messiah appear, not as an historical figure who then vanished from the scene.

This idea continues to constitute a challenge to such movements as 'Jews for Jesu,' and, *lehavdil*, to any other group closer to home, many of whose adherents believe that the mashiach has already appeared in our midst in the form of - their rebbe, who subsequently departed – or didn't depart - the scene.

Line 13: *Meitim yechah El...* 'God will revive the dead.' The doctrine of resurrection always needed boosting, against those, such as the Sadducees and the Karaites, who rejected it as without reference in Holy writ.

I have restricted myself to dealing with rabbinic attitudes to sectarianism in the Talmudic and medieval periods. Let me end with a reference to a modern form of polemic, in the insistence by rabbinic authorities of the 19th century that shul's have a bimah in the centre. This has become the essential determinant of an Orthodox shul, even though the halachah never placed such inordinate emphasis on it. In the great Code of Maimonides he states that the bimah should be in the middle "so that the one who is reading from the Torah or giving a sermon of exhortation may stand on it." This clearly suggests that its central position is merely functional, to facilitate the official's voice being heard.

It was only in the 19th century that this became an halachic imperative, and that was as a result of the Reform tendency to place the bimah consistently at the front in order to parallel the Church arrangement wherein the importance of the altar is emphasized by its position at the front. R. Moses Sofer – who was implacably opposed to any and every innovation - on being asked by a community that was rebuilding whether it could move the bimah to the front, gave a categorical ruling that it was forbidden. And from that time on it has become a matter of halachic principle, the hallmark of the Orthodox synagogue, to have the bimah in the centre.

And so the polemic continues, as Orthodox groups zealously seek to preserve their traditions intact and to build protective fences around them. These take the form of extra stringencies and safeguards, in order to resist the internal erosion caused by the modernising tendency or the march of time, as well as against the allure of secularism and progressive ideas. Whereas the United Synagogue used to be perceived as a Centrist organisation, and notwithstanding its conscious attempt, over the past three decades, to re-align itself in order to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the right wing, the pace of growth on the part of the latter, and the speed with which the Charedi community pulls up its drawbridges and intensifies its stringencies and demands on its adherents, has meant that, try as we might, we will always be perceived as left wing, if not beyond the Pale. Our mistake is in not defining more clearly, energetically and courageously our own position, and sticking to it, but rather in adopting an inferiority complex with regard to the right, and forever begging for their acceptance and indulgence. Wimps never win respect, only disdain. When we recall how determined rabbinic Judaism in antiquity was to defend its ideology we can only lament that we are so lacking in that self-same courage and belief in ourselves. Ironically it is we who are the *charedim*, the real 'tremblers,' not them!