

Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

# Yarchei Kallah

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Inyanei Eretz Yisrael at this Crucial  
Moment in History,  
Shemittah and Har HaBayit,  
Conflict and Community

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*On Certainty and  
Uncertainty  
(Which is not the Same  
Thing as Faith and Doubt,  
But That, Too)*



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YU/RIETS Community Yarchei Kallah  
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## **On Certainty and Uncertainty (Which Is Not the Same Thing As Faith and Doubt, But That, Too)**

### **1. Stephen Crane**

"Think as I think," said a man,  
"Or you are abominably wicked;  
You are a toad."

And after I had thought of it,  
I said, "I will, then, be a toad."

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### **2. F. Scott Fitzgerald**

"The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function."

### **3. David Remnick, *The New Yorker*, Nov. 17, 2014**

#### **"The One-State Reality"**

And yet, since Rivlin was elected President, in June, he has become Israel's most unlikely moralist. Rivlin—not a left-wing writer from Tel Aviv, not an idealistic justice of the Supreme Court—has emerged as the most prominent critic of racist rhetoric, jingoism, fundamentalism, and sectarian violence, the highest-ranking advocate among Jewish Israelis for the civil rights of the Palestinians both in Israel and in the occupied territories. Last month, he told an academic conference in Jerusalem, "It is time to honestly admit that Israel is sick, and it is our duty to treat this illness."

Around Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, Rivlin made a video in which he sat next to an eleven-year-old Palestinian Israeli boy from Jaffa who had been bullied: the two held up cards to the camera calling for empathy, decency, and harmony. "We are exactly the same," one pair read. A couple of weeks ago, Rivlin visited the Arab town of Kafr Qasim to apologize for the massacre, in 1956, of forty-eight Palestinian workers and children by Israeli border guards. No small part of the Palestinian claim is that Israel must take responsibility for the Arab suffering it has caused. Rivlin said, "I hereby swear, in my name and that of all our descendants, that we will never act against the principle of equal rights, and we will never try and force someone from our land."

Every Israeli and Palestinian understands the context of these remarks. In recent years,

anti-Arab harassment and vitriol have reached miserable levels. ...

“I’ve been called a ‘lying little Jew’ by my critics,” Rivlin told the Knesset recently. “ ‘Damn your name, Arab agent,’ ‘Go be President in Gaza,’ ‘disgusting sycophant,’ ‘rotten filth,’ ‘lowest of the low,’ ‘traitor,’ ‘President of Hezbollah.’ These are just a few of the things that have been said to me in the wake of events I’ve attended and speeches I’ve made. I must say that I’ve been horrified by this thuggishness that has permeated the national dialogue.”

Rivlin is no political innocent. A former speaker of the Knesset—like Netanyahu, he is a member of the Likud—he was a clubhouse pol, a backslapper, a vote trader. But he was never a first-rate campaigner, and in his long career he lost more than a few elections. His distinguishing quality, according to an endorsement from the left-wing daily *Haaretz*, is “niceness.” Niceness has never been a common quality in the Knesset. Screaming is. So is interruption, insult, epithet, storming out, and an occasional shove or thrown glass of water. After years of intra-party quarrels with Rivlin, Netanyahu went to great lengths to crush his Presidential hopes, pushing alternatives such as Elie Wiesel, who was neither interested nor eligible, not being a citizen of Israel. This time, however, niceness paid off for Rivlin. In his bid to become President—a largely but not entirely ceremonial post that is chosen by the Knesset—he won support from Arab legislators who appreciated his courtesy, and from right-wingers like Naftali Bennett and Danny Danon, who join him in a desire to make the West Bank a part of Israel proper.

Despite Rivlin’s satisfaction at achieving a lifelong goal, his mood when we met was not untroubled. As always, he began with a long story about the Rivlin legacy—a grand patriarch’s determination, in the eighteenth century, that his family leave Lithuania for Jerusalem—but he was soon enveloped in the details of what he refers to as “the tragedy we are now living in.”

“The extremists are talking too loudly, and everyone is convinced that only he is on the right side,” Rivlin told me in one of our conversations. “It’s not just Jews against Arabs. It’s the Orthodox versus those who don’t think they can keep all six hundred and thirteen commandments of the Bible. It’s rich people versus poor people. At some point, something came over Israel so that everyone has his own ideas—and everyone else is an enemy. It’s a dialogue among deaf people and it is getting more and more serious.”

Rivlin is careful to point out enmity among Arabs as well as among Jews. Hamas, he says, is a nightmare for the people of Gaza above all. But in his speech at the Jerusalem conference he made it plain that he was talking mainly about his own tribe. He despairs of hate speech on the Internet, of politicians and prominent rabbis condoning anti-Arab violence and rhetoric. “I’m not asking if we’ve forgotten how to be Jewish,” he said, “but if we’ve forgotten how to be human.”

#### **4. Rav Yehuda HaLevi, *Sefer HaKuzari***

(text and translation from <http://www.tsel.org/torah/kuzari/eindex.html>)

מלך זה מספר שם נשנה אליו חלום אחד פעמים רבות בחלומו והנה מלאך מדבר אליו ואומר לו כונתך רצויה בעיני האלוה-אבל מעשך אינו רצוי והמלך היה זהיר מאד במצוות דת הכוזרים עד שהוא עצמו היה משמש בהיכל אשר להם ומקריב קרבנות בלב שלם אולם עם כל אשר הוסיף לשמר את המצוות ההן היה המלאך נראה אליו לילה לילה ואומר לו כונתך רצויה אבל מעשך אינו רצוי דבר זה גרם לו למלך הכוזרים לדרש ולחקר בדבר האמונות והדעות וסוף דבר התיידה הוא ועם רב מן הכוזרים אתו

The latter, as we know from historical records, became a convert to Judaism about four hundred years ago. To him came a dream, and it appeared as if an angel addressed him, saying: 'Thy way of thinking is indeed pleasing to the Creator, but not thy way of acting.' Yet he was so zealous in the performance of the Khazar religion, that he devoted himself with a perfect heart to the service of the temple and sacrifices. Notwithstanding this devotion, the angel came again at night and repeated: 'Thy way of thinking is pleasing to God, but not thy way of acting.'

**5. Rav Aharon Lichtenstein**, Address to Yeshivat Har Etzion in the wake of the murder of Yitzhak Rabin  
(text from <http://www.vbm-torah.org/archive/ral1-rab.htm>)

There are several points I would suggest as worthy of reflection. First: the self-confidence that arises from commitment and devotion to a world of values and eternal truths - whether in terms of Torat Yisrael or Eretz Yisrael - sometimes has led to frightening levels of self-certainty and ultimately to arrogance. This arrogance has sometimes led us to act without sufficient responsibility towards other people, and at times even without responsibility to other values. "We are good, we have values, and they are worthless" - this attitude has seeped deeper and deeper into our consciousness.

Secondly, at times we have promoted simplicity and shallowness. Pragmatically, this has a greater chance of success than teaching complexity and deliberation. A simple direct message, appealing to one emotion and calling "After me!" will have more followers than the injunction to think, consider, analyze and investigate. Uncomplicated directives excite more passion than a balanced and complex approach, which confronts questions of competing spiritual values and of competing national interests. Because we wanted our youth to strive, to run up the altar, we not only promoted simplistic slogans, but also a simplistic lifestyle. Once, shocked to my core, I walked out of a meeting of religious educators where a teacher said that although we know that the Ramban and the Rambam disagree about the nature of the mitzva to settle the Land of Israel, we must keep this information to ourselves, lest we lower the enthusiasm of our youth and dampen their

fervor. Here we aren't delegitimizing Dizengoff; we are delegitimizing the Rambam!

Third, sometimes we taught our students to belittle and suspect others. One who doesn't agree with us is criminal, not merely mistaken. Any opportunity to credit a public leader with good intention was rejected in order to credit him with alienation, with hostility, with malice - not a suspicion of evil, but a certainty! From this way of thinking, horrible things can result. The Sifre (Shoftim 43) to the verse, "If there be a man who hates his fellow and he ambushed him and rose against him and mortally struck him and he died," states, "Based on this, it is said: If a man transgresses a minor precept, he will eventually transgress a major one... If he transgresses 'You shall love your fellow as yourself,' he will eventually transgress 'You shall not hate' and 'You shall not revenge'...until he finally spills blood." From a sin of the heart, an attitude, from not enough love, Chazal see a straight path to the ultimate sin of murder.

I am not coming to delegitimize our entire educational system or ideology - it certainly contains much that is wonderful. But I do mean to say that we cannot claim that this murderer was a "wild weed;" we must bring an eglarufa on behalf of the azarot as well.

The awesome, difficult question is - And now, what? .... We will not surrender to any city, nor abandon a single one of our values. Our values are eternal; nothing can be given up or erased. But in terms of balance and application, of seeing the whole picture, of the development of the ability to think profoundly in order to know how to apply the Torah - here undoubtedly we must engage in a renewed and deeper examination. Priorities must be re-examined.

....

In 1978, Shimon Peres visited the Yeshiva. He asked me what the political credo of the Yeshiva was. I told him the Yeshiva has no political credo, but we teach three things:

1. Even when sitting in the beit midrash, you have a responsibility to the community;

2. When addressing these problems, you have to think deeply and not simplistically;

3. Even when doing what is right, you have to know how to respect other opinions and the people who hold them.

This has to be our educational goal. The question is not just what are the particular values we hold, but through which spectacles we view values, through which eyes. A man, said Blake, doesn't see with his eyes but rather through his eyes. What sees is the mind.

**6. Rav Yehuda Amital**, Address to Yeshivat Har Etzion in the wake of the murder of Yitzhak Rabin  
(from <http://www.torah.org/rabin/amital.html>)

And as for the title "traitor" which they constantly shouted at Rabin - why did they think he was a traitor? For money? To save himself? Or because he had a different opinion, because, looking ten years ahead, he feared for the future? ...

On an educational level, I think this tragic event also reveals something frightening. A law student, an educated person, thought that by killing Rabin he would solve all of Israel's problems!? What primitivity, what shallowness, what a lack of thought! In our school and youth movements, have we educated so shallow a generation, where slogans have replaced critical thought?

Where do people get the idea that they have to ask a rabbi about whether to say "ve-ten tal u-matar," but regarding issues which affect all of Israel, they can decide for themselves?

**7. Yehuda Amichai**

(text and translation from <http://daysofawe.net/shebotzodkim.htm>; [sic])

## **The Place Where We Are Right**

*by Yehuda Amichai*

From the place where we are right  
Flowers will never grow  
In the spring.  
The place where we are right  
Is hard and trampled  
Like a yard.  
But doubts and loves  
Dig up the world  
Like a mole, a plow.  
And a whisper will be heard in the place  
Where the ruined  
House once stood.

המקום שבו אנו צודקים

מן המקום שבו אנו צודקים,  
לא יצמחו לעולם  
פרחים באביב.

המקום שבו אנו צודקים  
הוא רמוס וקשה  
כמו חצר.

אבל ספקות ואהבות עושים  
את העולם לתחוח  
כמו חפרפרת, כמו חריש.  
ולחישת תשמע במקום  
שבו היה הבית  
אשר נחרב.