First, let me thank Michah and Abe for the excellent and very helpful comments and for he thought and time invested in those. The two responses raise several important issues. I will not be able to respond to all points now (since I wish to keep my response not very long), but I will do my best to respond to each point over the course of the week (and if I fail to address any point, please raise it again!).

Let me explain briefly where this paper came from. For quite a while I have been feeling frustrated with the state of what might be called “modern Jewish philosophy,” and it took me time to articulate (first to myself) what I find so problematic about this field. This paper is meant as a polemic call-to-arms toward a revolution of Jewish philosophy. I see the need for this revolution due to the very poor state of the field. The claims I present are strong and intended to be provocative (otherwise, we’ll stay on the same course), but, let me make clear, I (1) stand behind them, (2) am happy to reconsider any claim in response to criticism.

In the following I will address some of the points raised by Abe and Michah.

YAAL KAGAM (Abe): Abe claims that Kaspi “would have been unlikely to be satisfied with mere familiarity with the famous YA’AL KAGAM mnemonic. I imagine that minimally he would have expected his son to not only know the 6 sugyot in which Abbaye’s position won out but also the ability to read and reconstruct the arguments in each.” – I completely agree. I suggested YAAL KAGAM as “litmus *test*.” Obviously, a test is just supposed to give a reasonable indication of knowledge of the subject matter. Learning the answers to the test, after the test, is clearly not a way of mastering the subject, which, in our case, is Talmudic dialectic.

Critique of Talmudism (Abe): Maimonides and his followers frequently criticized “hamon ha-rabanim,” but there is huge difference between *critique* (which must assume familiarity and knowledge in order to have any value), and *ignorance*. In order to criticize Rabbinic literature (a perfectly legitimate and desirable practice), Rosenzweig, Strauss, and Fackenheim had to have a reasonable access to it which they did not have.

“Haredi Perspective” (Michah): According to Michah my “understanding of what constitutes the subject matter of Judaism reflects a contemporary Haredi perspective.” Few points. First, let me remind ourselves that Haredi are human beings (“if you torture them, they will cry, etc.”). So even if this were indeed the case, it would not constitute a critique. Second, at the end of his response Michah criticizes my choice of Salomon Maimon as paradigm of how Jewish philosophy should be, due to Maimon’s willingness to consider conversion at some point. Well, “*mima nafshach*”? If my hero is a potential *meshumad*, I’m not Haredi (I assume). Third, I do have much sympathy for some essential features of the Haredi world, primarily its intellectualism. More specifically, I think that some aspects of speculative analysis of concepts (in the style of R. Hayim Solowichik and R. Shimon Shkopp) has significant similarities to philosophical practice and could fruitfully used for philosophical discussion (this is not *pilpul*, by the way).

“The Issue” (Michah and Abe): All these points, while reflecting certain cultural-ethical preferences – are mostly beside the point. My argument is very simple. I argue that much of modern Jewish philosophy claimed to elucidate the essence of Judaism. In order to point out the essence of X, one must have a comprehensive knowledge of X. For the most part, modern Jewish philosophers had hardly any access to the vast majority of Jewish literature, hence, they were very poorly qualified to pass a judgment on the essence of Judaism. Note, that even if Talmud cum Rabbinic were to constitute, say, only 30% of the Jewish textual world, I would still say that someone who does not master it cannot evaluate the essence of Judaism.

“Rashi on studying Talmud” (Michah): Michah cites a Talmudic source, cited by Rashi according to which Talmid Hacham must be knowledgeable [‘baki’ is just knowledgeable, expert is ‘mumche’] about the entire Bible. The Talmud is a vast sea and we can find quotes in various directions. Thus, for example, we find Rav Sheshet continue his study even during the recitation of the Torah in the synagogue, and explaining his behavior he says: “anan bedidan, ve-inhu be-didhu” (Brachot, 8a). Furthermore, if we wish to bring Rashi to the table let’s see how does he interpret “mineu bneichem min ha-higayon” (Brachot 28b). Rashi says: “lo targilum ba-mikra yoter midai [don’t let your children engage with scripture too much].” Having these quotes before us (and there are more), we should turn to the essential question. Does one have to know the bible in order to be Talmid Hacham? My answer is that I am not aware of any such formal requirement. In order to get Semicha (even in Italy!) one is examined on Rabbinic law. Do we have *any* indication of *any* community which required a Rabbi/Rabbinic judge/scholar to pass a bible exam? I am not aware of it but I’ll be happy to learn.

“Only in Askenaz” (Michah): According to Michah: “It was only in Ashkenaz beginning in the late twelfth century that the Talmud begins to overtake the rest of the curriculum (Michah, p. 3).” As far as I know, Ashkenaz, for most of the period after the 12th century was the demographical center of Jews. So “Ashkenaz” is not just one place. Furthermore, I very much doubt that in Kairuan, Geonic Babylonia, and Spain, the study of the Bible was more prominent than that of the Talmud.

“Mikraot Gedolot” (Michah): Excellent point! But please compare “Mikraot Gedlot” and OUP’s “Jewish Study Bible.” Look even at the layer of the two texts. What does the student of Mikraot Gedolot study, and what does the student of the OUP bible study? Why did the student of Mikraot Gedolot *not* use the naked biblical text without the commentaries?

“You don’t need the Talmud to be Maimonides” (Michah): I Disagree. Let’s ask: What is the truly remarkable feature of Maimonides’ Guide? His metaphysics is not innovative and his argumentation is ok, but clearly less sophisticated than that of Crescas. As far I can see, the truly remarkable feature of Maimonides’ philosophy is his bold willingness to engage in radical interpretation of scripture in order to accommodate it to philosophical truth. How does one acquire a license for such bold intervention in a sacred text? Well, Maimonides had a Rabbinic tradition before him that assumed precisely that license (to engage in non-literal, allegorical, interpretation, when needed). Someone who is loyal to scripture and is not part of the Rabbinic tradition would never dare to engage in such radical practice.

Ad Kan Shabbat Hagadol! I’ll address the issue of Maimon’s “philosophy of Judaism” and “willingness to convert” in my next post. Many thanks and Git Shabes, Itzik