

Greatest Creative and Intellectual Masters of Nations on the Ladder of Jacob

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How, then, with me, writing of this Leviathan? Unconsciously my chirography expands into placard capitals. Give me a condor's quill! Give me Vesuvius' crater for an inkstand! Friends, hold my arms! For in the mere act of penning my thoughts of this Leviathan, they weary me, and make me faint with their outreaching comprehensiveness of sweep, as if to include the whole circle of the sciences, and all the generations of whales, and men, and mastodons, past, present, and to come, with all the revolving panoramas of empire on earth, and throughout the whole universe, not excluding its suburbs. Such, and so magnifying, is the virtue of a large and liberal theme! We expand to its bulk. To produce a mighty book, you must choose a mighty theme.

Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*

Overview of the Article

The main idea of this article (Chapter IV) is presented as follows: Jacob (the Nation of Israel) is dreaming and sees the Ladder of History, which great Masters of the Nations (writers, poets, artists) are ascending and descending. Jacob's sleep is a symbol of the unique "being apart" position of Israel in the world's history. This position gives Jacob's progeny the power of understanding and interpretation, which by itself is the force that elevates great Angels and Masters of the Nations. In the first parts of the article (Chapters I-II), I attempt to describe my own ascent up my personal "Ladder of Jacob" from extreme individualism in Moscow of the '70s to my current communal life in Israel. This narrative emphasizes the aspects of "being apart" and standing against the external Soviet ideological pressure. Chapter III discusses the unique role of the great Russian and world literature in the self-understanding and self-identification of the Russian Jewry. It briefly sketches the current crisis of Israel's national religious community in terms of the weakening of the "Midrash Leumi" of the Jewish State's builders. Chapters IV and V close the circle by suggesting a new kind of "Midrash Kiyumi", which is based on a historical perception of Jacob's Ladder. Chapter VI outlines several questions that remain open for further discussion.

I. Motivation for Writing This Article

First I would like to thank the Almighty for His kindness in taking me and my family out of the Soviet reality of the '80s and bringing us to a new life in Israel. The Zohar, Shemot 41a tells us about the importance of discussing and describing the miracles surrounding the liberation of Jewish people from Egypt:

כגוונא דא חובה איהו על בר נש לאשתעי תדיר קמי קודשא בריך הוא, ולפרסומי ניסא בכל אינון ניסין דעבד, ואי תימא אמאי איהו חובתא, והא קודשא בריך הוא ידע כלא, כל מה דהוה ויהו לבתר דנא, אמאי פרסומא דא קמיה על מה דאיהו עבד ואיהו ידע, אלא ודאי אצטריך בר נש לפרסומי ניסא ולאשתעי קמיה בכל מה דאיהו עבד, בגין דאינון מלין סלקין וכל פמליא דלעילא מתכנשין וחמאן לון, ואודאן כלהו לקודשא בריך הוא, ואסתלק יקריה עליהו עילא ותתא

Similarly, it is the duty of every person to relate before the Holy One, blessed be He, and publicize the miracle among all these miracles that He did. One may ask why it is obligatory to relate the miracles; does not the Holy One, blessed be He, know everything, everything that was and will be in the future? And wherefore this publicity before Him of what He did, if He knows? He replies: but surely one has to make the miracle known and relate before Him all that He did, because these words ascend and all the company above gather and see them, and give thanks before the Holy One, blessed be He, and His glory rises over them above and below.

In his commentary on this page, the Nitzuzei Orot quotes from Ramban the following: “There is a commandment incumbent upon each person to tell in detail about the miracles that God performed for him. And so I saw the pious people who wrote briefly everything that happened with them and who take this writing with them and daily review it to tell about God’s Deeds, and this is a proper thing to do”. I believe that by writing this article I carry out Ramban’s recommendation. What additionally motivates me is my feeling that by sharing my personal observations I humbly contribute to the extremely important process of the development of self-understanding of the Jewish–Russian community in Israel.

II. Being Jewish in Russia of ‘60s and ‘70s Meant Feeling Different

About the terrible “black” days of Stalin’s rule we heard only from other people (some of them were eyewitnesses, others simply re-told us stories) and

from rare illicit books. My childhood took place during the relatively “grey” years of Brezhnev, when only those who actively struggled against the regime were fiercely persecuted. However, stories about innocent people thrown into prisons, camps and psychiatric hospitals for “different thinking” gave my childhood in Moscow an unforgettable flavor.

Since in my childhood, being Jewish was associated for me with being different from all other people around. I remember myself at the age of six playing with other kids near my house and knowing that I had my own secret: I have some books at home, and none of my friends will know about them. I had already gotten a very important message from home regarding this, “Never discuss with children outside our family the books that we keep and read at home”. Indeed, many of these books, typewritten on thin paper (to produce as many copies as possible at one go) were the “Samizdat” (self-published) forbidden books, chronicles of the current prison and camp life in the USSR.

To be Jewish at this age was to stand apart in the midst of the Russian-Ukrainian majority. I remember as well the first harsh lesson of the Jewish identity. The girl sitting in front of me in school often turned back, pointing a finger at me saying, “Ugh, Kara - a Jew!” I was six then, and I would never forget it (I remember her name, and sometimes cannot avoid wondering - is she also, like myself, a grandparent these days? What is she teaching her grandchildren now?). These lessons were later reinforced: I remember being beaten mercilessly in the streets of Moscow solely because of the shape of my nose. All of my childhood and youth passed in constant striving to move against the mainstream, not to be like others, not to think like others, not to behave like other people around. Others listened to Soviet Radio, watched Soviet TV, believed in the Soviet propaganda. To be different was not just a behavior, it was a different set of mind. In short, I would call it extremely developed individualism, although the common “individualism” vs. “collectivism” does not exactly fit the complex picture that I am trying to describe here. Interesting analysis of the individualism as a proved means of protection from the evil of tyranny in the modern world I found in [1].

In addition to the negation of the Soviet values and norms at that time, there were other tendencies. One of the most important among them was the search for spirituality in the disillusioned, bureaucratic and highly materialistic Soviet society - high esteem for any kind of spiritual values and the ability to stand against the Soviet machine was typical for thinking young people of the

'80s. The young generation in the '70s and the '80s was in a desperate search of some spiritual foundation for their life. Often I witnessed how Russian Jews hungry for spiritual sustenance adopted Christian beliefs of various kinds. Noteworthy, the Christian books, stories and materials, although prohibited along with the Jewish ones, were still much more available than Jewish books.

Ardent Marxists in their youth, my grandparents lost most of their communist illusions towards the end of their lives. My parents were devoid of any ideology and were totally apolitical. My father believed and still believes that the most important thing in the world is art, and my mother had similar thoughts about science. In fact, I learned from my mother that studying science or fine arts was an optimal compromise for surviving in the corrupt and false Soviet world [2]. Such interesting pursuits as humanities, social justice and order would inevitably lead one either to jail (most likely) or to selling the soul in exchange for climbing the Soviet career ladder.

My life position was formulated relatively early, at the age of fifteen: Remaining human at any price and maintaining human decency, even if this meant going to jail, camp or psychiatric hospital for compulsory treatment by the Soviet authorities. The central questions of those years were these: "How can a single person withstand all the tortures of the unlimited Soviet power? How can one withstand strong psychotropic drugs (whose purpose and actions were explained to me by my mother, a professor of biochemistry)?" I remember how, at the age of seventeen, I presented this question to a friend of mine. The answer puzzled me at the time, but probably it was one of the important milestones of the Repentance process. "I believe", he said, "that Almighty God will perform a miracle for me, and I will escape the prison or the psychiatric hospital. Even if I get there, God will help me to withstand all these tortures". It may be that my current interest in Kiddush HaShem is a natural continuation of those days' thoughts.

For years, I had been preparing for the day when I would find myself in a Soviet prison due to my way of thinking and feeling. I understood this option to be a critical point in my life and tried to prepare for that by learning from other people's experience as well as developing my own "survival" strategies. Several of the strategies I learned from my friends and several of them I took from the books. Among the best known was Varlam Shalamov's suggestion [3]:

“When you are arrested, follow these three “Don’ts”: Do not believe, Do not fear, Do not ask.” Another one was Vladimir Albrecht’s strategy: Try to force Soviet officials to obey their own written law [4]. I was aware that, should I be imprisoned, it might become impossible to uphold my standards of human decency. Therefore I tried to avoid active participation in general dissident demonstrations in favor of learning and teaching Torah, Tanach and the Jewish law in underground classes in Moscow.

III. Self-identification of Russian Jews in Russia and in Israel

One of the most interesting studies on the subject Jewish self-identification [5] in Russia, Israel and other countries is presented in the article of Alexander Lvov from St. Petersburg [6]. Lvov summarizes various types of Jewish self-identification in Russia, examines the interesting relationship between the Russian Jews and the Soviet intellectuals and arrives to a puzzling conclusion: The main positively-defined characteristic of the Russian Jew emerges through the great Russian literature. Below, there are several quotes from the English translation of this article [5].

“Two very important peculiarities of this brotherhood of Jews and intelligentsia are grounds for such a point of view: 1) Detachment from the mass, from the majority, and 2) *philology* of this brotherhood, love for literature, even as opposed to other fields of culture, to other manifestations of the national spirit ... These two peculiarities are noted in “The Jews” by A. Akhutin: “The Jew accumulates in himself and personifies everything alien to the nazi-totalitarian unity” and “Who but the Jew, a “philologist” by the grace and commandment of God, can feel a devouring love for the Russian word, speech and literature?”. *Philologists alien to unity* - this, to my mind, is a possible, though a little bit idealized, definition of the Jews.” (End of quotation from A. Lvov’s article).

This phenomenon of the Russian Jewish “self-identification” via the great Russian and world writers, poets, and artists deserves separate discussion in the context of the understanding of the Russian-Israeli community. I personally observed the correctness of the description above in communications with my acquaintances in Moscow and with new immigrants from the former Soviet Union in Israel. The puzzling phenomenon of young and middle-aged intellectuals, for whom minor details of Dostoevsky’s, Pushkin’s and Tolstoy’s

novels are more appealing than the day-to-day realities of the mortgage payment, searching for a job and political news, clearly awaits research and understanding. One may have an objection to Lvov's thesis that each nation's literature is great in its own right: German for the Germans, French for the French etc. However, such a phenomenon when a minority group defines itself through the literature of a majority group is not common. Another possible objection to Lvov's thesis is that this concept relates only to a tiny part of the Russian Jewry, namely to the St. Petersburg and Moscow intellectual groups. However, since here the ideals of a leading group are discussed, these ideals could influence the broad Jewish population in Russia of the second part of the 20th century.

As Menachem Yaglom correctly notes in his paper [7], Russian Jews in Israel continue to discuss various problems of their national self-awareness in terms of the Russian culture and the Russian literature. A most interesting analysis of this self-awareness and identification can be found in the works of Mikhail Vaiskopf [8], Dov Kontorer and Maya Kaganskaya [9]. It is noteworthy that one of the most talented Russian Israeli publicists, Maya Kaganskaya describes her relationship with the great Russian literature as the following existential paradox [10]: On the one hand, this literature is the most essential spiritual material for her thinking and self-understanding. On the other hand, she is well aware of the humiliating anti-semitic roots of this literature.

Russian Jewish self-identification should be studied in the context of general Jewish self-identification. Among the most interesting books that I read recently on this subject are the (controversial) monograph by Y. Slezkine [11] and the more comprehensive and appealing monograph by M. Rosman [12]. One thing is clear to me: Today I am a member of the world Jewish community and the smaller Israeli national community and a member of the Russian Israeli Community. As far as I understand, to be a member of a community means to take responsibility for its other members and for many other issues (too numerous to discuss in this article). In practice, this means that I am a (moderately) active member of the Maale Adumim Russian synagogue and cultural community and take a rather active part in learning and teaching at the Machanaim [2, 13] Center of Spiritual Absorption for Russian Jews in Israel.

As a part of all these communities, I am aware of a deep spiritual crisis that we witness today in Israel and in Jewish communities all over the world. This crisis is described in a book by the Israeli Professor of Tanach, Uriel Simon [14]. Simon devoted a full chapter to the transformation from what he calls the Midrash Leumi phase to a more quiet and prosaic “Pshat Kiyumi” stage. The Midrash Leumi stage is related to Byalik, Alterman, Ben Gurion and the entire generation that built the new life here in Israel inspired by the ideals of the Bible. Many of them identified themselves with biblical heroes (somehow entirely omitting the Exile and the Yeshiva-type Jew of the Exile). In my opinion, Simon correctly depicted the processes of destruction and disintegration of the collective identity that happened to a significant part of the Jews in Israel. The indicator of this process is the degree of familiarity with the Tanach, which is poor in the current generation. The Tanach language cannot serve as the common basis for cementing the whole nation anymore, since a significant part of the Jewish People is not familiar with it. Pshat Kiyumi, described by Simon, is an alternative to the “vanishing world” of Midrash Leumi, but I am not sure that we are approaching this stage on a national scale today. In addition, Simon’s noble Pshat Kiyumi ideal can be easily distorted by the post-modern and post-Zionist agenda of recent years.

In Simon’s terms, I would like to see the revival of a new Midrash Kiyumi with my own eyes. This new Midrash Kiyumi will be different from that of Ben Gurion’s, but it also should be capable of uniting different parts of the Jewish people. In order to work effectively, this Midrash Kiyumi should inspire the nation to active restructuring. A certain measure of enthusiasm is needed for this. A new Midrash Kiyumi should involve a meta-historical mission both for the Jewish people as a whole and for each individual separately. In the next chapter, I attempt to describe a possible new Midrash Kiyumi.

IV. Angels and Princes of Nations

Between the years 1975 and 1980, my value system gradually changed. My values had used to be those of a technically-educated Russian-Jewish intellectual youth in the spirit of Lvov’s article mentioned above. They then became typical of the Moscow Baalei-Tshuva of the ‘80s. My priorities had used to be Literature, Art, Poetry, Dissident Movement and, at the same time,

Resistance and Opposition to the Soviet regime. They shifted to Serving God, Kiddush Hashem, Torah and Commandments etc. Pushkin, Gogol, Lermontov and other "old" highest standards (including the highest esteem for creative work) hardly had any place in my new system of values.

Looking back on this change of values and priorities, I cannot avoid attempts to "reconcile" these two rather different worlds. In order to do this, let me ask the following question: "What are Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol and others who represent (at least, partially) the Jewish-Russian self-identification, in the new realm of Torah-oriented values and ideals?"

Several years ago it occurred to me that the great Russian writers and poets are angels and princes, who represent the essential character of the Russian nation. By "angels" here I mean spiritual beings who express the best and the most decent characteristics of a given nation and country. These ideas were supported by what I learned in Ramban's commentary to Leviticus 18:25:

והענין כי השם הנכבד ברא הכל, ושם כח התחתונים בעליונים, ונתן על כל עם ועם בארצותם לגוייהם כוכב ומזל ידוע כאשר נודע באצטגנינות זהו שנאמר (דברים ד יט) אשר חלק ה' אלהיך אותם לכל העמים, כי חלק לכולם מזלות בשמים, וגבוהים עליהם מלאכי עליון נתנם להיותם שרים עליהם, כענין שכתוב (דניאל י ג) ושר מלכות פרס עומד לנגדי, וכתוב (שם פסוק כ) והנה שר יון בא, ונקראים מלכים כדכתיב (שם פסוק יג) ואני נותרתי שם אצל מלכי פרס

The meaning thereof is as follows: The Glorious Name created everything, and He placed the power of the lower creatures in the higher beings, giving over each and every nation "in their lands, after their nations" (Genesis 10:31) some known star or constellation, as is known by means of astrological speculation. It is with reference to this that it is said, "which the Eternal your G-d has allotted unto all the people" (Deuteronomy 4:19), for He allotted to all nations constellations in the heavens, and higher above them are **the angels of the Supreme One** whom He placed as lords over them, as it is written "But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me" (Daniel 10:13), and it is written, "Lo, the prince of Greece shall come" (Daniel 10:20). They are called "kings" as it is written there, "and I was left over there beside the kings of Persia" (Daniel 10:13).

As we can see from this, Ramban believes that each nation is governed by its own Angel (various articles about angels in Jewish tradition can be found in [15]) and Prince. Taking this idea further, I suggested that German angels are

Kant, Hegel and other great German philosophers, Goethe, Shiller and other great writers and poets, Bach, Mozart and other great musicians. Hitler (may his name perish) is not an Angel, but rather the devil or one of his closest servants. This is similar to Ramban's approach in his commentary to Exodus 20:3, according to which sometimes demons grasp the power of a certain nation, and can force that particular nation to practice idolatry:

והמין השלישי בע"ז, אחר כך חזרו לעבוד את השדים שהם רוחות, כאשר אפרש בע"ה (ויקרא ז ז), כי גם מהם יש ממונים על האומות שיהיו הם בעלי הארץ ההיא להזיק לצריהם ולנכשלים שבהם
The third type of the idol worshippers, that afterwards turned to serve demons and spirits, as I'll explain in (Leviticus 17:7), and some of these [demons] are appointed to rule on the certain nations in order to rule on their countries and bring misfortunes to their enemies and to the weakest of them...

The first attempts to discuss this idea with my friends [16] got initial confirmation and encouragement. I was reminded that the word "genius" is related to genes (heredity) on the one hand and to the extra-human capabilities on the other hand. So, geniuses in each particular nation represent the highest standards of human achievements and at the same time transfer these extraordinary qualities to the future generations. See also [17] for some (not too successful) attempts to define a genius scientifically. Gershom Sholem in his article of 1949 [18] formulates the aim for Jewish people as a whole: To meet with its own Genius and thus return to history. Most probably, by returning to history, Sholem means the Jewish State becoming a "normal" state, similar to other states.

Sholem borrowed the metaphor of 'meeting its own Genius' from the Jewish mystical writings. However, in all these sources this metaphor is applied only to individual mystical experience. What is novel in Sholem's idea is his notion of a whole nation meeting its Genius, just like an individual does [16].

It is noteworthy that this article gives Sholem's text a new meaning both regarding a nation meeting its own Genius (greatest writers, artists etc.) and for returning to history (i.e., to playing an active role in human history).

As I found later, my idea that great masters (writers, poets and artists) can be viewed as national angels and prophets is not at all new. A similar idea was elaborated more than 170 years ago in the German tradition of Romanticism;

and some roots of this idea can be found in Hegel's and Herder's writings [19] (see also [20] about the historical development of these ideas). Herder talked of the "national animal" and of the "physiology of the whole national group", whose organism was crowned by the "national spirit", the "soul of the people" (*Volksgeist*).

German political Romanticism and West-European Romanticism Philosophy were afterwards adopted by Russian Literature forums, in discussions of romanticism, national poetry and national spirit.

Daniil Andreev wrote similarly about Pushkin, Lermontov and Gogol in "The Rose of the World" [21]. Andreev spent more than ten years in Stalin's camps and in jail. There most of his ideas were developed. Besides original vocabulary familiar to us today from Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings", Andreev's book contains striking descriptions of the dark side of Russia (like Stalin and other demons) and the bright side of Russian literature and character. When speaking about these great writers, Andreev used terms such as "mission", "heralds", "stars" and "Russian artistic genius", which can be transformed potentially into "Prophets". A recent review of the genesis of the myth about Pushkin as "our everything" (i.e. genius, national echo, mirror and soul of Russia) for Russian soul and character can be found in the article by Peskov [20].

Similar ideas in their somewhat peculiar and degenerated reincarnations even became a part of the Soviet official propaganda for the socialist national spirit. No doubt that even in today's Russia some perverted and degenerated reflections of these insights nourish reactionary and anti-Semitic organizations.

My further research in this direction in Jewish and, specifically, rabbinical sources was not too encouraging. More detailed search [22] in available databases showed that most references to celestial Princes and Ministers of Nations in the authorized rabbinical sources have rather negative character. Later I learned [16] that our Sages often use the name Ministers of Nations when they want to express their negative reaction to the evil deeds of these nations themselves. As an example, let us see the text from Psikta 36:

אמר השטן לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא [רבנו של עולם אור שנגנו תחת כסא הכבוד שלך למי א"ל
למי שהוא עתיד להחזיקך ולהכלימך בבושת פנים א"ל] רבנו של עולם הראהו לי אמר לו בא

וראה אותו וכיון שראה אותו נזדעזע ונפל על פניו ואמר בודאי זהו משיח שהוא עתיד להפיל לי
ולכל שרי אומות העולם בגיהנם שנאמר ובלע המות לנצח ומוחא ה' אלהים דמעא מעל כל פנים
 (ישעיה כ"ה ח')

The Satan said before the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the world, for whom is the light that was concealed under your Heavenly Throne?" "He answered him: "For him that is destined to defeat you". Asked [the Satan]: "Master of the world, show him to me". He said to him: "Come and see." As [Satan came] and saw him he trembled and fell on his face and said: "Surely, this is a Messiah, that will in the future throw down myself and all the Princes of the Nations into Geihinom", as it is said: "He will destroy death forever" (Isaiah, 25:8).

Negative passages related to nations in rabbinical sources are by themselves an interesting issue. This issue was eagerly discussed in Machanaim's [13] seminars, workshops and in various related forums [23].

My next thought was that similar to the earthly hierarchy, Princes of Nations are not identical to angelic representation of poets, writers and artists. This may well resemble what is happening in our world. The leader of the state is not necessary the best intellectual, writer or an artist. Some people even claim that the situation is healthier when this leader is not an artist. Further consideration brought me to the conclusion that putting Pushkin and other great writers and artists in the place of second-rate angels, subordinate to the greater Princes of Nations, diminishes the spiritual value and splendor of these artists.

Here I'd like to suggest a hypothesis based on several well-known commentaries to the biblical story of Jacob's dream of the ladder and angels [Genesis 28:12]. Extensive research of ancient midrashim and commentaries to this story can be found in the book by Prof. James Kugel "The Ladder of Jacob" [24].

Kugel presents a theory of the development of exegetical motifs. Several of these motifs, related to Jacob's Ladder, specifically attracted my attention. The names of these motifs are Ensnared on the Staircase of History, Rise and Fall of Empires, Angels Descended to Admire Jacob, Changing of the Guard and Jacob's Face Engraved on Heavenly Throne.

An ancient interpretation of Jacob's dream is found in a short biblical pseudoepigraphon called the Ladder of Jacob [25]. It is known only from

medieval Slavonic *Tolkovaya Palea*, which is most probably translated from a lost Greek text, which was in turn translated from the lost Hebrew original. In the fifth chapter of this text the angel Sariel interprets the meaning of Jacob's visionary dream:

Then he [the angel] said to me [Jacob]: "You have seen a ladder with twelve steps, each step having two human faces which kept changing their appearance. The ladder is the age, and the twelve are the periods of this age, and the twenty-four faces are the kings of the lawless nations of this age. Under these kings the children of your children and the generations of your sons will be tested. They [the foreign kings] will rise up because the wickedness of your offspring..."

Kugel named this motif *The Twelve Steps of the Staircase*. If what happens with one nation is usually called "history", the dream about this ladder, combining particular "histories" of various nations, and giving sense and direction to historical development can be called *Meta-History*.

As it is clear from *Genesis Rabba* 68, one of the interpretations of the angels who climbed and descended the ladder is that these angels are representatives of great nations. The ladder that Jacob sees in his dream is the ladder of history, and moving up and down this ladder reflects change of the relations between Jewish people and these super-nations. All these angels (and the nations themselves) drastically influenced Jewish life for many centuries. Kugel thoroughly analyzes and separates this motif (*Rise and Fall of Empires*) from the previously discussed motif of *The Twelve Steps of the Staircase*.

Now let us look closer at the verse where the angels of God moving up and down the ladder are discussed. It says in *Genesis* 28:12 that "a ladder was stuck into the ground and its top reached up to the heaven, and the angels of God were going up and down **on it**."

Kugel discusses *Genesis* 28:12 and writes:

The word **bo** ("on it") in Hebrew might equally mean upon Jacob himself. If so, the text would be indicating that the purpose of the angels' descent was to arrive directly next to Jacob himself, - presumably, to see him closely.

In support of this understanding, Kugel brings several sources, including *Genesis Rabba* 68:12, which says:

R. Hiyyah the Great and R. Yannai [disagreed on this verse]. The first claimed [they were] ascending and descending on the ladder while the other said [they were] ascending and descending on Jacob.

Jacob here can be understood both as a historical person, who escapes from the fury of his brother and moves to Haran according to his mother's commandment, but can also be perceived as the representation of the nation of Israel.

Note that the previous verse in Genesis that **Rosho magi'a ha'shamaima**, "his head reaches the sky" may refer also to Jacob's head, not only to the top of the ladder.

The word **bo** can have yet another meaning not mentioned by Kugel. One may understand the passage in Genesis 28:12 as "...and the angels of God were going up and down **dependent on him** [Jacob]." The continuation of midrash Genesis Rabba 68:12 supports this:

ד"א למעלן - כל מי שהוא אומר זכותו עולה חובתו יורד, למטן - כל מי שהוא אומר זכותו יורד חובתו עולה.

Another explanation: in the upper [world] everybody that praises [Jacob] ascends, and [everybody] that accuses him descends. In the lower [world] everybody that praises [Jacob] descends, and [everybody] that accuses him ascends.

Here the word **bo** is understood as "dependent on him": In Heaven the angels who praise Jacob are ascending, and the angels who speak against Jacob are descending. The second part of the midrash contains a bitter observation that just the opposite happens on Earth (similar to the Talmud-dictum Gittin 56b that one who starts bringing sorrows to Israel becomes a "head" and an authority). Taking a step away from Jacob to the historical nation of Israel through the centuries, we get a dynamic picture of great angels of the nations whose status is constantly changing, depending on their relations with the earthly and heavenly Jacob (Israel).

Although according to Genesis Rabba 68:12 the angels' movement depends on Jacob, we do not see any evidence of Jacob's active interference with angels'

positions and hierarchy. After some search, I found confirmation of a more active influence of Jacob's deeds on the angels' position in another text. Zohar Shemot Sitrei Torah 149b says:

אלפי שנאן, שנא"ן שו"ה, נש"ה, ארי"ה, ה' אדם כליל דכר ונוקבא, ואינון סלקי כד איהו סליק, ואלין נחתי כד איהו נחית. ותו כל אינון דשלטי בשלטנו דהאי עלמא על ידיה סלקין, וכל אינון דנחתי על ידיה נחתי, כלהו בהאי סלם, יהו"ה שלטא על כלא, דכתיב והנה יהו"ה נצב עליו.

They are "thousands upon thousands (Heb. Shin'an)" (Tehilim 68:18). They are the letters Shin'an (Shin, Nun, Aleph, final Nun) which consist of the initials of an ox (shor), an eagle (nesher), and a lion (aryeh); the final Nun alludes to a man who includes male and female. They rise when he rises, and descend when he descends. And moreover, those who dominate in this world do so through him. And those who are prevented from ruling fall through him. They all are (dependent) on this ladder. Yud-Hei-Vav-Hei dominates them all. As it is written: "And, behold, Hashem stood above it."

This text takes a step further from the concept given in Genesis Raba 68:12. While Genesis Rabba describes the ascent of the angels without obligatory actions on Jacob's part (only depending upon praises of the angels themselves), the Zohar can be interpreted as requesting an active involvement on Jacob's part. The Zohar explains that when Jacob (Israel) ascends, he elevates the Princes of Nations **together with him**. More than that, some "visual" representation is given in this text [16]. The letter Nun at the end of the word Shinan is a long letter, which relates to the full and complete Adam on the one hand and resembles a ladder by its elongated shape on the other hand. Three additional components of Chariot (see Ezekiel 1), namely a Bull, an Eagle and a Lion are moving on the elongated Nun as on the Ladder. In this representation, the Princes of Nations are not a passive burden, but rather a substantial complements to Adam, without whom the harmony cannot be achieved! The symbolic picture of Jacob sleeping at the base of the Ladder, on which Angels of God are moving up and down, emphasizes the special role of Israel in meta-historical process. Jacob's sleep is a somewhat non-conventional behavior (see, for example, [26]), which puts Jacob apart from the overall historical process (see, for example, details of the motifs Angels Descended to Admire Jacob, Israel Rules the World, Ensnared on the Staircase of History, Rise and Fall of Empires, No Angel over Israel and Jacob's Face Engraved on Heavenly Throne

in Kugel's monograph [24]). This somewhat "being apart" position reminds us of the sometimes persistent non-involvement of Israel in the "regular historical process", and, on the other hand, the sometimes too active involvement in this process, which frightens other nations (like the involvement of the Jews in the Russian revolutionary processes). Anyway, "being apart" creates some new and unexpected possibilities for philosophical reflection and understanding of the meta-historical process as a whole. This special "Jewish understanding" or interpretation can be a possible root of Israel's power to elevate the Angels and Princes of the nations. One may even suggest that the correct interpretation itself elevates the Angels on the Ladder [16].

I found a discussion of the special Jewish role in the creation of the general Collective Memory and Collective Jewish Memory in the book *Zakhor* by Yosef Haim Yerushalmi [27]. In this book, an important question about the puzzling non-involvement of Jews in the specific Jewish historiography in the post-Tanachic era is raised as well.

We can now notice several elements related to the changing status of the angels in the Slavonic Ladder of Jacob from Tolkovaya Paleya: "You have seen a ladder with twelve steps, each step having two human faces, which kept changing their appearance." First of all we find here the faces that constantly change their appearance. In addition, Jacob's active influence is also hinted at (at least, partially) in the continuation:

"They [the foreign kings] will rise up because of the wickedness of your offspring..."

Let us present several different views related to the Princes and Angels of the nations together:

- In the Tanach (Daniel 10:13, 20), the princes of nations appear as those assigned to watch over every country or people. In the book of Daniel, they clearly represent military, political and economic strength of each given nation. According to some of the commentators, Psalm 82 also speaks about the princes of the nations, who are rebuked for moral corruption.
- As follows from several Midrash motifs, the ladder that Jacob saw in his dream is the ladder of History.
- The angels moving up and down this ladder are the great Angels and Princes of the nations, who determine Israel's life in various historical periods. According to Kugel [24], "their ascending and descending... had

great significance: What Jacob saw was actually a visual representation of the rise and fall of empires, specifically, those foreign empires that would dominate his own descendants in time to come.”

- According to Genesis Rabba 68:12, the status of these angels changes as the result of their actions and their praises of Jacob (nation of Israel).
- Zohar Shemot 149b takes the concept of Genesis Rabba 68:12 a step further and states that Jacob (Israel) actively elevates and puts down the rulers of the Nations.
- According to the Slavonic Ladder of Jacob, the faces of these rulers are constantly changing.
- In rabbinical sources of the middle ages, these princes appear as cruel demons, who are torturing the Nation of Israel.
- Hegel and the German Romantic tradition elaborated on the idea that great world writers, poets and artists are the real Princes and Rulers of the nations.
- Our own experience confirms that sometimes entire nations can be transformed to demonic powers under the influence of certain rhetorically gifted monsters.

How can we put all these seemingly diverse ideas about the Princes of the nations together?

As seen from the midrash, Jacob (Israel), whose face is engraved on the Heavenly Throne, has the power to change the position of various Princes of the nations on the ladder of the world’s history.

Taking this idea further, I suggest that the deeds and the prayers of Israel can lower formidable and threatening military and political princes of super powers and, conversely, elevate great artists, poets, writers, philosophers and other masters. In case that Israel does not fit (God forbid) the role of the “Holy priests” (Exodus 39:6), these princes turn to be other, demonic rulers. Israel’s deeds are a spiritual lever that can force great princes and angels of the nations to ascend the ladder of history.

The aim and destination of Israel is to turn the Princes of the nations from their sometimes demonic status to a different status – that of glorifiers of God and Torah. This is what happened at Israel’s finest hour at the Mount Sinai. According to Psikta Rabati 21, at that time a multitude of Princes of Nations descended to glorify the Torah and Israel’s dignity:

א"ר עזריא הן דמלכא שלמה במסורת שעלה בידם מן הגולה מצאו כתב תרתין רבון דאלפי שנאן דמלאכין ירדו עם הקדוש ברוך הוא על הר סיני ליתן תורה לישראל אמר רבי אלעזר שנאן הנאין והמשובחים היו אמר רבי יוסי בי רבי חלפתא אילו שרי אומות העולם היו ולמה ירדו ר' חייא בר רבא לכבודה של תורה ור' חייא בר יוסי אמר לכבודם של ישראל

R. Azarya said: according to tradition [servants] of King Solomon found a writing, [in which was written] twenty thousand of thousands Shinan of angels descended together with Holy One blessed be He on Mt. Sinai to give Torah to Israel. R. Eliezer said Shinan [means] handsome and perfect. R. Yossi son of R. Halafta [said] these were Princes of the Nations, and why did they descend? R. Hiya son of Abba [said] that they descended to honor the Torah, R. Hiya son of Yossi said [that they descended] to honor Israel.

That is also a global goal of our actions in the future and, it seems to me, the meaning of the biblical verse in Exodus 19:6, "You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation".

I do not know how exactly this mechanism of elevation of the Princes and Angels of the nations by the actions of Jewish People could work. I have no doubt that God speaks to us also through the world history (in addition to speaking to us through Torah, Nature and through people we love), but the actual mechanisms are concealed from us. An example that comes to mind is a satanic and monstrous ruler, such as Stalin. Recently, Mikhail Vaiskopf published a fascinating book about Stalin, which he titled "Stalin as a Writer" [28]. In this book, Stalin is depicted as a bad and "worse than ordinary" writer, who "wrote" a book of the Russian and world history. As a writer who composes the first draft, then uses scissors and cuts full pieces of this draft and moves them to a new place in his book, Stalin relocated entire nations—partially destroying them—in his soulless experiments. In some sense, Stalin was a very effective writer—he had an incredible ability to make his own ideas look natural and accepted, obvious to millions of people. In an entirely different reality and with more effective and noble Jewish influence, this writer could have switched to more conventional writing habits and the mankind could have been spared millions of innocent victims. This did not happen. Noble and just ideas of the Torah and the Prophets about social justice and brotherhood (naively preached by the first Russian revolutionaries) were

somehow perverted by demonic powers into a justification of murder and use of other people's lives in order to reach an unlimited control, mastered by Stalin in Soviet Russia.

V. Enthusiasm in Our Everyday Work

How does the above relate to our everyday's work? In order to combat hackers and pirates effectively one needs to understand their way of thinking (see, for example, [29]). As one of my highly respected teachers of Smart Card Security explained to me many years ago, there is a considerable inspiration and romanticism in the struggle of a single talented pirate against huge corporations and companies. After all, the claims for free and public media and free software still have a certain value and appeal in our days. My claim is that we also need certain levels of enthusiasm and romanticism in our everyday's work to make this endeavor more challenging and effective. The calls for prosperity, for building a "consumer society" and to enlarging markets and "dividends" alone are not enough to inspire the entire nation to make difficult and routine efforts of self-restructuring. Over the years, I have formulated for myself a (somewhat "Zionist") solution to this problem. As I perceive Israel's survival and eternal existence to be one of the most important issues, nourishing Israel's industry and technology is a decent task, which is also connected to romanticism. In other words, Israel's struggle for the Torah and related ideals is a struggle of a minority against majority; it evokes inspiration and romantic feelings. More than that, the acute feeling that Israel's survival cannot be taken for granted in these difficult days, fills our life with romanticism and responsibility.

VI. Open Questions

Here, I'd like to confess that the number of questions that arose in the process of writing this article significantly exceeds the number of questions that I had at the beginning of this work. One obvious question is this: What place does great Jewish poet like Mandelstam (who composed his poetry in Russian) and great Jewish writer like Kafka (who wrote his stories in German) has on the Ladder of History? Are they Russian and German Angels, Jewish Angels, or, perhaps, even hybrid Angels?

The idea of the existence of hybrid angels definitely contradicts not only the Romanticism theory, but also the whole realm of Platonic ideals fundamental

to European thought. The existence of Jewish angels is by itself an open issue. According to some texts, Michael is the angel of the Jews (see, for example, Daniel 12:1). However, according to other sources, God rules the Jews directly without any intermediate involvement of the angels. Some direction to solving this problem was suggested by Nachman Krohmal [30]. While the angel of each particular nation symbolizes some particular aspect, Jewish creative and intellectual geniuses can at the same time represent not only a particular angelic aspect, but also a general one, attributed to God himself. Ramban in his commentary to Exodus 23:20 writes that Sefirat Malhut sometimes is called “angel”, but sometimes has other names representing much higher and general aspects of God’s guidance of the world.

These questions lead me to another serious question that I am considering these days: How can the specific Jewish contribution to the process of general world culture building and development be defined? Tanach, Talmud, Kabbala, Hasidut were unique Jewish input to the world’s culture in the past. Are we expecting the next Jewish contribution to the world’s literature, art, history, philosophy and science to be on the same scale as the Tanach and the Talmud? Of course, by the Jewish contribution here I mean not involvement of Jews in the world cultural development, but rather some specific and unique Jewish input. Another question: Why is it that both in Germany and Russia the ideas of the national spirit started so beautifully (from Romantic literature and poetry) but degenerated so severely and so fast? I hope to deal with all these questions in our future forums.

VII. Conclusion

In this article, I discussed various issues related to the following question: What is the nature of the processes I underwent when moving from the highly individualistic environment of Moscow of the ‘80s to the communal style of life in Israel of 2008?

For this purpose, I used the articles by A. Lvov, M. Vaiskopf and Y. Slezkine (that describe Russian Jewish life in the second part of the 20th century) and the articles by U. Simon, M. Vaiskopf and M. Rosman that describe our life here in Israel.

In addition, I also presented various thoughts and hypotheses on how various aspects of European and Russian culture are viewed from the perspective of

Jewish Rabbinical sources. I discussed the special role of the great Russian and world literature once so important for preserving our human integrity from Soviet indoctrination, and no less important today in influencing Russian Jews' self-identification.

Creative literature, art and philosophical work are incorporated in a holistic view of world history, in which the Jews play an essential role.

The highest esteem for art, literature and science (together with extreme individualism) of my youth is viewed today as a necessary component of ascending both the personal and the national "Ladder of Jacob".

Art, literature and science are themselves the great angels that direct the life of the mankind. The ancient message that the Jews brought to the world is still valid in our day: Great angels and princes are also governed by God who gives meaning and direction to human history.

The Ladder of Jacob, which according to some midrashic sources is depicted as the Ladder of World History, is viewed from the meta-historical perspective. From this perspective, great Princes and Angels of Nations can be great world writers, poets and artists.

Dreaming, like our forefather Jacob, we see Pushkin, Lermontov, Goethe, Shiller and many other great Princes and Angels going up and down the ladder of history.

The very special role of the Jewish people in the meta-historical process is symbolically represented by Jacob, whose face is engraved on God's throne and (at the same time) by Jacob sleeping at the base of the Ladder.

The sleeping Jacob is positioned somewhat apart from other Nations and their Angels, which gives Jacob's progeny a special power of understanding and interpretation of the historical process. It may happen that this interpretation itself elevates Angels and Princes of the Nations.

The ascent and descent of the Angels and Princes of the Nations is tied to the active deeds of Jacob/Israel's progeny.

And actual presence of the Angels and Princes of the Nations on the Ladder of Meta-History depends on us and is important for the creation of a new Midrash Kiyumi.

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 ראינו כיצד עולמו הארצי של היהודי נבנה לתוך עולמו הקדמון. המיתוס הקבלי היה בעל משמעות, כיוון שצמח מתור התייחסות מודעת לגמרי אל מציאות, אשר עם כל אימיה נתפסה כסימבולית, ומתוך כך היה ביכולתה לעצב סמלים אדירים של החיים היהודיים ולהעמידם כדוגמה קיצונית למצבו של האדם בכלל. אנו כיום כבר איננו יכולים להרגיש ולחיות את סמליהם של המקובלים ללא מאמץ ניכר, ואולי אין הדבר ניתן לנו כלל. שעתם נקפה ועברה. אנו עומדים עמידה חדשה בפני השאלות הישנות. ואולם אמת היא, כי סמלים צומחים מתוך ממשות רווית-רגש ומוארת לפני-ולפנים באור השקוף של הראייה האינטואיטיביות ואם אמנם, כפי שנאמר כבר, כל עת שבאה על מילואה היא מיתית, כי אז בוודאי מותר לנו להגיד, אימתי היתה לעם היהודי הזדמנות גדולה כל כך, כמו בזוועת השואה ובתבוסה במאבק ובניצחון של השנים האחרונות, בשיבתו האוטופית אל תוך ההיסטוריה שלו, לממש את הפגישה עם הגניוס המיוחד שלו ועם 'טבעו השלם' והאמיתי. גרשם שלום פרקי יסוד בהבנת הקבלה וסמליה, עמ' 112. המקור
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- [23]. See Machanaim's seminars materials on negative things written by Jewish sages about the nations of the world. In one of my conversations with Judge Zvi Tal, I heard a most impressive answer to the question of why prominent Jewish thinkers like Rav Josef Karo, the Alter Rebbe etc wrote such negative things about the nations. The elderly Judge heard this question, thought for a moment, and then answered: "Well, during many centuries nations killed, tormented, tortured Jews. As a response our sages... wrote about them rather negative things..."
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