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descend into the historical epoch and arouse its limbs from slumber.”⁴⁴ This call for “decisive action” (*entschlossene Thatkraft*) was more than Rabbi Nathan’s gentle diplomacy. It was the fantasy of a victorious “torah-true people” becoming the “strongest power in the new Eretz Israel,” recruiting its followers with “power and might” (*Macht und Gewalt*) and determined to “squish the Histadrut and the Revisionists against the wall.”⁴⁵ It was the fantasy of returning to history to become, like the Zionists, a united front with a mighty arm. But now the tragic hero descending into the world of nature was no longer David, nor Herzl, but Breuer himself.

Isaac Breuer’s Approach to the Study and Instruction of the Babylonian Talmud – in the geographic-cultural context of Central European Jewry

By *Menachem Katz**

The cultural-geographical axis between Pápa, Isaac Breuer’s birthplace, and Frankfurt, where he was brought up as a young child, when his father succeeded his grandfather as rabbi of the Secessionist Orthodox Jewish community, belongs to the cultural space of German-speaking Central European

44 BREUER, Eretz Israel (note 41), p. 180.

45 BREUER, Eretz Israel (note 41), p. 181. Such violent language troubled already Gershom Scholem, who, in a scathing review of Breuer’s *Kusari* accused the philosopher of having turned the legacy of S. R. Hirsch into a system of “Aggressivität und Macht.” In fact, Scholem viewed Breuer’s return to Kabbalah as a leap into a “Politik der Mystik, der die tiefsten Symbole unseres inneren Lebens dazu helfen sollen, eine Macht zu usurpieren, für deren Fundierung und Stabilisierung andere gekämpft und sich geopfert, und ein Leben zu unterjochen, dessen Aufbau die Träger jener Politik mit Bannstrahl Fluch und Hass allein begleitet haben.“ GERHARD SCHOLEM, Politik der Mystik. Zu Isaac Breuers “Neuem Kusari,” in: *Die jüdische Rundschau*, July 17, 1934, pp. 1-2. English as: “The Politics of Mysticism. Isaac Breuer’s New Kuzari,” in: GERSHOM SCHOLEM, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, New York 1971, pp. 325-334, here p. 334.

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Jewry. I refer to the northwestern part of Hungary known as “Oberland”, where the Jews predominantly embraced German language and culture and German Jewry. The Jewish communities of this cultural-geographical area had many points of similarity but at the same time not insignificant differences, as Isaac Breuer’s father, Rabbi Solomon Breuer discovered when he moved from Hungary to Germany. Hungarian Jewry and German Jewry are usually referred to and discussed separately. In my opinion, it is worthwhile to discuss the broader physical-cultural territory as a whole. As I mentioned earlier, this broader view can illuminate important aspects of the history and heritage of these Jewish communities, their practices and approach to learning, as this paper will show.

On a personal note, I am a Talmudist who grew up in Slovakia, on the axis described above. I was born and raised until the age of Bar Mitzvah in Bratislava, (Pressburg in German, Hebrew and Yiddish), home to the Chatam Sofer, Rabbi Moses Schreiber¹ in the 18th and early nineteenth century, and his followers. My grandfather, Rabbi Avraham Aharon Katz, was Rabbi of the community of Nitra, where Solomon Breuer learned for several years from the age of 12, and was president of *Agudat Yisrael* of Slovakia until his death, at a relatively young age in 1930. My great-grandfather, Rabbi Menachem Katz of Prostnitz, was one of the most important disciples of the Chatam Sofer, and served for fifty years as Rabbi and director of the Yeshiva in the town of Deutschkreuz, known in the Jewish world as *Zelem*, in the Austrian province of Burgenland, established after 1670 when the Jewish community was expelled from Vienna.² Through my family I was exposed to the culture and learning of the Oberland communities in my childhood.

Breuer’s Talmud Study in his Youth

In *Mein Weg* (My Way, 1946),³ the autobiography completed four months before his death and published posthumously, Breuer reflects on the role that Talmud learning played in his life. We understand the special significance of learning and teaching the Gemara in Breuer’s world. These personal statements are important, because his Talmud studies do not play an obvious role in his philosophical writings.

1 Rabbi Moses Schreiber (Frankfurt a. M., 1762–Bratislava 1839) prominent Orthodox Rabbi and Jewish legal authority.

2 Cf. SHLOMO SPITZER, *The Jewish Communities of Austria*, Jerusalem 2017, pp. 30–35 (Hebrew).

3 ISAAC BREUER, דרכי (translated from the German), Jerusalem 1988.

The foundations for Breuer's lifelong dedication to the Talmud were laid in his childhood. He remembers learning Talmud at the Hirsch School and his childhood home was imbued with the spirit of the Talmud. Breuer and his brothers learned after school every day with young Hungarian students engaged by his father. He recalls with pride the prime place he gave to Talmud in his learning over the classic works on Jewish ethics: "There are three great gates ("Bavot") to the Talmud, which lead to the internalization of Judaism, Bava Qamma, Bava Metzia and Bava Batra. In essence, they include the wisdom of the Creator and his wise men in matters of society, in business transactions between people and in financial matters. Bava Metzia was the only book of *Mussar* (ethical literature) I owned in my early youth."⁴

Breuer also expresses great pride in his father's Yeshiva, where he, like his five brothers studied for several years, in his case from 1898 to 1904, before commencing his university studies. Solomon Breuer had studied in the renowned Yeshiva in Nitra and with the Ksav Sofer in Pressburg.⁵ The Yeshiva, which he established on his appointment as rabbi in 1890 and directed for 36 years, was the first in modern Germany after the closure of the *Klaus* yeshiva in Mannheim.⁶ Rabbi Breuer structured the classes in the style of the instruction that he had received in Hungary. Beginner students learned with docents in small groups and only the highest class attended the lecture delivered by the principle, known as the *Rosh Yeshiva*. "In Frankfurt at that time, this [the existence of the Yeshiva] was a unique phenomenon that aroused a great sensation (at the end of my father's days, it was an almost obvious phenomenon for those in 'good' Jewish homes)."⁷ Graduates of the yeshiva include my esteemed late father-in law. Many students went on to become prominent spiritual leaders and scholars. They include the historian Prof. Jacob Katz (see below), Prof. Baruch Kurzweil (1907–1972),⁸ who founded the department for Hebrew literature at Bar-Ilan,

4 BREUER, דר"י (note 3), p. 30.

5 See MICHAEL BROCKE / JULIUS CARLEBACH (ed.): *Biographisches Handbuch der Rabbiner*. Part 2, *Die Rabbiner im deutschen Reich 1871–1945*, vol.1, München 2009, pp. 105-106.

6 See MORDECAI BREUER, "Chapters in the History of Samson Raphael Hirsch: At the Yeshiva of R. Jacob Ettlinger in Mannheim," (Hebrew), in: *Ha-Ma'ayan* 12:2 (1972), pp. 57-58

7 BREUER, דר"י (note 3), p. 28.

8 See DAVIC N. MYERS, *Resisting history: historicism and its discontents in German-Jewish thought*, Princeton 2003, p. 155.

University and Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe (Wilhelm Wolbe, Berlin 1914–2005 Jerusalem), author of the classic work on Jewish Ethics, *Alei Shur*.⁹ Breuer also praises his father's lack of pre-judgements in his Talmud lectures, an openness to new discoveries with inspiring him with a life-long passion for conquering a page of Gemara, even in his final years, when he suffered from ill-health.¹⁰

Talmud study as a feature in Breuer's Novels

Breuer's writings covered many genres including several novels, which portray the spiritual education of the protagonists as they find their way to maturity and their place in the Jewish people. Intensive Talmud study plays a role in their journeys to self-knowledge and the quest to find their place in Jewish society.

In Breuer's novella *Jerusalem*¹¹ about the Jewish way of life at the time of the Crusades published in installments in the *Israelit* newspaper in 1903, the character Rabbi Natan is obviously based on the Tosafist Yom Tov of Joigny who suffered martyrdom in York, England in 1190. Heinrich Thorning, the protagonist of *Ein Kampf um Gott*,¹² Breuer's novel published in 1920, and Falk Neft, the hero of *Falk Nefts Heimkehr*,¹³ published in 1923, are young men from Orthodox homes who were disillusioned with their parents and the mechanically observant bourgeois Jewish community. In their search for meaning in their lives and spiritual awakening, they immerse themselves in study of the Torah and Talmud. Thorning's teacher is a Galizian Rabbi, and Falk Neft learns Talmud with an *Ost-Jude* dairyman, (starting with the tractate Bava Qama – the same tractate to which Breuer devoted most of his years in his lectures) before he goes on to study in a Yeshiva for five years.

The New Kuzari – A Path to Judaism,¹⁴ Breuer's most important literary work published in 1934, takes the form of a philosophical dialogue. The protagonist Alfred Roden is the son of an assimilated Jewish banker and has little connection to Judaism. He is plagued by questions on the purpose

9 Rabbi SHLOMO WOLBE, שערי ההדרכה – ספר עלי שור, 2 vols. 1968–1998.

10 BREUER, דרכי (note 3), p. 29.

11 ISAAC BREUER, Jerusalem, Erzählung, in: *Der Israelit* nos. 33-57 (Mainz 1903), now in: ISAAC BREUER, *Werkausgabe*, vol. III, Münster 2018, pp. 19-128.

12 ISAAC BREUER, *Ein Kampf um Gott*, Frankfurt a. M. 1920.

13 ISAAC BREUER, *Falk Nefts Heimkehr*, Frankfurt a. M. 1923.

14 ISAAC BREUER, *Der neue Kuzari; Ein Weg zum Judentum*, Frankfurt a. M. 1934.

of life and seeks the deeper spiritual meaning of Judaism. Alfred immerses himself in studying Talmud as well as Torah. His teacher is Dr. Bernheim, the rabbi of the Orthodox synagogue of the general community.¹⁵

The Talmud Classes

Isaac Breuer delivered a regular Talmud class over decades to knowledgeable lay men in Frankfurt-am-Main and in Jerusalem after his emigration to Israel in 1936. In Frankfurt he taught tractate Bava Qama (for thirteen years) and tractate Shevuot (for six years),¹⁶ in Jerusalem he taught tractate Qiddushin.¹⁷ Breuer calls with pride his Talmud class for local members of the community in Germany that he conducted until he emigrated: “In 1917 I began to teach a class in the Beit Midrash on the street until I left Frankfurt and Germany in 1936. In these years we studied tractate Bava Qamma, tractate Shevuot and several *sugyot* [basic units of Talmudic discussion].”¹⁸ All those who studied with Breuer understood, in one way or another, the contribution of his legal training to his Gemara classes. The prominent Jewish historian Professor Jacob Katz, reflects on this aspect of Breuer’s learning in his personal recollections of the time when he was yeshiva student from Hungary in Frankfurt and Talmud instructor of Breuer’s three sons: “Isaac Breuer was a learned scholar, not the type who had the entire Talmud and the commentators at his fingertips, but a learned man to whom the paths of the halakha were clear and who was capable of going down to the roots of a Talmudic *sugya*, and it seems that his legal training sharpened his ability to put halakhic concepts to the test.”¹⁹

15 Thanks to Dr. Yeshaya Balog for his help in connection with the Talmud as a feature of Breuer’s novels. Cf. his PhD thesis „Die kämpfende Persönlichkeit. Isaac Breuers Konzept der jüdischen Erziehung,“ Münster / Berlin 2018.

16 JACOB BAR-OR, “Isaac Breuer as an Attorney”, in: RIVKA HOROWITZ (ed.), *Isaac Breuer, Studies in His Teachings* (Hebrew), Ramat Gan 1988, p. 70.

17 Bava Qamma covers civil matters, largely damages and torts. Qiddushin deals with the marriage contract and prohibited sexual relations. Shevuot discusses the laws regarding oaths. All three tractates are characterized by detailed legal analysis of precepts of Judaism, in particular Bava Qamma, to which Breuer devoted most of his time. As we shall see later in this paper, it is no surprise that Breuer chose to teach these tractates.

18 BREUER, דרטי (note 3), p. 94.

19 The Frankfurt Yeshiva and Beit Breuer in the Eyes of a Hungarian Emigré Pupil, in: RIVKA HOROWITZ (ed.), *Isaac Breuer, Studies in His Teachings* (Hebrew), Ramat Gan 1988.

Isaac Breuer's eldest son, the attorney Jacob Bar-Or (1916–2008), describes this dimension of his father's Talmud lectures in his article *Yitzhak Breuer as a legal scholar*. “In the enthusiasm of his lecture and being among friends he would endow one or another Jewish sage with an honorary term of special merit. I especially remember Rabbenu Asher²⁰ [or] the author of חידושי הרי"ם *Chiddushei HaRim*²¹ on Bava Qamma; both of them were praised with the exclamation: ‘Here was a real legal thinker! (זוהי היה יוריסט)!’ You immediately felt that he had decorated them with highest honour possible.”²²

Breuer wrote down his innovative interpretations of the Talmud tractates he taught. They were included in the family publication *Sabenu* (Our Grandfather), published in Hebrew on the gathering of his descendants in Jerusalem in 1996, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of his passing. Particularly in the Hebrew/Aramaic original of Breuer's observations we can see that he adopts the linguistic style and phrases of Talmudic commentators from the 11th century onward. It is evident that he regards himself as part of the continuum of Talmudic interpretation throughout the generations and as an additional link within it; he does not hesitate to express a different opinion from the other commentators.²³ This aspect of Breuer's personality is particularly pertinent in the context of his study and teaching of the Gemara.

20 Rabbenu Asher ben Yehiel (Cologne, ca.1250–ca.1327 Toledo), Rabbi and Talmudist.

21 Rabbi Isaac Meir Rotenberg-Alter (Magnuszew 1799–1866 Warsaw) was the first Leader of the Ger Hasidic Dynasty and author of a commentary on the Torah and the Talmud (חידושי הרי"ם).

22 JACOB BAR-OR, Isaac Breuer as an Attorney, in: HOROWITZ (ed.), *Studies* (note 16), p. 70. Not enough attention has been paid to Breuer's significant influence on משפט עברי *Mishpat Ivri*, the study and promotion of deriving Israeli Civil Law from Jewish law precepts. Breuer was a mentor to Menachem Elon, who later became a supreme court justice and Professor of Law specializing in *Mishpat Ivri*, as we can see from his son Mordechai Breuer's recollection of his father's first encounter with the young Elon: “[Isaac Breuer] was impressed by the education and the mind of that 16-year-old boy and asked him what he would do after the matriculation exams.” Then Breuer explained to him how much work was waiting for a young man like him, already an exceptional Torah scholar, to prepare himself to be a legislator of the Torah in the life in the future state of Israel. See MOSHE KRONA, *Personalities and Shades: A Collection of Conversations*, Tel Aviv 1991, p. 95.

23 For example, the phrase לפי עניות דעת [*in my humble opinion*] noted in Breuer's *Novellae* by his own hand is part of the familiar style of the classical commentaries of the Talmud. In *Sabenu* (p. 11) we read: לפי עניות דעתי לא [...] יהושע – “and the question (difficulty) of the Pnei Yehoshua [...] in my humble

Thanks to his legal knowledge and tools, he was able to understand the issues and legal concepts found in the Talmudic discussion. His *novellae* reflect his awareness of the Torah as divine legislation and the continuity of the Gemara's commentators throughout their generations. His approach to the Talmud was to show the legal reasoning in the Talmudic discussion. It can be said that although he grew to a greater or lesser extent the style of study customary in Hungarian yeshivas, he followed his own path. He did not seek to clarify practical applications in Jewish law or to dissect the argument of the Talmud. Breuer's concern was the legal logic. In this way, he combined the methods of study he had learned in his father's yeshiva with the philosophical and legal tools he acquired during his studies. His dominant interest was in Jurisprudence.

What was not included in Breuer's study of the Gemara? In my opinion it is important to ask not only what is included in his *novellae*, but also to

opinion, there is no difficulty here;” Breuer refers to the Rabbi and Talmudist known after his major work “Pnei Yehoshua”, Jacob Joshua Falk (Cracow, ca. 1680–Offenbach am Main, ca. 1756). In another example from his *novellae* on tractate Qiddushin, we can see Breuer's broad knowledge of the Talmud and Jewish commentaries from which he quotes freely. He brings references from across the gamut of Jewish scholarship and regards himself as a full partner in the interpretation of the Talmud. It was not enough for Breuer to study and examine the standard works available to students of the Talmud, or those that are included in the printed volumes of the Gemara; he also made the effort to study and discuss other commentators, including commentaries published in his lifetime, such as the writings of the medieval rabbi and scholar, Menachem ben Solomon Hameiri of Provence (Perpignan ca. 1249–ca. 1306): המאירי מפרש א"א [...] ולפי זה אפשר ליישב את קושית הרשב"א – The Hameiri interprets the verse [...]. Accordingly, it is possible to resolve the Rashba's question (*Sabenu*, p. 15). – Breuer's extensive knowledge of Jewish thinker is even more evident in his commentary on the Aggadic or non-legal passages of the Talmud. Here he also integrates in his answer the unique worldview that he formulated in his religious/philosophic works. For example: “The question of the Beth Yosef commentary is known and I believe that the miracle that the Hasmoneans dared to light on the first day was greater than the miracle that the candles burned for eight days. Such was their heroism and their confidence, they knew that they had to start a *mitzva* and to perform it even though they did not know how they would continue... and this is a great moral to the history of our day and our poor and needy generation” (*Sabenu*, p. 17 in the section חידושי התורה שנאמרו בשעת ידועה קושית בית יוסף... ואומר אני שיותר: *Novellae* mentioned in the lectures): בשיעור גדול היה הנס שבכלל העיזו החשמונאים להדליק ביום הראשון מהנס שהנרות דלקו שמונה ימים. כי זו היתה גבורתם ובטחונם, הם ידעו שעליהם להתחיל במצוה ולעשות אף על פי שלא ידעו כלל כיצד להמשיך [...] ויש בזה מוסר גדול לקורות ימינו ודורנו העני והדל.

examine which approaches Breuer excluded. It is worthwhile to examine the alternatives, the other options, which he knew closely and even personally, but rejected. To this end we shall present some of the methods of study in modern Orthodoxy at that time, the end of the nineteenth century - the first half of the twentieth century, especially in the cultural, literary and geographic areas close to Frankfurt.

Talmudic Research through Study of Textual Witnesses

The study and research of the variant readings of the Babylonian Talmud according to the manuscripts and early printings is now identified with Talmudic academic research, especially in the universities. In contrast, outside the academic world, and especially in the study in the framework of teaching of yeshivas, Bate Midrash and synagogues, even those identified with modern Orthodoxy, the study of the Talmudic text according to the manuscripts is almost entirely absent. In fact, the Author of דקדוקי סופרים *Dikdukei Sofrim* himself, Rabbi Raphael Nathan Neta Rabinowitz (Novo-Zhagory 1835–1888 Kiev)²⁴ was a rabbinic genius in Orthodox circles. In this great enterprise R. Raphael Nathan presented variant readings of the Babylonian Talmud from Codex Munich 95 and a comparison to other manuscripts, early printings and the writings of the early Sages. Almost all volumes of this huge project were printed in Munich in 1867–1886. This undertaking received the blessing and encouragement of the great rabbis of the time, such as Rabbi Yosef Shaul HaLevi Nathanson (Berezhany 1808–1875 Lemberg) of Lemberg (Galicia), Rabbi Jacob Ettlinger (Karlsruhe 1798–1871 Altona), and the Ksav Sofer, Rabbi Shimon Sofer of Erlau (Bratislava 1820–1883 Cracow).

In Breuer's *novellae* there is no reference to this great enterprise. He often cites the large and varied literature that was written on the Talmud, but he refers mainly to commentaries on the Talmud from various generations published in print, but not to the work of R. Raphael Natan Rabinowitz, who was almost his contemporary or to other commentators who were dealing with the textual tradition. It would seem that Breuer's consistent and sharp opposition to any apologetics led him to distance himself from this field as well. This area of study was identified in Breuer's day also with the research activity of representatives of Orthodoxy who dealt with the study of Jewish studies, such as Rabbi Azriel Hildesheimer (Verbo 1843–1921 Berlin), Rabbi David Zvi Hoffmann and others, an activity he resisted throughout his life.

24 See Y. S. SPIEGEL, *Chapters in the History of the Jewish Book: Scholars and their Annotations* (Hebrew), Ramat-Gan 1996, p. 436.

As far as I could see Breuer did not engage with or even express his opposition to Hildesheimer's historical approach to the Talmud in the context of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* either, or with Hoffman's philological studies.

Isaac Breuer and the Daf Yomi

The daily study of a designated page of Talmud in a seven-year cycle was the initiative of Rabbi Yehuda Meir Shapiro of Lublin (Suczawa 1887–1933 Łódź). He proposed this system in 1923 at the first International Congress of the *Agudat Yisrael*-World Movement in Vienna, whose participants and leaders included Isaac Breuer. A single page of the Talmud was designated for each day in a detailed timetable to ensure that everyone would be on the same page through the cycle. This project was not just a new idea, it was regarded by many as a revolutionary and subversive initiative. Since the days of Talmudic Sages, the reading of the Torah according to this week's *parasha* was not only a halachic-liturgical obligation, but also a basis for learning and literary activity (interpretations, midrashic exegesis, etc.) that unites every community and every single Jew throughout the world. It may be said that the initiative of the Talmudic *Daf Yomi* replaces the status and centrality of the weekly Torah portion. Here the focus is on the Oral Law and not on the Written Torah.

According to the reading cycle, the ancient Israelites apparently finished reading the Torah seven years whereas according to the initiative of *Daf Yomi*, the entire Talmud was completed in seven and a half years. This comparison also shows the change that stands behind the *Daf Yomi* initiative. Whereas the weekly Torah portion was shared by the entire Jewish people, the *Daf Yomi* daily study of the Talmud was an activity that distinguishes the followers of the *Agudat Yisrael* movement and its views. The study of the Talmud was central and important in all generations. But there was no Jewish framework and framework for its study.

One could suppose that Breuer opposed the *Daf Yomi* initiative.²⁵ In my opinion, this could well be the case, since the initiative did not promote the close study and persistence until a page was “conquered”, that Breuer loved all his life. The opposite was the case, with members learning the daily page in half an hour before proceeding with the business of the day. Furthermore, Breuer developed his own ideology i.e., the initiative to study the *Daf Yomi* was superfluous for him.

25 As mentioned above, Breuer emphasizes that he studied a single tractate for many years, in depth with the commentaries. As far as I know, Breuer never even referred to the *Daf Yomi* program and I believe this to be a deliberate omission.

Daf Yomi was, in my opinion, R. Shapiro's alternative to the blue charity box, a fund-raising tool for the Jewish National Fund, which served both as a practical means of fundraising and as an educational tool for assimilating the Zionist ideology. Over the years, the blue box became a symbol and brand of the Jewish National Fund and of Zionism from 1904. Other leading figures in the *Agudat Yisrael* and in other groups in the Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox streams opposed this learning.²⁶ Other rabbis in Hungary and Galicia objected to the study of *Daf Yomi*, also because of the association of the project of *Agudat Yisrael*.

Conclusion

Critics of the *Lebranstalt Yeshiva* complained that it did not produce luminaries, as the Hungarian Yeshivot did. Its students were encouraged to learn German and other subjects and most left after a couple of years to start university studies. Nevertheless, its graduates, and Isaac Breuer is a prime example, retained a life-long love for Talmud learning and never abandoned its study. Throughout his busy career and political activities, he always set aside a fixed time for teaching and studying the Talmud in accordance with the precept in the Talmud Bavli Shabbat 31, to fix times for learning the Torah. Breuer's inclusion of Talmud learning in his novels reflects his conviction that every serious Jew had to undertake serious Talmud study.

We can see from his *novellae* on the Talmud that he felt completely at home among the medieval interpreters and perceived himself as part of an unbroken chain of Jews who immersed themselves in the Oral law. He was true to this belief throughout his life.

Isaac Breuer und das Problem jüdischer Apologetik – eine Skizze

Von *Matthias Morgenstern*

Als Apologetik wird die systematische und grundsätzliche Verteidigung einer Weltanschauung bezeichnet, im Bereich der christlichen Theologie insbesondere die wissenschaftliche Rechtfertigung von Lehrsätzen des Glaubens. Der bereits im Neuen Testament (1. Petrus 3,15) anzutreffende

26 See SHABBTAI CHIZKIA, הפשרה של רבי חיים עוזר (Rabbi Haim Ozer's Compromise) (Hebrew), *Bhadrei Haredim* (August 2013). <http://www.bhol.co.il/57994/>.