

# Against Cynicism

On the Bio-graphies of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

# DECONSTRUCTION'S CHALLENGE TO BIOGRAPHY

- JACQUES DERRIDA – INTERNAL MEMORY AND EXTERNAL MEMORY (ARCHIVED)
- THE GRAPHEME (LETTER) DISPLACES LIVING MEMORY
- BIOGRAPHY IS NOT POSSIBLE – SKEPTICISM

# EDITH WYSHCOGROD

- *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy* – her book
- Hagiography – the bio-graph of the Saint - “highlights the breach between belief and practice.”
- But it can challenge deconstruction.
- A “grammatical mood” expresses a “personal desire” and a “social obligation” to act.

# Cynicism – The Greatest Challenge to Modern Society and Belief

- What is a cynical age? Why do we live in one today?
- How does it affect the Jewish community?

# Adin Steinsaltz – “My” Rebbe, Yours, Maybe Ours

- Taking his cue from Aristotle’s Metaphysics....
- The meaning of the Rebbe’s “otherness”
- The dichotomy between “feeling” and “thought”
- How does Steinsaltz apply it to his relationship to the Rebbe?
- “Cynicism” was the Rebbe’s “greatest challenge”
- Steinsaltz’s final words on cynicism and the purpose of the biography.

# Chaim Miller – the “Whole Story” but not the “Full Truth”

- Miller’s primary description of the Rebbe – rhetorical ranking – what comes first; what comes last?
- What are the greatest “obstacles” to writing a biography? Why are biographers reluctant to write?
- The Rebbe as a charismatic figure
- The Rebbe as an intellectual figure
- Esoteric vs. Exoteric – Leo Strauss
- Does this book address reflection or prompt action? Does it look to challenge cynicism? What doubts remain?

# Joseph Telushkin – “The Most Influential Rabbi in Modern History”

- Why is Telushkin’s preface different? The confession – influenced by optimism
- Political elements – subtle and not so subtle influence on history.
- Impressed with the Rebbe’s influence – influenced to change, to act, to believe that one can change the world.

# The Shluchim Have the Last Word

- Is experience more influential than language? What has a greater affect on mitigating cynicism?
- What is more “advantageous” in creating trust? Do we need more reflective texts to create a continuity? Didn't Maimonides do this in the *Guide to the Perplexed*? Did he turn Moses into a question about the relationship of leadership to intellect? Could that be done – or should that be done - with the Rebbe? Or should we focus more on influence and what needs to be done?