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PHYSICAL CULTURE IN RABBINICAL LITERATURE IN MODERN TIMES

by
AARON AHREND*

Physical culture – exercising, engaging in sport, watching sports competitions – occupies a central spot in our world. A study carried out in the US indicates that physical culture and sport is the most highly valued attainment among American youth, for Jews and non-Jews alike.¹ What is the status of physical culture in the view of Jewish sages in recent generations? What place does physical activity have in rabbinical literature? What is the position of the rabbis regarding watching sports or physical activity of others? I will try to respond to these and other questions in the framework of this article.

Nowadays hundreds of books are printed annually in the field of rabbinical literature. The tendency today is to write thick books on thin subjects. The topic of physical culture and sport, which has given rise to hundreds of books and research throughout the world, has not, to the best of my knowledge, given rise to even one rabbinical book. In contrast, quite a few essays have been devoted to researching physical culture among Jews in ancient times and in the Middle Ages.² In this article we will relate to the 20th century, which has so far gone unresearched.

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- 1 See Y. Oren, "Hebetim Sociologiyim shel Tarbut HaGuf BaYahadut," in A. Zimri (ed.), *Tarbut HaGuf BaYahadut*, Wingate Institute 1973, p. 38.
- 2 Idem, *Tarbut HaGuf BaYahadut*, Wingate Institute 1977 and the bibliography on p. 42 and following; Y. Sorek, *Tarbut HaGuf BeEretz Yisrael BiTkufat HaMishna VeHaTalmud*, Tel Aviv 1977; idem, *Tarbut*

PHYSICAL CULTURE AMONG THE SAGES OF ISRAEL IN THE PAST

As a generalization, one can state that during the rabbinical period, as well as in the Middle Ages and in the modern age, Jewish scholars did not relate in their writings to physical activity except in an offhand manner, mainly when they needed to explain or to rule on an ostensible variance between physical activity and a certain Halachic injunction. Thus, for example, the tanna Abba Shaul relates to running (Tosefta Shabbat, 16, 22): "Running is prohibited on the Sabbath for purposes of exercise"; and in the 11th century, in explaining a baraita which describes the case of a man who killed his friend during a ball game (Sanhedrin 77b), Rashi elucidates the rules of the ball game: "children would kick a ball against the wall so that it bounces back strongly, and after the ball is thrown, he runs away while his friend catches the ball and throws it at him, hitting him if he throws accurately"; and in the 13th century Rabbenu Asher responded to a question concerning damage rendered to a man as a consequence of wrestling (Responsa, 101, 6); and in the 16th century the Italian scholar Rabbi Moshe Provinciali (Responsa, 53) referred to a game similar to tennis being played on the Sabbath. Some scholars have presupposed, from these and other sources, an approving attitude on the part of those rabbis who replied to questions concerning physical activity. However, in my modest opinion, the only thing one can learn from these sources is that Jews of all eras were used to various kinds of physical activity, including games familiar to us to this day; but beyond that, it is hard to deduce anything about the rabbis' attitude to the essence of physical activity.

Nevertheless, there were a few lone scholars who did relate to physical activity in and of itself, and not within the context of an halakhic issue brought to them. The most prominent and important

HaGuf VeHaSport BeKerev Yahadut Yemei HaBeinayim VeHaRenaissance, Netanya 1980; idem, *Toldot HaHinukh HaGufani, Tarbut HaGuf VeHaSport (BaAmim UBeYisrael)*, Tel Aviv 1988. S. Muntner, "Physical Training in the Bible and the Talmud," *Koroth* 9, no. 11–12 (1991): 855–865.

of them was Maimonides, who in his various writings, particularly his medical essays, relates to physical activity. The gist of his view was that perfection of the body is a means toward moral and intellectual perfection. Therefore it is important to maintain the body's health, as well as to partake of physical exercise, and when a man exercises, he must direct this activity to these objectives. Thus, for example, he writes in an introduction to tractate Avot (Y. Shilat ed., Jerusalem, 5752, p. 242):

All behavior — body health and the continual striving for bodily perfection — must be geared toward one objective in order for the body, in all its parts, to be whole, so that the mind, without interference, may engage in the areas of ethics and philosophy.

Why did the sages of Israel not relate to physical activity? We shall discern two primary reasons:

A — Physical culture, body development and sports competitions were a major component of life among many gentile nations, beginning from the age of ancient Greece. Placing body development for the sake of beauty at the focus of life, and reaching the point of deifying man was regarded as idol worship by the sages. Those who participated in the gentiles' sports competitions were identifying with everything this competition symbolized.

B — The basic outlook of Judaism is succinctly expressed in the verse of Proverbs 6:3: "Know Him in all thy ways." The ideal man, according to Judaism, directs all his actions toward heaven, as the mishna in Avot (2, 12) describes it. The status of Torah study rose in importance from the time of the destruction of the Second Temple. The Mishna (Avot 6, 5) numbers 48 ways in which Torah is acquired, among them: "little sleep, little talk, few pleasures, little laughter." Maimonides (Mishne Torah, Hil. Talmud Torah, 3, 6) writes: "Those who strive to fulfill this commandment [=Torah study] will not let themselves be distracted with other things." In other words, according to the sources, man's primary activity must be Torah study, while all other activities, such as eating and sleeping, must be directed so as to better serve God and study Torah. There are many stories of how the sages used their time to this end, even while busy with daily life: having little sleep and food, working less and getting by with less income, all in order to

devote every moment to Torah study. And since the Jewish ideal is a man who studies Torah and whose deeds are dedicated to heaven, it follows that any other activity does not enjoy much partiality from the sages. Therefore, even Maimonides, who was unusual in his favorable attitude toward physical activity, did not mean physical activity for itself, but activity for a higher purpose, and he distinguishes in the Guide (3, 25) between foolish people who play ball or wrestle, for whom this is amusement, and wise men who play — for whom this is not dissipation but rather a "good deed," i.e., an activity undertaken for a worthy goal. In other words, physical culture for its own sake, without a higher purpose, is inappropriate.

In light of the above remarks, it can be understood why it is so difficult to find references to physical activity even in the 20th century. Even those rabbis who do allude to sport and physical cultivation only do so in the framework of a higher purpose or as part of a response to a question on halacha. Let us now turn our attention to the rabbis of the 20th century: we shall begin with a presentation of the view which opposes physical activity and sport, and from there we will turn our attention to a view which supports such activity.

THE PROBLEM OF TIME

We mentioned the ideal of Torah study during all leisure time, in other words, when man is not occupied with his basic needs. Physical activity requires time. This is the crux of the matter in the issue of physical activity: is this a basic need such as sleeping or eating, or not? If this is not an essential need, he must then turn his attention to Torah study while physical activity is to be considered *bittul torah*.

And indeed, a quite common approach prevails in rabbinical literature, which views physical activity and sport as *bittul torah*. This approach does not detect any positive aspects in physical activity. Thus, for example, in the response of Rabbi Moshe Dov Wolner, the rabbi of Ashkelon, to a question regarding sports on the Sabbath, he writes that this is forbidden because it is *bittul torah*, with no allusion at all to the laws of the Sabbath. He also proffers

another explanation against sport on weekdays saying that this is "the company of the insolent."³ The source of the expression "the company of the insolent" can be found in Psalms 1:1-2, which draws a comparison between "the company of the insolent" to a person studying Torah: "Happy is the man who has not...joined in the company of the insolent, rather, the Torah of the Lord is his delight, and he studies that teaching day and night." This interpretation is not the same as that of *bittul torah*: a person is guilty of *bittul torah* even when he sits home alone and is idle and does not engage in banter with anyone, whereas "the company of the insolent" fundamentally means sitting and chatting and laughing with others. One is allowed to engage in physical activity and even to play ball with a friend without joking around. However, because sports games usually involve talk about the game and take place in a light atmosphere, there are those who describe games of sport as "the company of the insolent." The objection to sports because they are "the company of the insolent" does not rule out sport for its own sake, but rather due to the atmosphere in which it takes place, whereas the argument of *bittul torah* refers to the activity itself and time that is not being utilized for Torah study. Rabbi Rafael Blum, the head of the rabbinical court in Brooklyn, in a response to a query regarding playing ball on the Sabbath, also writes that adults are forbidden from playing ball even on regular days because of "the company of the insolent."⁴ In his view, this expression refers to

All games, even when played on ordinary days, as it is forbidden to go bowling, to ride horses and sail in small boats, or whatever other amusements the world has invented in its vanity. And Israel must not revel like other nations, as this constitutes "the company of the insolent."

In the world of the yeshivot, where every free moment is devoted to Torah study, there is little spare time. Short breaks or summer

- 3 Rabbi Moshe Dov Wolner, Responsa *Sheiltat Hemdat Zvi*, part 1, Tel Aviv 5733, no. 22.
- 4 R. R. Blum, Responsa *Birkhot Shamayim*, part 1, New York 5751, Orah Haim 104. For *bittul torah* and "the company of the insolent" see following.

vacation are meant for rest and a lull from study. Even during these times, there were rabbis who adopted the above approach and did not encourage sport activity. Thus for example, it is related⁵ that during a visit of Rabbi Shimon Skopp to the Torah VeDaat yeshiva in Brooklyn -

It was recess time, and the boys were playing a game of baseball in the yard. And when he saw this he was astounded and full of wonder, and did not want to believe his eyes, because how could it be that students of the yeshiva, who study God's Torah, could spend their time in such folly.

In contrast to this radical approach, there is another, more moderate approach, which does not reject physical activity out of hand, but makes a distinction between physical activity for the sake of health, and physical activity which is not for health but only for the pleasure of the game. Rabbi Aharon Feiffer, who was a rabbi in Johannesburg, writes of the importance of maintaining a healthy body, since the body requires a rest and even play, so that a person may relax. But in his opinion, all activity must be done for the sake of heaven, as part of worshipping God, whereas "those who waste their time in games which do not serve heaven, are nearly equal to those who steal from the holy things of God."⁶ In other words, according to this view, the question is not whether physical activity or games are a basic need or *bittul torah*, since it is manifest that it is a basic need of man. The question is whether the person is engaging in physical activity as part of a basic need or if he has already played and exercised sufficiently, and is therefore now wasting time better spent elsewhere.

Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach also makes this distinction. A scholar in Jerusalem approached Rabbi Auerbach and told him that about 200 Americans had set up a sort of baseball league on Friday afternoons (when there is almost no study at yeshivot). His question was if participating in these games constituted "*bittul torah*." The

- 5 D. B. Schwartz, *Artzot HaHayim*, Brooklyn 5752, p. 16b. On the proper behavior during *ben haZmanim* see R. Y. Z. Segal, *Yerah VeDaat*, part 2, Lakewood 5749, pp. 83-87.
- 6 R. A. Pfeiffer, *Or Aharon*, Jerusalem 5758, p. 246.

rabbi asked him if he was playing for his health. The scholar replied that he jogs for his health and also runs two or three times a week, so that baseball was not his form of exercise. The rabbi answered him tactfully:

If so, then you have posed a difficult question. As you know, we are people who study Torah.... It sometimes happens that we waste time idly, in unnecessary talk with friends and such like things; it happens — but it is not all right. But to set a fixed weekly time for *bittul torah*?! That is a problem.

In other words, the rabbi was checking in his conversation with his interlocutor, what was the essence of the physical activity — was it for the sake of health or simply for pleasure.⁷

Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, head of the Yeshivat Torah VeDaat and a great American Torah scholar, must also be considered as espousing this approach. Rabbi Kamenetzky believed that the vacation of *ben haZmanim* should be utilized for the benefit of the pupils. He therefore established the Or Shraga Summer Camp, in which the first rule was to recognize the fact that this was not a framework to simply continue yeshiva life, but a framework designed for rest, relaxation and repose. A person who studies at camp as if in yeshiva, will one day find that he is no longer able to endure the usual study pace. Once a well-known rabbi came to visit the camp and wanted to teach a lesson at a time allotted for swimming and physical activity. Rabbi Kamenetzky refused to curtail the recess in order to enable him to teach the lesson.⁸

Rabbi Yisrael Meir Hacoen, the Hafetz Haim, surprisingly enough, adopted this approach, in an extreme manner at the beginning of the century. In a lecture on ethics which he gave at the yeshiva of Radin in 5653, he did not address the issue of engaging in physical activity at the expense of Torah study, but rather the obligation and the imperative of doing so. In his view, avoiding physical activity because of *bittul torah* is advice of the evil inclination, since by doing so, man is weakened and consequently is completely devoid of Torah, as he says:

7 Y. Eliyahu and R. Eliyahu, *HaTorah HaMesamahai*, Beit El 5758, p. 71.

8 N. Kamenetzky, *Rabbi Yaakov*, Jerusalem 5759, p. 246.

Do not study overmuch. Man must preserve the body so that it is not weakened, so that it does not fall ill, and for that it is crucial to rest and relax, to breathe fresh air. A walk should be taken toward evening, or sit at home and rest. When possible, a swim in the river is good for strengthening the body. Overindulgence in study is the advice of the evil inclination, which counsels working too hard in order to weaken the body, after which the person will be obliged to refrain entirely from Torah study, so that in the end his reward is his loss.

The Hafetz Haim himself explains the background to his approach later in the discussion: he related that during his youth he studied more than his strength would allow and weakened his eyes, subsequently the doctors ordered him not to read for two years, so that his reward was his loss.⁹

We have so far observed the various attitudes of the sages toward the relationship between physical activity and *bittul torah*. And what is the attitude of the rabbis toward physical activity at a time when there is no obligation to study Torah, for women for example, who are exempt from Torah study? One would think that the rabbis' attitude toward physical activity for women would be positive. It is difficult to find any reference to this issue in rabbinical literature, however, Rabbi Moshe Stern, in a ruling concerning playing ping-pong on the Sabbath, does distinguish between the two genders: It is forbidden for boys because of *bittul torah* and other reasons, while it is permissible to be more lenient toward girls who are permitted to play in an unobtrusive spot, since they enjoy it, while on week days it is not forbidden to them at all.¹⁰

9 See testimony of R. P. Mankin, in *Shaarei Tziyon*, Tamuz-Elul 5694, p. 45. On the health benefits of physical activity see R. A. Aviner, *Emunat HaHinukh*, Maale Adumim 5758, p. 86; R. M. I. Lipkowitz, *Imrei Daat*, Bnei Brak 5759, p. 120 (on swimming for health).

10 R. M. Stern, *Responsa Beer Moshe*, part 2, Jerusalem 5744, no. 27. Incidentally, I heard that the Agudat Yisrael youth movement wanted to buy a ping-pong table before the establishment of the State, and in order to obtain a purchase license, they approached R. S. Wozner of Bnei Brak who permitted them to play, while they did not even approach Jerusalem rabbis as they feared they would not allow it.

Now that we have seen the various approaches to the issue of *bittul torah*, let us look at some positive approaches by rabbis toward the matter of physical activity which is unrelated to time, and try to understand the background to these approaches.

TORAH WITH *DEREKH ERETZ*

In the middle of the 19th century, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch devised an educational-cultural approach known by the slogan "Torah with *derekh erez*," i.e., a combination of general studies and Torah studies. Among those espousing this approach were those who envisioned not only secular studies alongside holy studies, but physical health alongside spiritual health. Rabbi Hirsch himself writes of the importance of health and maintaining the body in his book *Horeb* (5733, p. 284), in relating to the biblical passage (Deut. 4:9) "take utmost care and guard yourself scrupulously": "use the routine of your life so that it bestows upon the body strength, health, courage and fortitude." Among those rabbis who adopted Rabbi Hirsch's viewpoint were those who also related, as part of their positive attitude toward general studies, to the cultivation of the body in a positive manner. We shall present one example.

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Carlebach served as rabbi in Altona and was the last rabbi of the Hamburg community until he was expelled and killed by the Nazis. The idea of Torah with *derekh erez* was a profound part of his outlook and he also applied it in the context of general culture and general studies. At the beginning of the century he spent a few years in Israel, and in 1905 toured the Galilee. In a letter which he sent, describing his feelings when he set eyes on Rosh Pina, he writes.¹¹

The tremendous moral satisfaction one feels just at the thought of being among Jews, not with those who pass their days in idleness and who live on handouts, but those who work hard and

11 Y. Z. Carlebach, *Mikhtavim MiYerushalayim*, Jerusalem 1996, p. 37.

diligently, Jews with learning on their lips and muscles on their arms.

In his pedagogic endeavors, Rabbi Carlebach was in support of physical education and encouraged it. In the 1920s, while working as the principal of the Reali Talmud Torah in Hamburg, he secured the expansion of gymnastics and the purchase of proper equipment, as well as regular swimming lessons. In a review which he wrote at the beginning of the thirties about the Agudat Yisrael summer camp for children and youth in Warsaw, Rabbi Carlebach also alluded to physical activities. He writes:¹²

A heart warming example of that (that religious Judaism is taking its fate into its own hands, is standing tall and proud and instead of passive resistance, is taking the initiative and insisting on what it wants...) can be seen...in "Rabka." The Warsaw branch of Agudat Yisrael has a few houses there in which they've established health camps for Haredi children.... It's wonderful to see the hundreds of children in their Hassidic garb carefully doing exercise routines, with the fringed undergarments of the teacher moving in time to the exercise...a spirit of independence emerges from these new enterprises, which are a result of dynamic Jewish life.

The goal of physical education is maintaining and strengthening the body. Through exercise and the spiritual effort involved in it, the pupil is invigorated and learns to endure adversity.¹³

THE AWAKENING OF NATIONALISM

The rabbinical figure which contributed more than anyone else to the subject of physical culture in the Middle Ages was, as mentioned, Maimonides. The central figure in the 20th century on this topic in the rabbinical world, was without a doubt, Rabbi Kook.

12 A translation from J. Carlebach, *Keren Hathora-Fahrt zu jüdischen, Kultur-Stätten des Ostens*, Wien 1934, pp. 80-81.

13 See Miriam Gilis, *Hinukh VeEmuna*, Tel Aviv 5740, p. 96.

As far as Maimonides goes, his remarks can be understood in the context of his being a doctor, and indeed the bulk of his writing on the issue of physical culture can be found in his medical writings. But what did Rabbi Kook have to do with physical culture? We shall examine the writings of the rabbi concerning physical activity and the responses of other rabbis to them, but first, let us begin with a brief historical background which can help us answer the above question.

The 19th century witnessed a revival in physical education in all of Europe as a means to instill national and social goals. Sport and exercise organizations sprouted in many countries, and in 1896 the Olympic games were renewed in Athens. This world resurgence of body development did not pass over the Jewish world. Many Zionist theorizers viewed bodily development as part of the national revival and as part of the new image of the Jew, as opposed to the image of the Diaspora Jew. Side by side with their call to go to Israel and leave the exile, they also related to rejuvenating the body. The most famous example of all was the call of Max Nordau, who was a doctor-psychiatrist and Herzl's assistant, to create a "Judaism with muscles." He believed that the revival of Judaism could not suffice with a general, spiritual and moral revival, but was also in need of a physical one and he therefore called for the establishment of Jewish sports establishments. Thus Jewish sports associations were established in Europe beginning in the mid 19th century. Physical education also began to infiltrate educational institutions in Israel, the first example being the Lemel School in Jerusalem, where in 1888 physical education began to be emphasized. Later on, sports associations began to burgeon in Israel: the Maccabi association was established in 1907, with the goal of providing "training for work and defense, and to fulfill all national values." In 1926 "Hapoel" was founded, with its primary goal being the physical development of the worker, improving his health and toughening his body. Nearly all members of these organizations were irreligious Jews.¹⁴ And then, in the year 1939, the religious sport association was founded, named "Elitzur." Its

14 See Sorek 1988 (cit. n. 2), chap. 4.

fundamental goal was to augment the physical power of religious youth in order to train them for national activity – guarding and defense, and indeed that is the purpose it served in its early years. Later on, particularly after the establishment of the State of Israel, this was no longer pertinent, and a new goal was fashioned, to create a framework for religious athletes who were unable to participate in the events of the other clubs.

The national revival and the new status of physical culture the world over, even among Jews, gave rise to a new attitude toward physical activity on the part of the rabbis at the beginning of the 20th century. It was almost inevitable that those rabbis who advocated Zionism adopted a favorable view toward physical activity. One might imagine that the tenet of Torah with *derekh eretz* might also have had an influence here, but now the emphasis was on the transition from Judaism in exile to Judaism in the land of Israel, a land which demanded physical activity in working the soil and defending the settlers.

As a first example, let us present the rabbis of Bulgaria. Less than 40,000 Jews lived in Bulgaria at the turn of the century, with the rabbis belonging to the moderate Orthodox stream. They were unusual among the rabbis of Europe in advocating Herzl's ideas at the close of the 19th century — they supported "Maccabi," and in synagogue even called on parents to send their children to this organization, in identification with Nordau's view regarding a healthy soul in a healthy body and physical revival as part of national revival. Incidentally, among the more extreme rabbis of Bulgaria was one named Rabbi Avraham Bachar, the rabbi of a community of Jews hailing from Sofia who lived in Jaffa, better known as the rabbi of Maccabi Jaffa. This anarchistic rabbi did not accept the rabbinate's authority and thought that football games on the Sabbath did not violate the holiness of the day, since it was not work but rather a pleasurable pastime. He went even farther and permitted those who could not get to a football field by foot, to travel there. The established rabbinate naturally did not agree with his opinions.¹⁵

15 Oral testimony from Mr. Victor Shem-Tov.

A second example: Rabbi Yitzhak Nissenbaum (1868–1942) was a writer and preacher, one of the leaders of religious Zionism and the president of the “Mizrahi” movement in Poland. He greatly emphasized the importance of physical labor in Israel and its material resurgence. In a sermon expounding on *parshat Emor* which he gave in 5658 (1898), Rabbi Nissenbaum claimed that the people of Israel had neglected body development in the Diaspora, and this neglect had led to spiritual dilution and national weakness. He contended that the Diaspora had not always scoffed at physical strength. He found confirmation of this opinion in the writings of the sages, as it is written: “And the priest who is greater than his brothers – greater in strength.” In other words, physical strength was an essential attribute for a high priest. The prophet also had to be physically strong since (Shabbat 92a) “the Divine Presence rests on those who are wise, heroic, rich and of stature.” Legend tells of the forefathers as being strong people: Abraham’s steps spanned three miles (Bereishit Raba 43), Jacob rolled the stone off the well like someone removing a cork from a bottle, etc. In other words: before the exile, the nation of Israel attributed the proper moral importance to strength and heroism, as “it is in their power to rescue the downtrodden and to protect the weak.” In the past, parents taught their children to be healthy in their body in order to grow up like the heroes and devote their physical strength to protecting their people.¹⁶

Another example of a rabbi who saw body development as integral to national revival is Rabbi Dr. Yosef Zeliger (1872–1919), a Galician sage and pedagogue who came to Israel in 1907 and became the editor of the “Bat Kol” newspaper. In 5673 he published an article in “Bat Kol” entitled “Soul and Body,” in which he wrote that man is not perfect if all his physical and spiritual powers are undeveloped. We must not revert to Greek culture where respect of God was replaced by respect for the body, but on the other hand, in

16 R. Y. Nissenbaum, *Drashot LeKhol Shabbatot HaShana VeHaMoadim*, Vilna 5668, pp. 176–179. Incidentally, regarding the meaning of the term “heroism”: R. H. Schmulevitz, *Sihot Musar*, Jerusalem 5740, pp. 99–103, does not explain the term “heroism” in the sources in its simple sense of physical strength, but rather utilizing this strength for speed and diligence, as opposed to laziness. Mr. Binyamin Baron drew my attention to this.

order to defeat the Greeks, “Mattitiah and his friends were in need of muscles, in addition to their wisdom and holiness.” In “recent centuries,” our forefathers became accustomed to neglecting the body, but today there is a new dawn and the days of deeds and strength are at hand. He concludes his remarks saying that the Israeli soul sings to the Lord, “my soul and my body are yours,” and if we maintain a healthy body and a pure soul, we can also say “our soul and our body.” Rabbi Zeliger also integrates the idea of Torah with *derekh erez* in his discourse.¹⁷

Finally, we must make note of Rabbi Yehuda Leib Graubart (1861–1937), a rabbi in Poland and Russia, author of *Responsa Havalim BaNe'imim*, a leader of the Mizrahi movement. In 5679 Rabbi Graubart lectured at the second national conference of Mizrahi on problems in education, and proposed a curriculum combining Torah with general studies. He devoted some of his remarks to the issue of physical culture, saying:

We must raise a strong generation, one which has solid muscles, and adopt the rule of: “a healthy soul in a healthy body.” Somehow a foolish belief has taken hold which avers that it is a mark of honor to be weak and feeble, as if this was synonymous with “righteous and holy.” We must protest this nonsense, and make it known that the strong are to be admired for their strength, and not the weak for their weakness. Weakness is not a virtue. Those whose body is weak are also weakened in spirit. The majority of abased cravings derive from a frail body. Boys must enjoy fresh air as much as possible, to stroll in the fields, to stretch their bones. We were once a mighty nation – and we must be one again. Let us go from strength to strength!¹⁸

RABBI AVRAHAM YITZHAK HACHOHEN KOOK

Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hachohen Kook (1865–1935) was active in Israel in the years of the second and third *aliyot*. This was at the time when the national reawakening in Israel was at its height,

17 Leah Zeliger (ed.), *Kivvei Dr. Yosef Zeliger*, Jerusalem 5790, pp. 317–318.

18 *HaMizrah* 19–21, 14th of Iyar 5679, p. 27.

when Jews immigrated from the Diaspora and embarked on building the land. Educators of that generation wrote of sport as a means of promoting *aliya*. Sports competitions began to be organized, and as early as 1919, the Maccabi Games were held in Jerusalem. With this backdrop, it was natural for Rabbi Kook, who was attuned both to the pioneers and the residents, to relate in his writings to physical culture. And indeed, in his books and in his writings, Rabbi Kook refers a great deal to the importance of physical health. His primary allusion to physical activity can be found in his book *Orot*, first printed in the summer of 5680 (1920). This thoughtful book on the national revival of the people of Israel in its land includes two passages which relate to the importance of physical health. In the first passage, Rabbi Kook writes (p. 80):

Our physical needs are great; we require a healthy body. We have been preoccupied with spirituality, we have forgotten the sanctity of the body, we have neglected the importance of health and the significance of the material. We have forgotten that our flesh is holy, no less than our souls. We have rejected the life of deeds... Redemption will come in all its glory, only if there is a corporeal redemption, creating healthy flesh and blood, comely and hardy bodies, with a shining spirit adorning powerful muscles, and by means of this sanctified flesh, the weakened soul shall radiate through, a reminder of the material resurrection of the body.

A few comments are in order regarding the above passage:

A. In describing the neglect of the body, Rabbi Kook uses the past tense: "we were occupied...we forgot...we neglected...we rejected," with the solution being a return to the faith, a repentance, in a physical sense. The past which Rabbi Kook is referring to is the exile, the time during which "we rejected the world of deeds." Physical health in this context is linked to the redemption of the land, as contrasted to the situation in the exile.

B. Rabbi Kook talks about a corporeal return to the faith/repentance. This is in line with his viewpoint, as delineated in his book *Orot HaTshuva*, that the act of returning/repentance has several stages, the first being a natural one, i.e., returning the body to its potency and well-being.

C. At the end of the passage, Rabbi Kook writes that by means of the sanctified flesh, the weakened soul would radiate through. In other words, this constitutes a viewpoint which asserts that man is an organism comprised of both a body and a soul, and in order for the soul to be healthy, the body must be healthy and strong, ergo, it is important to develop the body. He also raised this idea in his other writings. Thus for example he writes in his great essay *Ein Aya* about the legends in Tractate Berakhot (p. 59, sect. 165):

The power of the soul is very much dependent on the state of the body and its health. We learn from this to what degree we must hone our bodily strength, because this has implications for our spiritual growth.

This view regarding the benefits of physical health to spiritual health can be found in ancient times. According to the Platonic conception, nourishing the body is beneficial to the spirit.¹⁹ Even Jewish sages at the time wrote along these lines, such as Assaf Harofe, Maimonides, and others.²⁰

Let us now turn our attention to the second passage in *Orot*, the most famous. The following is the most important part of his statement:

Exercise, which the youth of Israel do in the Land of Israel to strengthen their body in order to become brave sons of the nation, refines the spirit of the most righteous, those who busy themselves with disseminating the light of God unto the world. And this light cannot stand alone...let the boys laugh and strengthen their muscles and their spirit for the nation. This holy work sends the Divine Spirit higher and higher, just as do the hymns of glory as recited by King David in the Book of Psalms. The soul ascends to lofty heights by means of exalted intentions, while by means of deeds which strain the body of those who work for the good of all, external spirituality grows. Together they amplify their degree of holiness, and reflect the character of

¹⁹ Sorek 1988 (cit. n. 2), p. 37.

²⁰ On the approach of Jewish doctors see Sorek 1980 (cit. n. 2), p. 13 and following.

the nation as reflected in the short verse so central to all of Torah: know Him in all thy ways.

In this case, the benefits of strengthening the nation by means of physical development are presented in reference to the youth of Israel, who prepare for war against its enemies. This idea is somewhat similar to the earlier passage, which described man as being comprised of a body and a soul. Here, however, the reference is to the entire nation of Israel: the nation is composed of people of the body and people of the spirit, and it is incomplete without both kinds. The physical activity of Israeli soldiers is presented here as being beneficial and as enriching the spiritual activity of the righteous. Rabbi Kook formulates this idea in other places as well (for example *Orot Yisrael* 9, 5, printed in 5703). Yosef Yekutieli, chairman of Maccabi Israel, said similar things in Rabbi Kook's name later on, in 5691 (1931). Yekutieli wrote what he had heard from Rabbi Kook while visiting him in order to resolve the matter of sports on the Sabbath. This is what Rabbi Kook said, according to Yekutieli:

Sport is an act of holiness. The Maccabi movement is one of the most important elements in our national revival. Sport embodies both delicacy and nobility. My view of exercise has recently been published, and I have not changed my mind. There is a lot of idealism in sport. We must restore to our people the heroism of the heroes of Judah, so vital to rebuilding our country and our nation. Those who take a negative view of sport are in error; this view does not suit life and reality. As we say [about God], "a king who desires life," and we therefore must fight against all the obstacles on our path, we must strengthen our abilities and utilize them to build the nation.²¹

Rabbi Kook was well aware that the second passage in *Orot* could arouse disapproving reactions. Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook testifies that even before *Orot* was printed, he commented to his father that it would perhaps be better to omit this passage because many would misunderstand it, and the rabbi's adversaries would exploit it to

21 *Doar HaYom*, Nissan 2, 5691.

incite. But Rabbi Kook replied that he had no fear of flesh and blood.²² Why was it so important to Rabbi Kook to publish this passage? Although a difficult question to answer, in this case it is possible. That is because the passage became, as anticipated immediately upon the book's publication, the most famous passage in the entire book and the one which aroused the most extreme reactions. Rabbi Kook indeed never retracted his opinion, but he was compelled to reply to those who appealed to him to explain his remarks, and one can understand from his explanations why he insisted on publishing the passage. First let us turn our attention to some of the opposition the passage aroused.

Rabbi Kook's outlook was exceptional for that time. The rabbis of the "old yishuv" did not view physical development as a spiritual value. Physical activity was conceived of as something which characterized Greek culture and was opposed to the spirit of Judaism. Rabbi Kook was forced to bear the brunt of insults and ignominy in wake of his statements, and not only from fanatical zealots, but even from important rabbis whom he himself admired. As early as the month of Av 5680, just after *Orot* was printed, Rabbi Kook wrote to his parents that there were people who were upset by the book.²³ Indeed, there is much evidence of opposition to it just after its publication. Rabbi Yitzhak Diskin and Rabbi Y. H. Sonnenfeld, together with members of the *Badatz* rabbinical court, sent a copy of the book along with a letter, to an overseas rabbi in the month of Elul 5680. They express their profound reservations to *Orot* in the letter and ask that he, the rabbi, publish along with other rabbis, a prohibition on reading Rabbi Kook's writings. The principal statement they did not agree with is the second passage on exercise, which aroused their anxiety lest this influence young people adversely.²⁴ Placards were even posted against Rabbi Kook's view of physical culture. An anonymous poster put up in the year of 5682 (1922) condemns Rabbi Kook with these words:²⁵ "those who

22 S. Y. Agnon, *Sefer, Sofer VeSippur*, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv 5738, p. 352; S. Hacoheh Avidor, *Halsh Neged HaZerem*, Jerusalem 5722, pp. 184-185.

23 Rabbi Kook, *Igrot HaRaaya*, part 4, Jerusalem, 5744, no. 1049.

24 See H. Hacoheh Horowitz, *Tosafot Hayim*, Jerusalem 5686, p. 5.

25 Photograph of the poster from: *LeSha'a UleDorot*, part 2, Jerusalem, 5731, p. 72.

find holiness in a game of football shall not take part in our hallowed institutions." Opposition continued to reverberate even later on: At the beginning of the 1930s (5692?), Rabbi Y. H. Sonnenfeld and Rabbi Eliyahu Klatzkin and members of the *Badatz* published a poster relating to football games on the Sabbath as well as to the game itself and to the Rabbi Kook's statements praising physical activity in order to strengthen the nation.²⁶ First they express reservations against the game itself:

We were overcome with grief and distress to see the hooligans of our people indulging in a profligate game of football, with many other youngsters going astray and being enticed into watching this horrific spectacle, thus forfeiting the modesty and morals of the people of Israel and its holiness.

Later on there is a passage against holding football games on the Sabbath, followed by a passage which reproves Rabbi Kook, particularly for his statements in *Orot*:

There are errant people who believe that deceptions of this sort "are necessary in order to build the nation and the country." However, all those who believe in the words of our holy Torah know that salvation will not come through either force or human strength, but through strengthening Torah and worship of God, through which redemption will come with God's help. The idea that redemption will ensue by force and by human strength, is heresy, God forbid, which originates in the misguiding thinking of external books.

Immediately following, there is a sentence which scoffs at Rabbi Kook's remarks to members of Maccabi: "The 'King who desires life' has no desire for wicked people who are considered dead in their lives." Incidentally, it should be mentioned that even before the appearance of *Orot*, there were rabbis of the old yishuv who disagreed ideologically with Rabbi Kook on other matters, thus the discord over physical activity was just another minor detail.

26 Photograph of poster see Y. B. Beeri, *Ohev Yisrael BiKdusha*, part 3, Tel Aviv 5749, p. 112 (see there for additional sources).

However, there were also those who appealed to Rabbi Kook in a more courteous manner, asking him to explain his remarks. Thus for example, in a letter from 5686 (1926) which relates to football, he explains to Rabbi Hona Ansbacher, the rabbi of an Orthodox congregation in Wiesbaden, Germany, the rationale behind his statements:

Those youngsters who are enamored of physical activity, who believe that this is the pinnacle of perfection, and who scorn Torah scholars thinking they know nothing of life – they are misguided. If they would only devote their ways and their thoughts accordingly, it would be possible to elevate the idea of physical activity even further in the service of the people of Israel, until it stood at the highest rung of holiness, thereby conferring strength to those righteous and holy men who themselves would rise in holiness. Thus a great treasure would be found in Israel, made up of life forces which would be utilized both for holiness and purity as well as for striking fear into the enemies of Israel, as in the time of the ancient heroes and the troops of King David.²⁷

In other words: There are Jews who engage in physical activity and who are detached from Torah and the commandments. However, their activity can be channeled away from secular pursuits (engaging in sport as part of casting off the yoke of the commandments) toward holy pursuits, when those who engage in sport channel their pursuits into serving the nation. Thus these young people can be brought closer to their father in heaven. The expression "know Him in all ways," cited by the rabbi in the second passage, can serve as the foundation for athletic youngsters if only they steer their activities toward serving all of Israel. In his response to Rabbi Ansbacher, Rabbi Kook is careful to clarify that under no circumstances is physical activity permitted if it involves desecration of the Sabbath.

27 The letter was published in *Pri HaAretz* 4 (5742): 6–7. Another letter in the same vein sent at around the same time was published in *Nekuda* 113 (5747): 23. Regarding Rabbi Kook's views on exercise see also A. Shapir, "HaRav Kook VeYahaso LeFeilut Gufanit ULeSport," *Hagigei Giv'a* 4 (5756): 147–157.

Pursuant to the attacks and questions to Rabbi Kook's remarks, there were also rabbis who supported him and defended him. One can understand from their statements that Rabbi Kook was not alone in his views. Following are three instances.

In the summer of 5680 (1920), a short time after *Orot* was published, Mr. Isaac Ben Tovim wrote to Rabbi Y. M. Harlap, a student of Rabbi Kook's, and asked him to explain certain passages of the book, particularly chapter 34 of *Orot haTeḥiya*, the passage dealt with here. Rabbi Harlap wrote him a long reply at the beginning of Elul 5680, which was printed in the volume *Tovim Meorot* in which he elucidates the ideas of Rabbi Kook. Like Rabbi Nissenbaum at the time, Rabbi Harlap also relates to the topic of prophecy, and interprets the importance of physical heroism in the land of Israel as a precondition for receiving the gift of prophecy and the divine spirit, as it is written "prophecy comes to one who is a hero, wise, modest and rich." This is in contrast to the situation in the exile, when Israel was enslaved to other nations and its body was weak and oppressed, which is why it was unable to receive the Holy Spirit.²⁸ This treatise by Rabbi Harlap was also greeted by wrathful letters from zealots opposed to Rabbi Kook, as can be seen in a letter Rabbi Kook sent to his son in Tishrei 5681.²⁹ Later evidence comes from a satirical Haredi newspaper called *HaMetapeah* published by Haredi extremists just before Purim 5683, which was written as a polemic against Rabbi Kook. At the end of the newspaper (p. 4), a small ad appears which scoffs at both rabbis. It says:

On Purim, when everyone is drunk, the "surma" (sic) of the rabbis will debate the question of exercise as it appears in *Orot* and in *Tovim Meorot* to an audience of thousands. All those who like sport and who wish to send the divine spirit upwards and away are asked to come, and can kiss the rabbi after the lecture, in Mercas Ha-Rav, as customary.

Another rabbi who expressed support of Rabbi Kook was Rabbi Naḥman Shlomo Greenspan, head of the Etz Haim yeshiva in

28 R. Y. M. Harlap, *Tovim Meorot*, Jerusalem 5727, pp. 9–11.

29 *Igrot HaRaaya* (cit. n. 23), no. 1063.

London. Rabbi Greenspan published a short review of *Orot* in the middle of 5681 (1921) in which he related to critics of Rabbi Kook for the latter's praise of athletes who strengthen their bodies for the good of the nation. He expresses astonishment at the critics, since it is after all obvious that it is a great *mitzva* [good deed] to maintain the health of the nation and to strengthen it, and when the body is impaired, so is the spirit. As evidence, he cites Maimonides in the *Guide* (3, 25) who writes that when foolish people partake of exercise it is a mockery, while when the wise do so, it is not.³⁰

A few years later, in the winter of 5685 (1925), the matter came up once again, this time overseas – in an essay by Rabbi Haim Hirschensohn, one of the foremost rabbis of Mizrahi and the rabbi of an Orthodox congregation in New Jersey.³¹ Rabbi Hirschensohn comments on a letter which he received from another learned rabbi who wrote to him:

If our friend, the genius Rabbi Kook, may he live long, would deal in matters of Torah and cease his well-known study of physical activity asserting that "exercise is like saying Psalms," he would earn the respect of all people, but by turning his attention to these matters, honor is denied him.

To this, Rabbi Hirschensohn replied in an even more far-reaching manner than Rabbi Kook. He praised the courage of Rabbi Kook in writing these things. After that he related to the comparison which Rabbi Kook drew between exercise and saying the Psalms of King David, and he made it very clear: "Rabbi Kook did not relate to the study of Psalms, but rather to the reciting of Psalms. If he had been referring to study, there would be reason to disagree with him, as 'the study of Torah is above all,' but as far as reciting Psalms, it is clear that strengthening the youngsters to enable them to defend themselves from enemies is a bigger *mitzva* than saying Psalms without learning them. He therefore expressed astonishment at Rabbi Kook:

30 R. N. S. Greenspan, "Or Zarua LaTzadik," *Shaarei Tziyon* (Shvat-Adar 5681): 17–18. My thanks to Mr. T. Preshel for drawing my attention to this.

31 R. H. Hirschensohn, *Hidushei Haraha*, part 3, Jerusalem 5686, section 23. My thanks to R. M. Wonder for drawing my attention to it.

How could Rabbi Kook write that [engaging in sport] is equivalent to reciting Psalms, after all it is way above that... reciting the Psalms is the work of lazy people whereas exercise is the work of industrious people. "See a man skilled at his work — He shall attend upon kings, he shall not attend upon obscure men" (Proverbs 22:29), who do not understand what industrious-ness or exercise are.

We have, therefore, three rabbis, two from overseas and one from Rabbi Kook's circle in Israel, who supported Rabbi Kook's views. Another rabbi also upheld Rabbi Kook's approach and developed his ideas even further. I am referring to Rabbi Yeshayahu Shapira, *haAdmor heHalutz*. Rabbi Shapira authored an article on youth movements in which he described the dangers to youth in his time, resulting from the fact that they do not go out to work at the age of 13, but much later on. Between the ages of childhood and adolescence much time is therefore lost, and there is a risk lest a person begin to follow a worthless lifestyle. A suitable Jewish Torah framework must therefore be created: a religious-traditional youth movement. In his opinion, youth activity must be directed toward morals. Among those activities which must be channeled in a religious-ethical direction are sports. He quotes from Rabbi Kook's second passage, and writes:

Here we have a complete system of sport for its own sake, for serving God, which can be expanded and broadened and fulfilled. This is the direction physical culture should take. And the pleasure the body takes in sport does not detract from it.³²

He believes that exercise is also valuable for health reasons, but he adds a religious dimension to exercise which is not found in rabbinical literature, the esthetic angle:

The pleasing appearance of the body also has great religious value, and in ancient times, this was one of the praises of Israel. "our boys are like saplings, our girls are shapely...happy is the nation which has these attributes" (Psalms 144:12-15).

32 The article appears in S. Daniel, *Rabbi Yeshayahu Shapira*, Tel Aviv 5706, p. 81.

ELITZUR

Elitzur, as mentioned, had two goals: first to train religious boys for security-related needs, and after the state was established it constituted a framework for religious athletes. There are few indications of links between Elitzur and the rabbis at the beginning of Elitzur in the 1940s. The connection was reflected mainly in that the rabbis of Mizrahi, such as Rabbi Yeshayahu Shapira and Rabbi Meir Bar Ilan, were helpful in raising funds for the organization.³³ There are a few writings quoting the rabbis' statements about this movement. Rabbi Shapira related to Elitzur in a letter which he sent (via A. Bart and A. Halevy Fränkel) to friends of Elitzur in reference to a request by Elitzur for financial help. In the letter he notes the importance of the enterprise for the defense of the country. This was during the early years of the movement, when activity constituted a framework for military training:

It is important that in tandem with the spiritual strengthening of the youth, their body be strengthened by exercise, to enable them to fulfill the national missions assigned to the youth at this time. Nonetheless, it is important that this be undertaken in a religious framework, so that the youth understand that physical culture is not worship of the body but rather preparation of a healthy body for the healthy and whole soul of the young Jew.³⁴

Rabbi Meir Bar Ilan referred to Elitzur with affection. He believed it was important that Elitzur existed as a religious sport organization. In a Mizrahi meeting which took place after the establishment of the state, he said:³⁵

Even today, when we have merited the grace of God who has given us the State of Israel, sport is still very important for religious youth, as is education for self-reliance. Hapoel and Maccabi reject us, and we do not approve of the atmosphere in those organizations. If Elitzur did not already exist, we would

33 See Y. A. Eliash, *Maase HaBa BeHazon*, Tel Aviv 5743, p. 245.

34 In *Dvar Elitzur* (Heshvan 5706): 4.

35 In Y. Gush-Zahav, "HaRav Bar Ilan VeElitzur," *Igud* (Iyar-Nissan 5709): 7. See also Eliash (cit. n. 33), p. 292.

have to establish it now. Elitzur's activities have more influence and uphold the dignity of Judaism more than any propaganda speeches and rallies.

The rabbi was to have spoken at a national convention of Elitzur at Beit Meir on the 18th of Nissan 5709 in the evening, but he passed away that same evening a short time before the convention, and S. Z. Shragai spoke in his stead.

The founder of Elitzur as a religious athletic organization in 5709 (1949), was Yehiel Eliash. In his autobiography, "The Visionary" (note 33, p. 236), he writes that when he set up this athletic enterprise, he was guided by the words of Rabbi Kook in the first passage mentioned above: "we need healthy bodies." Even 30 years after they were written, Rabbi Kook's words served as the ideological basis for the founding of a religious sports organization.

PHYSICAL CULTURE AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

When Rabbi Isser Yehuda Unterman was chief rabbi of Tel Aviv, he was invited to greet the Elitzur organization on the occasion of its 10th anniversary on Tishrei 5710 (1950). In his remarks, Rabbi Unterman spoke of the benefits of sport to education, order and discipline.³⁶ His remarks have unfortunately not been preserved, making it difficult to recollect them precisely.

Educational benefit of another kind related to sport as mentioned by the rabbis, is interest in and, knowledge of, sports. A rabbi who discloses his knowledge of sports competitions to his pupils can win their sympathy. One teacher in Kfar HaRoeh yeshiva relates that Rabbi Moshe Zvi Neria, the head of the yeshiva, approached him once and asked him what he thought "of Ohana's goal?" To the teacher's astonishment, Rabbi Neria explained that it was important to read the sports pages in order to better communicate with the youngsters, and that the head of a high school yeshiva must not only be interested in sports but also mention football games in

36 Article in *Hatzofe*, 18th Tishrei 5710 (11.10.1949): 1.

conversation, so that the boys feel that the rabbi identifies with and understands them.³⁷ Rabbis in yeshivot in the United States also testified that they use analogies from the field of sports in order to capture the attention of their pupils.³⁸

As a sideline to the pedagogical issues of physical and religious education, we mention that a physical education teacher, in the framework of his lessons, can also instill various religious values in his pupils. The pupils are not in the usual frontal class framework, but in an informal framework — a gym or a field, and therefore the influence of the teacher can be greater (such as when religious values are taught in the framework of a field trip). We note a few examples here. A teacher requires that his pupils appear in gym class with a kippa, and if the kippa falls the game can be stopped to allow him to pick it up without this affecting the game. Values of Zionism can be imparted: the teacher is careful to ensure that girls and boys do not exercise together, and that girls be taught by a female teacher so they not feel bashful. The teacher can ensure that the commandments pertaining to conduct between man and his fellowman are maintained: a weaker rival should not be insulted or jeered at, one must not get angry at a classmate during a game. Honesty and fairness must be adhered to during games. I was unable to find any reference in rabbinical literature to imparting religious values through sport, despite the fact that in Torah institutions, time has been set aside for gym classes ever since the 1920s.³⁹

37 See *Meorot Neria: Purim*, Kiryat Malachi 5757, p. 129.

38 W. B. Helmreich, *The World of the Yeshiva*, New York 1982, pp. 161–162, 184.

39 See A. Zuchman, *HaPeilut HaGufanit BeMahshevet HaYahadut VeHaqnayat Arakhim Datiyim BeEmsaut Horaat HaHinukh HaGufani*, Ph.D. dissertation, Yeshiva University, 5746, pp. 113–127. Incidentally, on the removal of skullcaps during ball playing, see R. H. D. Halevy, *Responsa Ase Lekha Rav*, part 8, Tel Aviv 5748, p. 335.

PHYSICAL CULTURE AS IT CLASHES WITH HALAKHA

Most allusions to physical cultivation in rabbinical literature in the 20th century are in the framework of responses to questions concerning physical activity insofar as it conflicts with the world of halakha. There is almost no opinion expressed in the rabbis' responses about physical activity in and of itself, since they were not asked about this. They do, however, express themselves on halakhic questions pertaining to physical activity. What halakhic restrictions must a person engaging in sport be aware of? They can be categorized under three headings: time (in other words, timing of the activity), place, and essence.

The issue of time or timing of physical activity is the most frequently one raised. Halakhic rulers were asked about physical activity on the Sabbath. Various concerns are raised: weekday behavior (*ovadin deHol*), the prohibition against healing on Shabbat, and others. The question of ball games on the Sabbath comes up often. There were rabbis who found various prohibitions in this regard,⁴⁰ and there were those who were more lenient. We shall present two cases of lenient rulings.

In the year 5686 (1926), Rabbi Kook wrote a letter to a rabbi in Germany (see above, page 75), stipulating that playing football on the Sabbath is permissible if it does not involve desecration of the Sabbath. Rabbi Kook also clarified why he allows young people to play on the Sabbath: they could examine the sources and see that there were those who allowed it, and if he would tell them it was forbidden, they would tell him that he was piling on restrictions to something which has been permitted. Incidentally, with regard to *bittul torah*, Rabbi Kook writes that this is not applicable, because in any case they would not be studying and would not accept the prohibition therefore, it is better that they should err honestly and not deliberately. In other words, Rabbi Kook believes that not everything should be prohibited for reasons of *bittul torah*, but it depends on who is asking.

40 For example: Blum (cit. n. 4), R. M. Isaacson, Responsa *Mevasser Tov*, part 1, Brooklyn 5735, note 19.

A second example: Rabbi Dov Eliezerov was the rabbi of the detainees at the Latrun camp during the War of Independence (and later the rabbi of the Katamon neighborhood in Jerusalem). The detainees asked him if they were allowed to play football on the Sabbath. In an introduction to his reply he relates that he in turn approached Rabbi Uziel on this question, who answered him in a way reminiscent of Rabbi Kook:

His answer was that I should tell them that he is studying the matter and as for now, he has not found any reason neither to allow it nor to forbid it. However, in fact, he told me that if in any case they will not adhere to a prohibition, it is better that they should err honestly and not deliberately.⁴¹

In his response, Rabbi Eliezerov concludes that there is no problem in the game itself, but rather in all the aspects that pertain to the game: traveling, buying and selling, *bittul torah*, forgoing prayer, and the general frivolity of the activity.

An additional problem related to physical activity on the Sabbath relates to exercising with equipment. Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg was asked about using an expander, a muscle flexer, composed of several springs three-quarters of a meter long, for building muscle tone. The rabbi prohibited using this apparatus for reasons of weekday activities and the prohibition against healing on Shabbat, but he did allow the use of a smaller instrument to strengthen the wrist and fingers. Another problem was the relaxing and loosening of muscles by doing stretching exercises.⁴² R. S. Z. Auerbach distinguished between cases where a doctor has instructed that physical activity be undertaken, whereupon it is forbidden, and

41 R. D. Eliezerov, Responsa *Shaali Tziyon*, part 1, Jerusalem 5722, no. 11. For another ruling see R. L. Y. Rabinowitz, "Kaduregel BeShabbat Lefi HaHalakha: Mutar," *HaHinukh HaGufani* (Iyar-Sivan 5739): 7-8. On basketball see R. S. Aviner, Responsa *Am KeLavi*, part 1, Jerusalem 5743, no. 143-144.

42 R. A. Waldenberg, Responsa *Tzits Eliezer*, part 6, Jerusalem 5745, no. 4. For a response from the 1920's on exercises and gymnastics on the Sabbath see R. S. Greenfeld, Responsa *Maharsha*, part 2, Jerusalem 5743, no. 93.

cases where there is no instruction from a doctor, but only the personal initiative of a person, in which case it is permissible.⁴³

Let us now move on from timing to location. The most prominent example is mixed bathing. This subject was often brought to halakhic authorities to make a decision, as in the famous "disputed pool" in Jerusalem which was a topic of dissension in the 1950s. The question of separation between the sexes while swimming often comes up in religious communities, and the local rabbi is frequently compelled to conflict with his congregants. This is what happened at Kibbutz Lavi: the kibbutz guesthouse published an announcement that there was both "separate and mixed" bathing at the pool. In wake of this, the rabbi of the kibbutz, Rabbi Shlomo Aviner, published an announcement in the paper that he does not allow this but that he was unable to revoke it. He added:

I have a tradition from my rabbis that there are many excellent things on the kibbutz, as well as some things which need to be amended, as in all communities. The most serious matter, among the things which require correction, is the matter of mixed bathing.⁴⁴

One of the major reasons that Rabbi Aviner left the kibbutz was the dispute among kibbutz members over the pool. Not only was the bathing mixed, but ball games were as well, which entailed forbidden physical contact between boys and girls.⁴⁵ Another problem which arose in connection to the site of the activity was playing ball in a place of forbidden worship. Rabbi M. Feinstein forbade children from playing ball at a non-Jewish prayer house, apparently a churchyard, lest they be influenced by the worshippers.⁴⁶

The third type of problem is unrelated to either the timing or the place of activity, but rather to the essence of the activity. Thus for example, Rabbi M. Feinstein was asked if it was permissible to earn

43 See A. Halperin, "Hitamlut BeShabbat," *Gulot* 3 (5755): 87.

44 See R. S. Aviner, note 41 above, no. 337. On mixed bathing see also R. S. Katz, *Kedoshim Tihyu*, Jerusalem 5740, according to the index.

45 Katz, *ibid.*, p. 93.

46 R. M. Feinstein, Responsa *Igrot Moshe*, Oraḥ Hayim, part 4, *Bnei Brak* 5748, 40, 26. See also R. M. Klein, Responsa *Mishne Halakhot*, part 6, New York 5758, no. 138.

a living from throwing balls (there are no details to explain what game is meant), lest someone get hurt, which can occur once in every couple of thousand throws. The rabbi allowed it, even when the risks were greater.⁴⁷ Another example: Rabbi Isser Yehuda Unterman was asked about schools overseas where wrestling and boxing were included in physical education classes. The question was if this was permissible since someone might hurt their classmate, thus breaking the commandment. The rabbi allowed it, since in his opinion, the prohibition against injury refers only to that resulting from a brawl, as Maimonides says (*Mishne Torah*, Hil. Hovel, 5,1): "Any person who hits another...is breaking a commandment." But in this case, since wrestling and boxing are competitive activities and undertaken voluntarily with the purpose of overcoming another through strength, and if any injury occurs, it is purely accidental, it is permitted.⁴⁸ A third example is the response which appears in Responsa *Mar'eh HaBazak* (Jerusalem, 5756, p. 78) permitting drills and breathing exercises as in yoga, but forbids any religious ritual (meaning Eastern religions) which accompany the drills.

Until now we have seen the answers of rabbis to questions concerning physical activity, but there were also rabbis who themselves initiated the issue of physical activity. There were rabbis who cautioned against physical activity which bordered on Torah prohibitions or which could lead to a violation of a commandment, or building sports installations where forbidden activity might take place. These warnings, unlike the responses, are not directed toward specific people but to the general public. We shall cite a few examples.

In the 1920s, when organized sports competitions began on the Sabbath as part of Maccabiya, the question of football games on the Sabbath became an issue. In Adar 5687 (1927), Israeli rabbis circulated a "public announcement" signed by dozens of rabbis, foremost among them Rabbi Kook and Rabbi Sonnenfeld, that this was forbidden not only to the players, but to the spectators as well,

47 R. M. Feinstein, Responsa *Igrot Moshe*, Oraḥ Hayim, part 1, New York 5724, no. 104.

48 R. A. Y. Unterman, *Shevet MiYehuda*, part 1, Jerusalem 5744, pp. 439-444. My thanks to Mr. Yehuda Galinsky for drawing my attention to this.

since they were assisting in breaking a commandment.⁴⁹ Rabbi Kook himself sent a letter to members of the Zionist Congress in the summer of 5687 (1927), asking them to wield their influence on sports organizers so that games not be held on the Sabbath.⁵⁰ In 5691 (1931) Rabbi Kook again moved to prevent Sabbath desecration by football games. This can be seen from a poster published by Yosef Yekutieli, the chairman of the Maccabi movement in Israel, reporting that a Maccabi delegation visited the rabbi, who told them that he sees many positive things in sport but that it must not take place on the Sabbath. Consequently, the committee decided not to sell tickets to Jews on the Sabbath, to forbid smoking on the field, and that there would be no sales during games. (See above near note 21).

The first Maccabiya took place in Tel Aviv in 5692 (1932). The chief rabbis of Tel Aviv–Jaffa, Rabbi Shlomo Aharonson and Rabbi Ben Tziyon Meir Hai Uziel, wrote a letter to the directors of the Jewish Agency, asking them to persuade the Maccabiya committee to avoid games on the Sabbath.⁵¹ At the second Maccabiya in 5698 (1938). Rabbi Uziel, chief rabbi of Tel Aviv, greeted the Maccabiya participants and spectators. Most of his remarks were devoted to welcoming Jews who had come to the Maccabiya from all over the world, but he ended with a mention of sport in the halakhic context: Since the land of Israel is the holy land and public and noisy games of sport should be avoided on the Sabbath and on holidays.⁵²

Rabbi Eliezer Menahem Shach and Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky published letters of protest against building mixed-bathing swimming pools and against the erection of sports installations which would be in use on the Sabbath.⁵³ A bill was

49 A photograph of the announcement can be seen in S. Raz, *Malachim KiVnei Adam*, Jerusalem 5754, p. 61.

50 Rabbi Kook, *Hazon HaGeula*, Jerusalem 5701, p. 242.

51 The letter, dated 7th of Shvat 5692, can be found in the Central Zionist Archives, numbered: S-25/6716.

52 His remarks can be found in M. Ovadyahu (ed.), *Sefer HaMaccabiya*, Tel Aviv 5698, p. 27. Another speech by Rabbi Uziel at the 11th Maccabi congress at the end of the 1920's can be found in his book, *Milchamot Uziel*, Tel Aviv 5699, pp. 481–483.

53 Rabbi E. M. Shach, *Mikhtavim UMamarim*, Bnei Brak 5748, part 1, p. 159; part 3, pp. 112–113; Rabbi Y. Y. Kanievsky, *Karyana Deigarta*,

even proposed in the Israeli Knesset pertaining to physical activity when it clashed with halacha. We are referring to the bill submitted by Rabbi Yitzhak Levy in Sivan 5750 (1990) to move football games from the Sabbath to Friday.⁵⁴

An even more widespread phenomenon than physical activity is that of watching sports. Thousands of people crowd into halls and stadiums, and even more watch on television, listen to the radio or read the newspaper about sports competitions. What did the scholars of Israel think of this? Obviously, rabbis who had reservations regarding physical activity had even more reservations about watching it. However, even those who had praise for physical activity for various reasons, were only referring to doing it, not watching others do it. They rejected watching it. Thus for example, Rabbi Shlomo Aviner writes:⁵⁵ “Obviously standing and watching how others push a ball around, either in the field or on television, can in no way be called physical activity.” Rabbi Moshe Feinstein forbade watching sports games at stadiums because this constituted frivolity and *bittul Torah*.⁵⁶ Regarding the relationship between playing sport and watching sport, Professor Rabbi Levy Yitzhak Rabinowitz, who was chief rabbi of South Africa, relates that when he was a rabbi in England he once told a group of youths that, in his opinion, an athlete was someone who did sports, not someone who watched others doing it. The audience he addressed viewed his remarks as heresy and no longer came to hear his sermons.⁵⁷

Were there any rabbis who did watch sports? In light of the above, it seems not, but there is one piece of evidence concerning

part 1, Bnei Brak 5746, p. 267. See also R. R. Blum, *Petaḥ HaOhel*, New York 5739, p. 383, no. 9.

54 *Divrei HaKnesset*, 20th Sivan 5750, pp. 3954–3955.

55 R. S. Aviner (cit. n. 41), no. 145. See also R. Y. Ariel, “*LeDmuto shel HaYehudi HaModerni*,” *Hatzofe*, 14th of Iyar 5759, p. 9. Incidentally, scorn for watching physical activity was voiced several times by Yeshayahu Leibowitz, as he once said (M. Shashar, *Yeshayahu Leibowitz: Al Olam UMlo'o*, Jerusalem 1987, p. 181): “the enthusiasm for sport which provides the masses with spiritual nourishment and values, arouses disgust in me.”

56 R. M. Feinstein, *Responsa Igrot Moshe*, Yoreh Deah, 4, Jerusalem 5756, 11, 1.

57 R. L. Y. Rabinowitz, “*Sport UPolitika*,” *Eretz Yisrael* (Shvat 5740), p. 17.

Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook. At the Merkaz Harav yeshiva in the 1960s, pupils played football on Friday afternoons in a field next to the rabbi's house. Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook and his brother-in-law, Rabbi Shalom Natan Raanan, were in the habit of watching the game and enjoyed the fact that the lads were engaging in sport, as this constituted the physical blossoming of Israel.⁵⁸ In other words, this was not spectatorship due to interest in the game or in its results, but rather because they enjoyed seeing the yeshiva boys healthy and full of energy, as part of the national revival.

Finally, let us comment on the esthetic side of physical activity: Watching gymnasts, swimmers, sprinters and jumpers, who are in perfect form, often affords us an esthetic pleasure much like that from gazing on a painting or sculpture.⁵⁹ One might assume that those same rabbis who find value in regarding artistic creations, "looking at gardens, lovely buildings and pretty shapes," as Maimonides describes it (Introduction to *Avot*, chap. 5), would also approve of observing (in a monitored fashion, obviously) sports activity. However, except for Rabbi Yeshayahu Shapira regarding the esthetic side of gymnastics, I have not found any reference to this on the part of the rabbis of Israel.

RABBIS' DEEDS

The deeds of the rabbis testify to their outlook no less than their writings. Is there any evidence of rabbis who took part in physical activity? There are practically no descriptions of physical activity in rabbinical literature and in biographies of rabbis. It may be that most of them did not engage in physical activities, but it is also possible that the biographers did not see any relevance in noting

58 This was told to me by Rabbi Ahya Shlomo Amitai, the rabbi of Kibbutz Sdeh Eliyahu. On the rabbis' attitude to Jewish victories in competitions against gentiles, see R. Halperin, *Zirat Hayai*, Tel Aviv 5748, pp. 96-97. Incidentally, on p. 170, Halperin writes that the physical prowess which he gained over the course of the years, helped him endure long hours of study without tiring.

59 See D. Best, "The Aesthetic in Sport," in W. J. Morgan and K. V. Meier (eds.), *Philosophic Inquiry in Sport*, Champaign, Ill. 1995, pp. 377-389.

such activity.⁶⁰ We shall hereby note a few instances in which we have found evidence of physical activity on the part of rabbis.

Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky (same as above) was scrupulous about partaking of regular physical exercise. In his youth, he was known as the best swimmer in the yeshiva of Lomza. His sentiment was: if a father must teach his child to swim (Kidushin 29b), then that man must himself know how to swim, and if so – then he must know how to swim well. He was once asked if it was appropriate for a yeshiva boy to ride a bike. His reply: I wish I had had a bike in my youth, then I wouldn't have to walk so much now for my health.⁶¹ Rabbi Amram Korah, the last rabbi of the Jews of Yemen, was wont to walk with young scholars in his youth to the hills near Sana'a and to run down them quickly to exercise their bodies. Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook used to relate that when his father, Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook, was in Riga and lived in an apartment with Rabbi Yosef Yuzel Horowitz (the "grandfather" from Novardok, author of *Madregot HaAdam*) and Rabbi Aharon Walkin (author of *Responsa Zekan Aharon*), they would wrestle for their health.⁶² One rabbi who admitted to engaging in exercise was Rabbi Shlomo Goren, who related in an interview to the "Hatzofe" newspaper that he does fifty sit-ups a day.

There is one surprising piece of evidence indicating non-participation in sports on the part of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook, whose attitude toward exercise we described at length. Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook attests that his father could write about sport but that he himself never engaged in it.⁶³ And of the Hafetz Haim, who, as we have seen, attributed great importance to physical activity, I have heard that he said that he himself does not exercise only because he is so lazy.

60 On bias in Haredi biographies see Z. Lev, "A Response to Criticism," *HaMaayan* (Tamuz 5752): 48-49.

61 Above n. 8, p. 316.

62 I heard about Rabbi Korah from Rabbi Aharon Kapah and about Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook from his pupil, Rabbi A. S. Amitai.

63 I heard this from Rabbi A. S. Amitai.

THE YESHIVA WORLD

The attitude of the yeshiva world to physical culture can be categorized according to location. Let us begin with Israel: The Mizrahi teachers seminary in Jerusalem has held exercise classes since its inception in 1921. The classes were one to two hours long, and the school even boasted exercise equipment. The sport association of the school, founded in 1927, established regulations such as "association games shall not be played before noon" to ensure that association members' activities not impair their level of studies.⁶⁴ At that time the Mizrahi seminar was directed by Rabbi A. M. Lifshitz, who was in contact with Rabbi Kook, so that physical education classes were with his consent and affected by his influence. Many pupils partake of sports on Friday afternoon at "hesder" yeshivot. Sometimes this is with the yeshiva head's encouragement. Thus for example, the head of Yeshivat Ha-Golan, Rabbi Mordechai Halperin, would encourage his pupils to engage in sport for their health. This was the attitude of yeshivot from the Mizrahi stream. In Haredi yeshivot, on the other hand, the rabbis generally did not encourage physical activity. However, I do have a few unusual examples: in the early years of the Kol Torah yeshiva in Jerusalem, yeshiva heads encouraged their pupils to play football during recess. At the Ponevezh yeshiva in Bnei Brak, yeshiva head Rabbi Yosef Kahaneman encouraged the boys to swim on Friday afternoons. Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, one of the greatest *musar* authorities in the Haredi world, while serving as *mashgiach* at the Beer Yaakov yeshiva, encouraged pupils to engage in physical activity. This may have to do with his German origins and to his attitude toward Torah with *derekh erez*.

The situation is completely different in the Torah world of the United States: Many yeshivot there hold lively games during recess or on Friday afternoons. Many yeshivot in the U.S. had basketball teams in the 1950s, and pupils organized themselves into leagues and played against each other. This activity was totally stopped later

64 D. Shemesh, *Beit Midrash LeMorim "Mizrahi,"* Jerusalem 5751, pp. 37, 45.

on.⁶⁵ In any event, some yeshivot in the U.S. still have sports to this day, as well as sports equipment. This is the case at Yeshivat Torah VeDaat (Rabbi Kamenetzky's), at "Haim Berlin" (Rabbi Hutner) in Brooklyn, at "Ner Yisrael" (Rabbi Ruderman) in Baltimore, and "Telz" near Cleveland. Yeshiva boys in the U.S. who later traveled to other places disseminated the idea of physical culture. Thus for example, although physical exercise was not practiced at the "Mir" yeshiva, when yeshiva pupils from the U.S. who had first studied at American high schools which included gym classes came there at the beginning of the thirties, they brought sports equipment with them for they and their friends to practice on.⁶⁶

What is the reason for this disparity between Haredi yeshivot in Israel, "hesder" yeshivot in Israel and the moderate Haredi yeshivot in the U.S.? It may have to do with the fact that Haredi yeshiva boys in Israel are supported financially by the state, as "Torah is their vocation," i.e., they are a "society of students." They harbor a certain fear that overt and organized physical activity would be criticized, as it could then be argued: you say you spend your time in Torah and in the world of the spirit, and here you are developing your bodies. In contrast, pupils at "hesder" yeshivot serve in the army and have no compunction about engaging in visible physical activity. That is also the case in the U.S., where there is no obligatory draft and yeshiva boys are not expected to enlist, making them unafraid of partaking in observable physical activity. One should add that physical culture in the U.S., particularly sports competitions, occupies a much more prominent position than in Israel, and this affects the entire population, including the world of Torah. Incidentally, the sports apparatus of Haredi yeshivot in the U.S. are discussed in rabbinical literature: Rabbi David Kassel, head of the Beit Midrash LeTorah yeshiva in Chicago and later a teacher at the Itri yeshiva in Jerusalem, in the context of his criticism of materialism in the Haredi yeshiva world, mentions the

65 See Helmreich (cit. n. 38), p. 369 n. 25; J. S. Gurock, *The Men and Women of Yeshiva*, New York 1988, pp. 173-179, 280-281.

66 I was told this by Prof. Aharon Mirsky.

"summer camps in the US which have the most sophisticated sports fields."⁶⁷

CONCLUSION

In this paper we examined rabbinical literature's attitude toward physical culture in the 20th century. Several conclusions can be drawn.

Rabbinical literature contains almost no allusion to physical culture. There were rabbis who related negatively to any physical activity and saw it as *bittul torah* and "the company of the insolent." Others, in contrast, noted the positive aspects of it, particularly the health benefits, while distinguishing between activity for the sake of health, which is worthy, and activity for the sake of pleasure, which is unworthy.

Encouragement of physical activity can be found in some rabbinical writings from the first half of the 20th century, before the establishment of the State of Israel. Their favorable attitude can be attributed to the ideology which began to be prevalent in the second half of the 19th century: The idea of Torah with *derekh erez* on the one hand, and the idea of national revival and renewing the image of the Jew in the land of Israel on the other. Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook's remarks on the importance of bodily health elicited many reactions, both positive and negative, and served as the theoretical basis for the establishment of Elitzur.

Some rabbis stressed the didactic benefits to be gained from physical activity or knowledge of sports competitions. Many halakhic questions arose regarding physical activity, the issue being the time of the activity, its location, and its essence. Rabbis also protested installing sports equipment where the ensuing physical activity would not be in accordance with halakha. The rabbis were opposed to watching sports. Nevertheless, there is evidence of rabbis who did partake of physical exercise. As for physical activity in the yeshiva world, we distinguished between yeshivot of the Mizrahi and the National Religious Party, and between Haredi

67 R. D. Kassel, *Darkhei David*, part 1, Jerusalem 5750, introduction, p. 4.

yeshivot in the U.S., where physical education classes do take place and Haredi yeshivot in Israel where there are no regular physical activities.

There were many subjects related to physical culture which could not be found in rabbinical literature: Reference to women's physical activity, who are exempt from Torah study;⁶⁸ allusions to competitive sports and the significance of competition, which is so common today; references to the esthetics of sport; and relating to sports instruction as a means of instilling religious values. Despite all this, rabbinical literature in the 20th century contains, we believe, more attention to physical culture than all the centuries which preceded it. This is because physical culture occupies a central role in the 20th century the world over, as leisure time has greatly increased in wake of the industrial revolution and the introduction of automatic machinery, vastly curtailing the number of jobs which do not require skills. This central role is also a result of the tendency to try to reduce the number of work hours in order to have more time available for culture and amusement.

Our remarks were devoted to describing physical culture in rabbinical literature in the 20th century. We are now on the brink of the 21st century. What role will physical culture play in the eyes of the rabbis in the next century? What place will it occupy in rabbinical literature? It is difficult to predict the future. Nonetheless, we will relate to one fact: studies on leisure time activities in the next century foretell that the number of work hours will decrease and there will be a marked increase in leisure hours, in yearly vacations and in the number of years people spend in retirement. In other words, leisure culture will grow, as will physical activities and sports.⁶⁹ It is clear, therefore, that among those who are attentive to the Torah sages, namely the religious community, the issue of physical culture will also occupy a larger place.

Rabbis in the 20th century barely related to leisure culture and the question of leisure. The attitude of many rabbis is summarily

68 In the U.S., and recently also in Israel, many women, religious as well as Haredi, go to fitness classes in the evening hours.

69 See H. Raskin, "*Tarbut HaPnai VeHahinukh LiFnai Likrat HaMeah Ha-21: Hizui HaAtid, Megamot, Hitpathuyot VeKivunei Peula Eshariyim,*" *Tnua 4* (5759): 421-449.

expressed in the remarks of Rabbi Isser Frankel at an international seminar in 1977, in reference to physical culture in Judaism:⁷⁰

Leisure time, which is usually characterized by sports activities of various kinds, is unacceptable in the Jewish worldview and in the Orthodox worldview... the ideal image in Judaism is that of a person who has no leisure.

This indeed is the ideal in Judaism, yet most of the public, including the religious, do not reach this ideal and do engage in a variety of leisure activities in their spare time.⁷¹ Among the various leisure time activities, physical activity and sport is considered neutral (as are hikes or musical concerts), in other words, these are the less problematical activities from the religious perspective, as opposed to secular books, movies, media, which carry a secular message. In the future, rabbis — either at their own initiative or pursuant to their community's initiative — will be forced to address the issue of leisure time. There will no doubt be those who will encourage physical activity, for a simple reason: Even if Torah study institutions are open to all, there will still be a great many people who will not devote their free time to Torah study, and the rabbis will have to relate to the diversity of leisure activities. Furthermore, studies indicate that physical activity has a variety of benefits, of which we will note four:

1. Physical health: reducing weight, and preventing disease such as heart disease, diabetes etc.
2. Psychological well being: mood improvement and the ability to handle everyday challenges.
3. Social benefits if it is group sports.
4. Emotional wellbeing: release of energy, to repress aggressive instincts.⁷²

70 R. A. Frankel, "Tarbut HaPnai BeTefisat HaYahadut," *Tarbut HaGuf BaYahadut* (cit. n. 2), 1977, pp. 17-18.

71 See M. Barlev, "Tmurot BeDfusei HaPnai shel HaYehudi HaDati: bein Hakhtava Normativit LeVein 'Tehum Harsha'a'," A. Liptzin (ed.), *Tarbut HaPnai VeHaNofesh BeYisrael*, Tel Aviv 1981, pp. 21-26.

72 J. D. F. Willis and L. F. Campbell, "Why People Exercise: Motives for Fitness," *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology* (1992): 3-58.

Our premise therefore, is that in the framework of leisure culture, rabbis of the 21st century will in fact opt for physical activity, at least regarding people who clearly will not turn to Torah study in their free time. The rabbis will encourage this activity in the confines of halakha, will confer religious import to it, and will perhaps find the ancient texts which corroborate these rulings.