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DID KING DAVID HAVE A CONSCIENCE? THE HISTORY OF A CONCEPT AND THE WORDS

Abstract: The concept “conscience” is considered one of the most fundamental concepts of Western ethics, psychology, and culture. Etymology of the word “conscience” in most European languages — *conscientia*, *conscience*, *Gewissen*, *совесть* — is identical to the Greek word *συνείδησις* meaning “with knowledge”, the expression “pangs of conscience” is found already in the Latin literature by Cicero. It is hard to find “conscience” in the Biblical era. Researchers state that in the Biblical culture the heart and sometimes the kidneys (reins) are a source of a reaction of the ethical judgment formed by the conscience. Indeed a voice of inner moral may be heard from one’s heart, the inner moral voice appears in the Old Testament only in three passages and it should be noted that all three are related to King David. In the Talmudic and Midrashic literature as well God is the source of ethics. However there is an apparent reference to the “inner voice”: according to the Midrashic and Talmudic literature, two instincts exist in a man — a good instinct and a bad instinct, each pulling a man to its side, they are struggling and one dominates over another. This view prevailed in Judaism until the recent era. The concept of conscience penetrated the secular Jewish culture very lately, in the second half of the 19th century.

Key words: concept of “conscience”, conscience in the Biblical culture, conscience in the Midrashic and Talmudic literature

Арье Ольман, Академия языка иврит, Иерусалим

ИМЕЛ ЛИ ЦАРЬ ДАВИД СОВЕСТЬ? ИСТОРИЯ ПОНЯТИЯ И СЛОВ

Резюме: Европейская этика, психология и культура рассматривает категорию «совесть» в качестве одной из наиболее фундаментальных. Этимология слова «совесть» в большинстве европейских языков (*conscientia*, *conscience*,

Gewissen) — тождественна значению греческого слова «συνείδησις» — «с, вместе + знание». Выражение «муки совести» присутствует уже у Цицерона. Тем не менее, понятие «совесть» вряд ли можно найти в Библии. Исследователи утверждают, что в библейской культуре «сердце» и иногда «почки (чресла)» являются источником того нравственного суждения, которое связано с совестью. В сущности, сердце рассматривается как источник внутреннего нравственного голоса. В Ветхом Завете внутренний нравственный голос упоминается только в трех местах. Следует отметить, что все они связаны с царем Давидом. В литературе Талмуда и Мидраша источником нравственности является Бог. Тем не менее, в литературе Талмуда и Мидраша присутствует явное указание на «внутренний голос»: Талмуд и Мидраш говорят о существовании двух инстинктов в человеке — доброго и злого, тянущих человека в разные стороны, борющихся и побеждающих друг друга. Подобный взгляд преобладал в иудаизме вплоть до Нового времени. Понятие «совесть» появляется в секулярной еврейской культуре очень поздно, во второй половине XIX века.

Ключевые слова: категория «совесть», совесть в Библии, совесть в литературе Мидраша и Талмуда.

The purpose of this work is to explore when the concept “conscience” in its modern meaning first appeared in the Jewish culture, what close or complementary concepts exist and what language tools are used to express it in Hebrew.

The concept “conscience” is considered one of the most fundamental concepts of Western ethics, psychology, and culture. In his *Rav-Milim* Hebrew dictionary, Shveika defines a modern notion of “conscience” as follows: “Conscience is an ability of a person to judge the moral value of one’s actions; an inner voice forbidding or permitting fulfillment of a certain action from the moral point of view”¹. This definition originates in Western culture, Christian ethics, and, thus, it comes from Hellenistic ethics that considers “Man the measure of all things”, according to Protagoras². Etymology of the word “conscience” in most European languages — *conscientia*, *conscience*, *Gewissen*, *совесть* — is identical to the Greek word *συνείδησις* meaning “with knowledge”³. In the Septuagint, the word *συνείδησις* appears only once as translation of מַלְאָכָה (Ecclesiastes 10:20). The primary meaning of this word was “moral self-awareness”. In Greek philosophy, especially in the Stoic school, this word meant “an inherent capacity which allows a person to act in accord to what he/she knows it right”⁴. Epicurus, Seneca, and Cicero mention “good conscience” that leads to happiness. In the Jewish literature

¹ Shveika Y., *Rav-Milim* — milon ivri-ivri shalem, Steimatzy, Yediot Achronot, Matach (1997), p. 1111 [in Hebrew]

² See Plato, *Theaetetus*, section 152a.

³ See S. Nobel “Borrowed Translations from Yiddish to Rabbinical Hebrew”, *Leshonenu* 33 (1959), p. 172 [in Hebrew].

⁴ Wall R.W., ‘Conscience’, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, New York: Doubleday, 1992, I, p. 1129.

written in Greek the word *συνείδησις* was used by Philo, but with a slightly different meaning: in his view, *συνείδησις* is not independent, but related to awareness of the truth revealed in the Torah⁵. In Hellenistic perception, there is a mechanism in a human soul that dictates a person what is good and what is bad and encourages him/her to act in a good way. Acting as a consultant before an action is done, it can become a punishing judge afterwards: the expression “pangs of conscience” is found already in the Latin literature by Cicero⁶. Many European languages have the expressions that mean “clean conscience”, “uneasy/guilty conscience”, “to have something on one’s conscience”, “to ease/to salve one’s conscience”, “to appeal to someone’s conscience”:

English: good, bad, guilty conscience; a vote of conscience; twinge of conscience; on smb’s conscience; conscience-stricken⁷;

German: reines, schlechtes Gewissen; Gewissen folgen; an jdms. Gewissen appellieren; jmdn. auf dem Gewissen haben seinem⁸;

French: une conscience droite, intègre, pure; la voix de la conscience; examen de conscience; par acquit de conscience; capituler, composer, transiger avec sa conscience; libérer, soulager sa conscience⁹.

In the worldview reflected in Russian, conscience appears mostly as a restraining means against one’s wish to perform a bad action: this language has expressions that mean “conscience does not sanction doing this”, “conscience revolts against something”, “to ease one’s conscience”, “to have clean conscience / before the tribunal of conscience”¹⁰.

Now we will trace a history of this concept in Jewish culture in all its generations.

It is hard to find “conscience” in the Biblical era. Researchers state that in the Biblical culture the heart and sometimes the kidneys (reins) are a source of a “reaction of the ethical judgment formed by the conscience”¹¹. In any case, one can notice from reading biblical passages that the heart thoughts and reins advice can be both good and bad. “אֲבִרְךָ אֵת ה' אֲשֶׁר יִצְעָנִי אֶף לַיְלֹת יִסְרוּנִי כְּלֵי־וֹת”, which means “I will bless the LORD, who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night seasons.” (Psalms 16:7). It is not clear in this phrase that the reins instructions should be necessarily good, although it was understood in this way by

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Sinclair J. (ed.), Collins COBULID English Language Dictionary, London 1987, p. 298a

⁸ Drozdowski G. (ed.), Duden, das grosse Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache, Mannheim 1979, v. III, p. 1032b

⁹ Rey A., Rey-Debove J. (eds.), Dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française par Paul Robert, Paris 1981, p. 369b

¹⁰ Apresjan J.D., ‘The Picture of Man as Reconstructed from Linguistic Data: An Attempt at a Systematic Description’, Systematic Lexicography, Oxford 2000, pp. 101–144

¹¹ Wolff H. W., Anthropology of the Old Testament, Philadelphia, 1974, p. 51

the sages (see below). The “counsel of heart” in Ben-Sira 37:13 is also vague. Indeed a voice of inner moral may be heard from one’s heart, and we may find it in several passages:

”ויהי אחרי כן ויך לב דוד אתו על אשר כרת את כנף אשר לשאול” (שמואל א’ כד:ה).

[“And it came to pass afterward, that David’s **heart** smote him, because he had cut off Saul’s skirt” (1 Samuel 24:5).]

”ויך לב דוד אתו אחרי כן ספר את העם. ויאמר דוד אל ה’: חטאתי מאד אשר עשיתי, ועתה ה’ העבר נא את עון עבדך כי נסכלתי מאד” (שמואל ב’ כד:).

[“And David’s **heart** smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done; and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly” (2 Samuel 24:10).]

”והיה כי יעשה ה’ לאדני ככל אשר דבר את הטובה עליך וצוך לנגיד על ישראל... ולא תהיה זאת לך לפוקה ולמכשול לב לאדני ולשפך דם חנם ולהושיע אדני לו...” (נאום אביגיל לדוד — שמואל א’ כה:ל-לא).

[“And it shall come to pass, when the LORD shall have done to my lord according to all the good that he hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have appointed thee ruler over Israel... That this shall be no grief unto thee, nor **offence of heart** unto my lord, either that thou hast shed blood causeless, or that my lord hath avenged himself...” (Abigail’s speech to David, 1 Samuel 25:30–31).]

”וימלך לבי עלי, ואריבה את החרים ואת הסגנים ואמרה להם: משא איש באחיו אתם נשים...” (נחמיה ה:ז).

[Then I consulted with myself, and I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them, Ye exact usury, every one of his brother. And I set a great assembly against them...” (Nehemiah 5:7).]

The last passage can be interpreted not as a voice of conscience turned towards a man, but as an inner decision of Nehemiah to start acting, and here is what Rashi says in this place: “ויוועץ לבי בעצמי” [“and my heart will consult myself”].

The inner moral voice appears in the Old Testament only in three passages and it should be noted that all three are related to King David. These passages, which present the heart as a source of conscience, invalidate most of six hundred passages, presenting the heart as a source of vague mind with no moral limitations. There can be a “sound heart” (Psalms 119:80), a “wicked heart” (Proverbs 26:23), a “clean heart” (Psalms 51:10), and “a revolting and a rebellious heart” (Jeremiah 5:23). It seems that David’s heart acted as a conscience, because his heart was good by nature:

”על כן מצא עבדך את לבו להתפלל אליך את התפלה הזאת“ (שמ”ב ז:כז);

[“... therefore hath thy servant found in *his heart to pray* this prayer unto thee” (2 Samuel 7:27).]

”ויאמר ה’ אל דוד אבי: יען אשר היה עם לבבך לבנות בית לשמי הטיבת כי היה עם לבבך“ (מל”א ח:יה);

[“And the LORD said unto David my father, whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto my name, *thou didst well that it was in thine heart*” (1 Kings 8:18)];

”ואתה אם תלך לפני כאשר הלך דוד אביך בתם לבב ובישר“ (מל”א ט:ד);

[“And if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, in integrity of heart, and in uprightness...” (1 Kings 9:4).];

”ולא היה לבבו שלם עם ה’ אלהיו כלבב דויד אביו“ (מל”א יא:ד, טו:ג);

[“... and his heart was not **perfect** with the LORD his God, as was *the heart of David his father*” (1 Kings 11:4, 15:3)];

”ואתה שלמה בני, דע את א-להי אביך ועבדהו בלב שלם ובנפש חפצה, כי כל לבבות דורש ה’ וכל יצר מהשבות מביין“ (דה”א כח:ט);

[“And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him **with a perfect heart** and with a willing mind: for *the LORD searcheth all hearts*, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts” (1 Chronicles 28:9)];

”אני בישר לבבי התנדבתי כל אלה“ (דה”א כט:יז).

[“... in the *uprightness of mine heart* I have willingly offered all these things...” (1 Chronicles 29:17)].

We have to admit that we could not find “conscience” in the Biblical culture. Other researchers make the same conclusion: “There is no word ‘conscience’ in the Bible — this is surprising, but understandable, considering the Bible opposition to autonomous anthropology, based on the inner observations. God reveals the truth”¹². The biblical moral is not autonomous, it is dictated from above, and the God’s commandments take place of conscience. “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Micah 6:8) Instead of inner ethics the Bible suggests outer one: “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment” (Ecclesiastes 11:9), “Search me,

¹² Ibid.

O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23–24). “For the biblical authors, human responsibility derives from God’s reality. One God and no other created the universe, set its rules, oversees its affairs, and participates in its activities in both ordinary and extraordinary ways”.¹³

In the Talmudic and Midrashic literature as well God is the source of ethics: “Classic Judaism summons humankind and the Jewish people to action for God’s sake”¹⁴. Only Torah, Divine law, is authority of goodness:

אמר רבי יודה בר פזי זנח ישראל טוב אויב ירדפו ואין טוב אלא תורה היך מה דאת אמר
כי לקח טוב נתתי לכם תורתיו אל תעזבו (תלמוד ירושלמי (ונציה) ראש השנה ג:ה [דף נח
טור ג])

Rabbi Juda bar Pazi said: “Israel hath cast off the thing that is good: the enemy shall pursue him”, and good is just Torah, as you say “For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law” (Proverbs 4:2) (The Palestinian Talmud, Rosh ha-shana 3:8, 58c)].

However there is an apparent reference to the “inner voice”:

”זימן הקב”ה לאברהם אבינו שתי כליותיו כשני חכמים והיו מבינות אותו ויועצות אותו
ומלמדות אותו חכמה כל הלילה, שנאמר: ”אברך את ה’ אשר יעצני אף לילות יסרוני כליותי”
(תהילים טז:ז) (אבות דרבי נתן, נוסחא א, לג, ד”ה עשרה דורות).

[“The Holy One, blessed be He, granted Abraham two reins that were wise and understood him well and gave him advices and taught him wisdom all the night, as it is said: “I will bless the LORD, who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night seasons” (Psalms 16:7)” (Avot de R. Natan, Version 1, 33, glossa ‘Asara Dorot’)].

”הכליות מחשבות, והלב גומר, והנפש למעלה מכולם” (ויקרא רבה וילנא ד, ד”ה (ד)
עשרה דברים);

[“The reins instruct and the heart agrees and the soul is above all” (Vaikra Rabbah Vilna 4, glossa ‘Asara Dvarim’);

And another version:

”כליות יועצות, לב מבין” (ויקרא רבה מרגליות ד, ד”ה (ד) עשרה דברים).

[“The reins instruct, the heart understands” (Vaikra Rabbah Margalot 4, glossa (4) ‘Asara Dvarim’)].

¹³ Borowitz E. B., Exploring Jewish Ethics: Papers on Covenant Responsibility. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990, p.18.

¹⁴ Ibid.

According to our sages, the reins are an organ of a primary thinking process; they initiate thoughts that are then completed in the heart. However, the reins counsel, mentioned in the quotes above, is vague and not necessarily good. The later midrash “Otiot de Rabbi Akiva” expresses this clearly: “the reins give good and bad counsel” (“Otiot de Rabbi Akiva”, Version 1, glossa 20 Kaf).

And the same is with “something referring to one’s heart”:

“כל דבר שהוא מסור ללב נאמר בו “ויראת מאלקיך” (ספרא קדושים ג)

[“as all that refers to his heart, and in such a thing it is said, “Thou shalt fear thy God” (Sifra Kdoshim 3)],

which means that both good and wicked may be in one’s heart. If so, “the inner voice” mentioned in the Sages’ writings is not “conscience”.

Until now we have been engaged in a search for one inner voice of moral. However, it is known that, according to the Midrashic and Talmudic literature, **two** instincts exist in a man — a good instinct and a bad instinct, each pulling a man to its side, they are struggling and one dominates over another. These instincts, thus, counsel the man:

“טוב ילד מסכן וחכם ממלך זקן וכסיל”, “טוב ילד מסכן וחכם” [“Better is a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king”, “better is a poor but wise youth”] — this is a good instinct, and why is it called “poor” — because no one listens to it; “ממלך זקן וכסיל” [...] [“...than an old but foolish king”] — this is a bad instinct, and why is it called the “king” — because everyone listens to it (Kohelet Rabbah 4, glossa 1 [13] “Tov”).

“מצא בה איש מסכן וחכם” [found there a poor and wise man] — this is a good instinct, why is it called “poor” — because it is not found in most of mankind and many people do not listen to it (Kohelet Rabbah 9, glossa 8 “Ha-ir”).

In the spiritual world of our sages there are “two consciences” — good and bad — in a human soul, and this view prevailed in Judaism until the recent era. The concept of conscience penetrated the secular Jewish culture very lately, in the second half of the 19th century. In the middle of the 20th century it even entered religious literature, although with only a few authors as we will see below.

One may reply to this: Hebrew has a word “מצפון”, used in the Bible and in the Middle Ages and translated as “conscience”! The truth is that the word “צפון” in Hebrew had the following meanings in different periods: 1) “buried treasure” in the Biblical language: “his hidden things sought up!?” (Obadiah 1:6), only once and in plural; 2) “hidden thought” in medieval language, such as:

“ואהרן חפץ לגלות מצפונם ועל כן סייע בעשותו” (יהודה אבן תיבון, תרגום של הכוזרי, א:צז),

[“And Aharon desired to reveal their conscience and, therefore, helped them in making it”] (Yehuda Ibn Tibon, translation of the Kuzari, 1:97)];

“ספר מיוחד בחכמת המצפון וראיתי החכמה הזאת שהיא חכמת חובת הלבבות” (יהודה אבן תיבון, תרגום של חובות הלבבות, הקדמה).

[“...special book about wisdom of conscience and I’ve seen that this is a wisdom of the duties of the heart” (Yehuda Ibn Tibon, translation of Duties of the Heart, introduction)],

and many others.

This meaning is indicated by an inclination to appear in plural, its use as a direct object with a verb “to reveal” and as a subject with a verb “to be revealed” (passive voice). Only in the modern age this word acquired the meaning of conscience (used only in singular), but this meaning has an interesting history.

In the Modern literature database of the Academy of the Hebrew Language I have found¹⁵ the first occurrence of the word “מצפון” in the modern sense or similar to it only in 1920 in Yosef Haim Brenner’s work¹⁶:

“מי שמבקש טובת המוני העם באמת, לא יענהו מצפוני אם הסיר מעל הדרך אויב ומתנקם לעם באיזה אמצעים שהם”.

[“Whoever really wanted to make good for all the people and removed an enemy, should not be tortured by one’s conscience, if the enemy took revenge on the people in any way”].

Brenner uses an expression “one’s conscience tortures someone”, which did not put down roots in Hebrew and which is, of course, a calque of the Russian expression “совесть мучает”. However, the meaning of this word here is modern in every way — we are dealing with pangs of conscience and a dilemma of “the end justifying the means”. This is strange, because Brenner was not one of the great word renovators, and this sentence apparently shows that the word “מצפון” in the meaning of “conscience” is clear and familiar to him and his readers. However, Brenner himself uses the word “מצפון” in its old meaning of the “hidden thought” in his translation of the G. Hauptmann’s play “Michael Kramer” in 1911: “ואני אגלה מצפוניך” (“And I will reveal your hidden thoughts”)!

After Brenner we find this meaning in Agnon’s writing of 1931: “והמצפון” “שלי שלם” (“and I am in agreement with my conscience”)¹⁷. Likewise, in his

¹⁵ I would like to express my gratitude to Doron Rubinstein, The Academy of the Hebrew Language, for his generous help.

¹⁶ “Lefanim Uleachor”, ha-Adama 1, Tishrei-Adar 5680 (1919–1920), Tel Aviv, pp. 585–594, signed by “Bar Yohai”, p. 590 [in Hebrew].

¹⁷ S.Y. Agnon, Esterlein Yekirati («Dear Esther: Letters 1924–1931»), letter 180, page

other books Agnon often uses such expressions as “לגלות מצפונים” (“to reveal hidden thoughts”) in their old meaning. It means that we should search for the new interpretation of the meaning long before Brenner and Agnon.

Turning to Ben Yehuda’s works, we discover that in his first dictionary¹⁸ he translates “מצפון” as “געוויסען, совесть” and marks it as a renewed word. In the Russian-Hebrew-German dictionary¹⁹, edited and published by Yehuda Grazovski in 1899, the word “совесть” is translated as “הכרה פנימית, ידעות, דאס געוויסען (מזפון (כך!), דאס געוויסען (Das Gewissen)”) and the words “awareness” and “conscience” are marked as renewed. In Vol. 7 of his dictionary²⁰, published in 1926 and finished before 1921, Ben-Yehuda brings the modern meaning of the word “מצפון”, in addition to its biblical and medieval meanings: “the inner feeling of a person regarding any issue, conscience, Bewusstsein, Gewissen” (page 3265). However, we should discuss the following three issues here.

First, Ben-Yehuda marks this meaning with a sign of after-Talmudic literature and not with a renovation sign. Secondly, Ben-Yehuda (as well as Knaani²¹ and Even-Shoshan²² afterwards) brings here some examples that may be clearly interpreted in their old meaning:

“ספר מיוחד בחכמת המצפון וראיתי החכמה הזאת שהיא חכמת חובת הלבבות” (יהודה אבן תיבון, תרגום של חובות הלבבות, הקדמה),

[“a special book about wisdom of conscience, and I have seen that this wisdom is a wisdom of the duties of the heart” (Yehuda Ibn Tibon, translation of Duties of the Heart, Preface)];

“ירבה שכרך על בר לבך ומצפונך” (הוא, תרגום של הכוזרי ה:כה),

[“and you will be repaid for your pure heart and conscience” (Yehuda Ibn Tibon, translation of the Kuzari 5:25)]

“וירצה לומר כי המצפון הרע שוה עם חבורות פצע” (חותם תכנית, מריקה).

[“and will say that bad conscience is like a bunch of wounds” (Chotam Tochnit²³, ‘Merika’)].

271 [in Hebrew].

¹⁸ Ben-Yehuda E., Hebrew Dictionary, Warsaw, 1903, page 815 [in Hebrew].

¹⁹ Complete Russian-Hebrew-German Dictionary, compiled by E. Ben-Yehuda with participation of Y. Grazovski, Warsaw: Tushia, 1905, column 1938.

²⁰ Ben-Yehuda E., Milon ha-lashon ha-ivrit ha-yeshana ve-ha-hadasha, Jerusalem — Berlin, 1910–1958 [in Hebrew].

²¹ Knaani Y., Otzar ha-lashon ha-ivrit, Jerusalem-Tel Aviv, Massada, 1960–1989, p. 3232 [in Hebrew].

²² Ben-Shoshan A., Ha-milon he-hadash, Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1985, page 761 [in Hebrew].

²³ Avraham Ben Yitzhak from Béziers, Chotam Tochnit, 1865 [in Hebrew].

This ascription mistake becomes clear after reading the following:

”אך חכמת התורה מתחלקת לשני חלקים. האחד מהם לדעת חובת האיברים והיא החכמה הנראית, והשני — לדעת חובת הלבבות, והם המצפונים, והיא החכמה הצפונה” (חובת הלבבות, הקדמה),

[“However, wisdom of the Torah is divided into two parts. One of them is to know the duties of the organs and this is a visible wisdom, and another is to know the duties of the heart and these are *consciences*, and this is a *hidden* wisdom (Duties of the Heart, Preface)”];

”ואהרן הפץ לגלות מצפונם ועל כן סייע בעשותו” (הכוזרי, א:צו),

[“And Aharon desired to *reveal* their *conscience* and, therefore, helped them in making it” (Kuzari 1:97)”];

”וירצה לומר כי המצפון הרע שוה עם חברות פצע כי מעשה האויבים כמעשה החבורות שהם מכאיבים בלי מעצור ולא יעבירו האיבה ויוסיפו אותה בכל עת” (חותם תכנית, עמ’ 671, ’מריקה’).

[“and he will say that bad conscience is like a bunch of wounds, that enemies’ actions are like bruises that hurt endlessly and will not lessen hatred, but will add to it all the time” (Chotam Tochnit²⁴, p. 176, ‘Merika’)].

And finally, Ben-Yehuda’s definition does not quite match the modern definition, for instance, that of Shveka²⁵ in his afore-mentioned Rav-Milim Dictionary:

”מצפון — היכולת הקיימת באדם לשפוט את הערך המוסרי של מעשיו; הקול הפנימי האוסר עליו או המתיר לו מעשה מסוים מבחינה מוסרית” (עמ’ 1111).

“Conscience is an ability of a person to judge the moral value of one’s actions; an inner voice forbidding or permitting fulfillment of a certain action from the moral point of view” (page 1111).

Ben-Yehuda had some reason to translate “מצפון” as “*Gewissen*” and also as “*Bewusstsein*”, in other words “*consciousness*”, not “*conscience*”! This can be explained if we assume that for Ben-Yehuda in his spoken language “מצפון” was an “inner feeling of a person regarding any issue”, “*Bewusstsein*”, “consciousness”, and he understood the Russian word “*совесть*” in this way, also in the Medieval texts, because the notions “hidden thought” and “consciousness” are rather close.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Shveika Y., Rav-Milim — milon ivri-ivri shalem, Steimatzky, Yediot Achronot, Matach, 1997 [in Hebrew]

And if so, what would be for Ben-Yehuda the parallel Hebrew word for “conscience”? The dictionaries (Knaani, Rabin-Radai²⁶, Stuchkov²⁷) give several synonyms for the word “מצפון” in the meaning of “conscience” — “מוסר” “כליות” (“reins moral” — “remorse”), “מוסר לב” (“heart moral”), “הכרה פנימית” (“internal consciousness”), “חובת הלבבות” (“heart duty”), “חוש המוסר” (“moral sense”), “תביעה מוסרית” (“moral claim”). Some of them — “הכרה פנימית” (“inner consciousness”) and “מוסר כליות” (“reins moral” — “remorse”) — are used since the 19th century. The expression “הכרה פנימית” (“inner consciousness”) appears in this meaning already in 1873 in Lilienblum’s works²⁸:

”כל אחד ואחד מבני החברה יכיר בהכרה פנימית שאין לא כל זכות ויפוי כח מחברו האדם כמותו...”

[Every member of society will recognize by his/her *inner consciousness* that he/she has no right or authority in regard to another man...];

and in Ahad Ha’am’s writings²⁹ of 1895:

”בני אדם מדברים גבוהה על אודות “ההכרה הפנימית” שבלבם אשר לפיה יוציאו משפט על אמת ושקר, טוב ורע.”

[“People speak high about the “inner consciousness” in their heart, which guides them to tell truth from lie, good from bad”]

“Reins moral” (remorse) — this expression is borrowed from Psalms 16:7 “אף לילות יסרוני כליותי” (“my reins also instruct me in the night seasons”). It means pangs of conscience, unpleasant feeling leading to remorse. It appears in Mapu’s works already in 1861³⁰: “חרפת לב ומוסר כליות” [shame of heart and remorse], and in Lilienblum’s in 1873³¹:

”יש אנשים שאהבת עצמם גברה בלבם כל כך, עד שהם הולכים ומזיקים לאנשים אחרים בלי כל מוסר כליות.”

[“There are some people whose love for themselves grew so much in their heart that they start hurting other people without any *remorse*”].

Ben-Yehuda includes only one of these expressions in both his dictionaries — “הכרה פנימית” (“inner consciousness”): “געוויסען”, *совѣсть*” marked as a renewed word (in his small dictionary, page 272), “this word was used in the

²⁶ Rabin H., Radai Z., Otzar milim. Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1985 [in Hebrew].

²⁷ Stuchkov N., Otzar ha-safa ha-ivrit. New York, 1967, p. 396a [in Hebrew].

²⁸ Lilienblum M., “Olam ha-Tohu”, Ha-Shahar 4, Vienna, TavReishLamedGimel (1873), pp. 509–510 [in Hebrew].

²⁹ Ahad Ha’am, Al Parashat Drakhim 1, 1895, p. 196 [in Hebrew].

³⁰ Mapu A., Ayit Tzavua 2, 1861, p. 38 [in Hebrew].

³¹ Note 13 above, p. 695.

meaning of an inner sense of a soul in relation to what is good or bad, conscience, *Gewissen*” (in his large dictionary, Vol. 2, page 1085). However, even in his large dictionary, despite his comment, he marks this meaning with a sign of medieval literature and does not admit wholeheartedly renovation of the meaning.

We have seen that for two important expressions — “*הכרה פנימית*” and “*מצפון*” — Ben-Yehuda, despite the common sense, would like to ascribe the meaning of “conscience” already in the Middle Ages. For him “conscience” is a fundamental concept of the ethics all over the world and the overall Jewish ethics. It was inconceivable for him that this concept could not have existed in the classic culture of Israel and it was important for him to find some evidence of this concept in the Israeli literature.

Two additional words that are not included among the above-mentioned synonyms are ‘*ידעות*’ and ‘*ידעון*’. The word ‘*ידעון*’ appears already in 1871 in Sholboim’s writing:

³²“רע בעיני הא-להים ובעיני” [“without pangs of conscience”]; “בלי בעותי הידעון”³³ [“bad in God’s eyes and according to a voice of conscience”]. This word is translated in Grazowsky’s Russian-Hebrew Dictionary as совѣсть³⁴. The word ‘*ידעות*’ is not included in any of three Ben-Yehuda’s dictionaries, neither it is included in the dictionaries of Gur (Grazowsky)³⁵ and Even-Shoshan³⁶, but we find it in Knaani’s dictionary³⁷ and in the book “*Sfat Ever — Safa Haya*” by Klauzner. The first discussion in Hebrew linguistics on the subject of conscience is related to this book. Klauzner writes:

“R. Yitzhak Ber Levinzon writes about one word used in the common language that was a subject of much consideration by our writers regarding its translation into Hebrew: this word indicates remorse and regret or a hidden force in a man’s soul, preventing him from doing wicked things or, if he already did wrong, making him admit in his heart that he did a bad thing and regret it. Almost in all European languages this word comes from the verb “know”: “*conscientia*” in Romanian [...] and, consequently, “conscience” in French and English, “*Gewissen*” in Ashkenazic. And here r. Levinzon proves that in Hebrew this word is used in the same meaning, like “*ומעקש דרכיו ידוע*” [he that perverteth his ways shall be known (Proverbs 10:9)], which means that his heart will feel pain (like in “*ויידע בהם את אנשי סכוֹת*” [“and with them he taught the men of Succoth” (Judges 8:16)]), “*ידוע כמביא למעלה...*” [“a man was famous according as he had lifted up...” (Psalms 74:5)] and he will regret what he did wrong and also וואד-

³² Schiller F., *The Robbers*, translated by M. Sholboim, 1871, p.22 [in Hebrew].

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

³⁴ See Note 5.

³⁵ Gur Y., *Milon ha-safa ha-ivrit*, Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1935.

³⁶ See Note 8.

³⁷ See Note 7.

“and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh” (Jeremiah 31:19)]. R. Levinzon adds that “our brothers, Jewish people, in this country (Russia) use the word “יאהדיס” (ער האט קיין יאהדיס) instead of the word “Gewissen”, used by the Ashkenazic in the same meaning. And it seems to me that its real pronunciation is ‘ידעות’ (Yad’ut) and this Hebrew word comes from the root ‘ידע’ [“know”] [...]” (Shorshei ha-Levanon, first notebook from Beit ha-Ozar of Rabbi Yitzhak Ber Levinzon. Vilna, 1841, glossa “Yeda”, pp. 72–73)³⁸.

According to the quote above, Y. Levinzon offers the word ‘ידעות’ already in 1841. In Yiddish there is a word ‘יאנדיס/יאנדיס/יאנדיעס’, but Schechter³⁹ and Weinreich⁴⁰ claim that etymology of this word is ‘יהדות’ [“Judaism, Jewry”]. Agnon hesitates between these two etymologies: he says, ללא היה בו שמץ יד-
⁴¹ “חבורה של ריקנים שאין בהם ידעות”, “עוֹת” [“he had no conscience whatsoever”],
⁴² [“a group of ignorant people that have no conscience / Jewry”],
⁴³ [“people do not have conscience/Jewry any more”]. In 1940 he wrote ⁴⁴ “היכן היושר והיכן הידעות” [where is honesty and where is conscience], and in the edition of 1950 he corrects himself: ⁴⁵ “היכן היושר והיכן היהדות” [where is honesty and where is Judaism], because Yalon pointed him to this.

At the same time the sentence ⁴⁶ “ניטלה הידעות מבני אדם וכל אדם גוזל וחומס ואוכל” [“Conscience was taken away from people and every man robs, steals and destroys”] from the same work remained unchanged in all its editions. The following quote provides the best illustrative example, showing Agnon’s play with both words: ⁴⁷ “ומשמניה את יהדותו מניה את ידעותו” [“and whoever leaves Judaism, leaves conscience”]. As we know, S.Y. Agnon was a master of various styles⁴⁸.

In religious literature ‘מצפון’ (conscience) in its modern meaning was documented only in the 20th century and only in the writings of one man — Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg in responsa “Tzitz Eliezer”. Unlike other Halachic literature, this work was written in a modern and emotional style, in literary Hebrew from all points of view. The author of “Tzitz Eliezer” knows such expressions as “להשקיט מצפון” [“to ease/to salve one’s conscience”], “נקיפת מצפון” [“pangs of conscience”], “מצפונם לא יתן להם לעשות זאת” [“their conscience will not allow them to do this”], “המצפון שלהם לא התעורר ולא גרם להם שום נקיפת לב” [“their conscience did not awake and did not cause them any scruples”]. Only he could

³⁸ Klauzner Y., Sfat Ever — Safa Haya, Otzar HaSifrut, Krakow, 1896, p. 36 [in Hebrew].

³⁹ Schechter M., Leitish Mame-Loshen 1, New York, 1986, pp. 148–149.

⁴⁰ Weinreich M., History of the Yiddish Language, Chicago & London 1980, p. 196.

⁴¹ Agnon S.Y., Hachnasat Kala, 1952, p. 158 [in Hebrew].

⁴² Agnon S.Y., Ha-esh ve-ha-etzim, p. 187 [in Hebrew].

⁴³ Agnon S.Y., Lifnim min ha-homa, p. 81 [in Hebrew].

⁴⁴ Agnon S.Y., Oreach Nata Lalun, 1940, p. 103 [in Hebrew].

⁴⁵ Agnon S.Y., Oreach Nata Lalun, 1950, p. 79 [in Hebrew].

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 124.

⁴⁷ Agnon S.Y., Ir u-mloah, p. 474 [in Hebrew].

⁴⁸ See Kadari M.Z., Sha Y Agnon — rav-signon. Bar-Ilan University, 1980.

use two meanings of the word conscience — “inner thought” from the Middle Ages and modern conscience — in one paragraph⁴⁹. For the sake of truth it should be added that this word is found only in rabbinical verdicts of the Chief Rabbinate, but these verdicts are intentionally written in a modern literary language, and even there this word appears mainly in the quoted statements of the parties. Regarding ‘מוסר כליות’ (“kidneys’ ethics”, remorse) — out of all modern rabbis only the author of “Tzitz Eliezer”, already familiar to us, and Rabbi Yaakov Breish from Bnei-Brak, the author of responsa “Helkat Yaakov”, use it: “זה יגרום להם מוסר כליות” [“it will cause you to feel remorse”]⁵⁰, “יצאתי מלא” [“I came out full of remorse”]⁵¹, “יש לו מוסר כליות על זה” [“he feels remorse about it”]⁵². This expression also belongs to the 20th century.

If so, the classical Jewish tradition in all its generations did not have a notion of ‘מצפון’ (conscience) and this was because there was no need in it: the God’s voice took its place. The traditional Jew is looking for a moral control mechanism beyond himself and not inside himself and this is clearly reflected in the Hebrew language.

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⁴⁹ Tzitz Eliezer 5, 4, Preface, glossa ‘ma yomru’.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 13, 39, glossa (5) ‘ve-nir’e’

⁵¹ Ibid. 18, 63, glossa ‘paam nichnas’

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