



# Let those commandments be burned unto your heart: kafka's in the penal colony and legal transmission

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## Abstract

Kafka's works very often work as parables in which the lesson has been lost; or at least is ingeniously obfuscated from immediate understanding from the reader. His short story "In the Penal" Colony is no exception: the Traveller visits a penal colony with an unusual take on capital punishment as a sophisticated machine, built by the former commandant, inscribed unto the flesh of the criminals the law whose violation has resulted in their excruciating painful death. Our proposal is that the story is a clear reference of a very commonplace Jewish ritual of laying "tefillin", i.e. phylacteries containing certain commandments and to be affixed to one's head and arm every morning, and that such preoccupation of ensuring the transmission of the law by physical inscription unto the mind and the flesh.

**Keywords** Kafka · Legal transmission · Tradition · Law and literature

## 1 In the penal colony: a presentation

### 1.1 On the subject of interpreting Kafka's work

In a recent work movingly titled *Genius and Anxiety*, English writer Norman Lebrecht looks at the lives and deaths, the successes and shortcomings of Jews of the assimilation period (between 1847 and 1947) in Western and Central Europe, and also in the United States. The author tells tales of Marx, Mendelssohn, Proust, Trotsky, Gershwin. Evidently, it is perilous to even attempt to find commonality among such wildly different men, besides the two words Lebrecht has chosen for his title, and whose association is so quintessentially and tragically Jewish. And one will be hard-pressed to find a better illustration of this odd syntagm than another focal point of the book, namely Franz Kafka.

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Lebrecht takes note of one remarkable aspect of Kafka: his intellectual posterity, which is immense *ratione personae* but forever ambiguous *ratione materiae*.

His impact on world literature is boundless. Jean-Paul Sartre adopts him as an existential positivist. Albert Camus owes his *Outsider* to the *Trial*. Samuel Beckett annoys James Joyce by telling him that the Irish are forsaking *Ulysses* for the *Trial*. JM Coetzee dreams of Beckett meeting Kafka on a beach. Graham Greene's *Ministry of Fear* originates in *The Castle*. George Orwell's *1984* is Kafka's world. Philip Roth is happy to be called "a Kafka *doppelgänger*". Kafka is revered by the magic realist Jorge Luis Borges, the narrative literalists JD Salinger, the political writers Günter Grass and Arthur Koestler and the film Comedian Woody Allen. The Czech writer Milan Kundera extols Kafka for finding great beauty in dull, everyday existence. Yet almost any tag you pin to Kafka, *the opposite is equally true*. (emphasis added) [1].

Kafka bequeathed upon the world, in other words, an oeuvre whose *posterity* is variegated and cosmopolitan, but on the content of his heritage, no-one agrees: Kafka lives through his heirs, but his work is frustratingly elusive, akin to shadows and fog. A symmetrical observation about the *precursors* to Kafka has been famously made by Borges himself. The Argentinean master listed Zeno, Han Yu, Kierkegaard, Léon Bloy and Lord Dunsany among such forerunners, and concludes:

If I am not mistaken, the heterogeneous pieces I have listed resemble Kafka; if I am not mistaken, not all of them resemble each other. This last fact is what is most significant. [...] The fact is that each writer creates his precursors.

His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future. In this correlation, the identity or plurality of men doesn't matter. The first Kafka of "*Betrachtung*" is less a precursor of the Kafka of the gloomy myths and terrifying institutions than is Browning or Lord Dunsany [2].

The difficulty of interpreting Kafka was the subject of a now-classic article by Dietrich Krusche [3]. I would rather state it is very easy for one to interpret Kafka, but that it would seem to speak to each other in a different voice (sombre, playful, idealistic, lucid etc.) and with a different message. Furthermore, there would appear to be an almost unlimited possibility in possible interpretations, however, none seems to be perfectly consistent with *every* aspect of the Kafkaian text.

It is therefore of some value, it would seem to me, however, that much of one of Kafka's seminal works, which seems to possess an almost unbearably eerie aura in spite, or maybe, because of its brevity and strangeness, can be fruitfully analysed in light of a Jewish ritual Kafka could not have been unaware of.

## 1.2 The text

I have just spoken of the difficulty in interpreting Kafka, and opened a new paragraph dedicated to "the text", but I feel it is still my duty at that point to mention a fact that is not heuristically innocent, namely, that "In the Penal Colony" is one of

the few texts that Kafka instructed his friend and confidant Max Brod not to burn *but rather to preserve* after the author's death. Therefore, I am simultaneously writing about the text as a whole and the *hors-texte* as a reality with uncontested epistemological power, because Kafka instructed Brod to preserve the very work whose theme is preservation, as will soon be uncovered.

I will now summarise the text as faithfully as I am able.

The Traveller visits a remote penal colony. He is informed by the Officer (the very few characters of this fable are known only by their occupation, or, more exactly, their position) that a very particular tradition of the colony is about to be eliminated. The tradition consists in a certain method of capital punishment; those inmates sentenced to death are executed through the use of a machine described by Kafka, as translated by Ian Johnston:

The name fits. The needles are arranged as in a harrow, and the whole thing is driven like a harrow, although it stays in one place and is, in principle, much more artistic. You'll understand in a moment. The condemned is laid out here on the bed. First, I'll describe the apparatus and only then let the procedure go to work. That way you'll be able to follow it better. Also a sprocket in the inscriber is excessively worn. It really squeaks. When it's in motion one can hardly make oneself understood. Unfortunately replacement parts are difficult to come by in this place. So, here is the bed, as I said. The whole thing is completely covered with a layer of cotton wool, the purpose of which you'll find out in a moment. The condemned man is laid out on his stomach on the cotton wool—naked, of course. There are straps for the hands here, for the feet here, and for the throat here, to tie him in securely. At the head of the bed here, where the man, as I have mentioned, first lies face down, is this small protruding lump of felt, which can easily be adjusted so that it presses right into the man's mouth. Its purpose is to prevent him screaming and biting his tongue to pieces. Of course, the man has to let the felt in his mouth—otherwise the straps around his throat would break his neck.”

[...]

Now, listen. Both the bed and the inscriber have their own electric batteries. The bed needs them for itself, and the inscriber for the harrow. As soon as the man is strapped in securely, the bed is set in motion. It quivers with tiny, very rapid oscillations from side to side and up and down simultaneously. You will have seen similar devices in mental hospitals. Only with our bed all movements are precisely calibrated, for they must be meticulously coordinated with the movements of the harrow. But it's the harrow which has the job of actually carrying out the sentence.“

[...] The law which a condemned man has violated is inscribed on his body with the harrow. This Condemned Man, for example,” and the Officer pointed to the man, “will have inscribed on his body, ‘Honour your superiors [5].”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In Kafka's original German: “Die Nadeln sind eggenartig angeordnet, auch wird das Ganze wie eine Egge geführt, wenn auch bloss auf einem Platz und viel kunstgemässer. Sie werden es übrigens gleich verstehen. Hier auf das Bett wird der Verurteilte gelegt. – Ich will nämlich den Apparat zuerst beschreiben und dann erst die Prozedur selbst ausführen lassen. Sie werden ihr dann besser folgen können. Auch ist ein Zahnrad im Zeichner zu stark abgeschliffen; es kreischt sehr, wenn es im Gang ist; man kann sich

My purpose is to demonstrate and evidence a connection between the unnervingly strange and grisly ritual described by Kafka and the performance of a commandment proper the Jewish law, the laying on of *tefilin*, most particularly the so-called “arm tefilin”.

## 2 Tefilin

### 2.1 Summary description and relevance to Kafka’s story

From the Hebrew word meaning “(objects of) prayer”, tefilin, or phylacteries, a *plurale tantum*, consist of two parts, each resembling a black box affixed with straps. The standard presentation of these boxes was designed by Middle-Age French rabbinical authority Rashi (an acronym of Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki), later contradicted by his own grandson Rabbeinu Tam [6] as a codification of a practice aimed at satisfying the commandments (or *mitzvot*) set forth in one way or the other by four different biblical passages and in particular by the one below:

Therefore impress these My words upon your very heart: bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead. (Deuteronomy 11:18) [7].

To add a little more context, tefilin are to be worn by every Jewish man of age, on every day, except on Saturdays and holidays (essentially because these days contain enough “signs” already), once the sun has risen [8]. Some amount of controversy exists over the question of whether women may wear tefilin as well. Tefilin are to be worn further to a commandment which frequency is defined in terms of occurrences per day (in this case, exactly once a day), which make them mandatory only for men [9]: some movements on contemporary Judaism do allow women to wear them [10].

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Footnote 1 (continued)

dann kaum verständigen; Ersatzteile sind hier leider nur schwer zu beschaffen. – Also hier ist das Bett, wie ich sagte. Es ist ganz und gar mit einer Watteschicht bedeckt; den Zweck dessen werden Sie noch erfahren. Auf diese Watte wird der Verurteilte bäuchlings gelegt, natürlich nackt; hier sind für die Hände, hier für die Füße, hier für den Hals Riemen, um ihn festzuschnallen. Hier am Kopfende des Bettes, wo der Mann, wie ich gesagt habe, zuerst mit dem Gesicht aufliegt, ist dieser kleine Filzstumpf, der leicht so reguliert werden kann, dass er dem Mann gerade in den Mund dringt. Er hat den Zweck, am Schreien und am Zerbeißen der Zunge zu hindern. Natürlich muss der Mann den Filz aufnehmen, da ihm sonst durch den Halsriemen das Genick gebrochen wird.

[...].

Nun hören Sie! Sowohl das Bett, als auch der Zeichner haben ihre eigene elektrische Batterie; das Bett braucht sie für sich selbst, der Zeichner für die Egge. Sobald der Mann festgeschnallt ist, wird das Bett in Bewegung gesetzt. Es zittert in winzigen, sehr schnellen Zuckungen gleichzeitig seitlich, wie auch auf und ab. Sie werden ähnliche Apparate in Heilanstalten gesehen haben; nur sind bei unserem Bett alle Bewegungen genau berechnet; sie müssen nämlich peinlich auf die Bewegungen der Egge abgestimmt sein. Dieser Egge aber ist die eigentliche Ausführung des Urteils überlassen".

[...].

Dem Verurteilten wird das Gebot, das er übertreten hat, mit der Egge auf den Leib geschrieben. Diesem Verurteilten zum Beispiel “ – der Offizier zeigte auf den Mann – „wird auf den Leib geschrieben werden: Ehre deinen Vorgesetzten!” [4]

The boxes contain scrolls inscribed with four biblical passages [11], which support the idea of keeping certain words on a man's head and heart, which I will enumerate below and give the most relevant excerpt in the body of the text as well as the full KJV translation in the footnotes:

Exodus 13:1–10<sup>2</sup>: «And it shall be for a sign unto thee upon thine hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes, that the LORD'S law may be in thy mouth: for with a strong hand hath the LORD brought thee out of Egypt.»

Exodus 13:11–16<sup>3</sup>: «And it shall be for a token upon thine hand, and for frontlets between thine eyes: for by strength of hand the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt.»

Deuteronomy 6:4–9<sup>4</sup>: «And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.»

<sup>2</sup> And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine. And Moses said unto the people, Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out from this place: there shall no leavened bread be eaten. This day came ye out in the month Abib. And it shall be when the LORD shall bring thee into the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which he sware unto thy fathers to give thee, a land flowing with milk and honey, that thou shalt keep this service in this month. Seven days thou shalt eat unleavened bread, and in the seventh day shall be a feast to the LORD. Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days; and there shall no leavened bread be seen with thee, neither shall there be leaven seen with thee in all thy quarters. And thou shalt shew thy son in that day, saying, This is done because of that which the LORD did unto me when I came forth out of Egypt. And it shall be for a sign unto thee upon thine hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes, that the LORD'S law may be in thy mouth: for with a strong hand hath the LORD brought thee out of Egypt. Thou shalt therefore keep this ordinance in his season from year to year.

<sup>3</sup> That thou shalt set apart unto the LORD all that openeth the matrix, and every firstling that cometh of a beast which thou hast; the males shall be the LORD'S. And every firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb; and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break his neck: and all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem. And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this? that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the LORD brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage: And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the LORD slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man, and the firstborn of beast: therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all that openeth the matrix, being males; but all the firstborn of my children I redeem. And it shall be for a token upon thine hand, and for frontlets between thine eyes: for by strength of hand the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt.

<sup>4</sup> Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

Deuteronomy 11:13–21<sup>5</sup>: «Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes.»

In summation, Jewish law mandated men to affix these biblical passages, placed in two black boxes. One is laid on the inside of the arm and secured through the wrapping of straps around the arm and hand, and the other on the forehead (here, the straps circle the man's skull).

Even at this preliminary level of analysis, it is rather obvious that the strange execution method dreamt by Kafka resembles the tefilin ritual: in both cases, the very text of a law is inscribed into a man's corporeality through the prominent use of straps (in Kafka's original German text, *Riemen*). Likewise, Kafka, when describing the details of the machine, specifically states that "the bed and the inscriber *were the same size and looked like two dark chests*", and indeed, the head tefilin and the arm tefilin boxes are black, cubic in shape and of the same size.

Franz Kafka was, as is well known, born in a Jewish family, and without it be necessary at that stage to dive into the complex relationships that the great author nurtured vis-à-vis Judaism, both as a civilizational concept and a religion, it is at any rate averred that young Franz did celebrate his Bar Mitzvah, as young Jews do when they come of age at thirteen years old. Even if he did not frequent the local synagogue assiduously [12], there is no possible doubt that Kafka knew what tefilin was and was taught of their importance, as Jewish boys are habitually reminded that the entry into adulthood means subjection to the commandments, with a particular emphasis on the laying on of tefilin.

Ritchie Robertson relates the idiosyncratic and pluricentric approach that Kafka nurtured towards Judaism:

It is important, however, to remember how eclectic Kafka was in drawing on religious traditions. The story of Kafka's estrangement from the Judaism in which he had been nominally brought up, and his rediscovery at least of aspects of Judaism with the help of Max Brod, Georg Langer, and other friends, is by now familiar [13].

On a more anecdotal note, I learned during the course of my research for this article, and chiefly through the delightful and thorough editing work provided by Stanley Corngold, Jack Greenberg, and Benno Wagner, that Kafka was routinely exposed with early, and often potentially deadly industrial machines in the scope of his

<sup>5</sup> Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; And then the LORD'S wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD giveth you. Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates: That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth.

employment with Assicuranzi Generali [14], and there is therefore a good chance that these visions of horror also inspired him to describe the “peculiar apparatus” of the penal colony.

## 2.2 Tefilin and tradition

It is trivial to assert that the commandment of tefilin evidences all the features of tradition, although their origin is textual and legislative, the actual manner in which it is carried out is a repetition of the standard laid out by Rashi, as was briefly discussed below, and then reiterated in Jewish communities with some variations (Ashkenazim versus Sefardim [15], Hassidic Jews versus non-Hassidic [16] etc.) but with almost perfect universality. The written Torah, however, does not specify how to put on tefilin: the specificities of the commandments are a matter of *minhag*, tradition.

We must however confess that a demographically small but intellectually fascinating Jewish denomination, known as the *Karaites*, refuse to wear tefilin as “they read the biblical passage from which that commandment is derived metaphorically and consider the wearing of tefilin to be an “over-literalization” on the part of the rabbis. As the deuteronomical text begins with the words “Place these words on your heart and upon your soul”, “So, for the Rabbis to be consistent, they should not only be wearing arm and head tefillin, but also heart tefillin, and perhaps even soul tefillin!”.

The obvious conclusion is that these verses of the “Shema<sup>6</sup>” are not at all meant to be taken literally. In fact, note how similar the above verses from Deuteronomy are to the verses brought earlier from Proverbs, Jeremiah and Song of Songs. This was simply a common figure of speech in ancient times. There is no implication whatsoever in these verses of strapping black leather boxes to your body [17].

Regardless of this delightful dissent, and of the actual meaning (if there could be such a thing) of the text, the Biblical narrative established a very close connection between the binding of “these my words” upon oneself and what we propose are three aspects of tradition.

The first aspect is *commemoration*, as stated plainly by the two excerpts from the Book of Exodus quoted above (“for with a strong hand hath the LORD brought thee out of Egypt” – “for by strength of hand the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt”).

The second aspect is the aspect of *testimony* (“bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes”, “bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes”).

The third and most fascinating aspect is the *tradition of tradition*, in other words, laying on tefilin is a vehicle for the *transmission* of the commandments, it is a

<sup>6</sup> The Jewish prayer containing the four Biblical passages enumerated above.

tradition to help foster other traditions, and perhaps even “Tradition” as a value. These are the verses<sup>7</sup> immediately following the cornerstone Deuteronomy 11:18:

and *teach them* [i.e. those words] *to your children*—reciting them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up; 20 and inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates 21 *to the end that you and your children may endure, in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to assign to them, as long as there is a heaven over the earth.*

This connection did not go unnoticed by leading commentators. Here is Rashi’s take:

From the moment when your son knows how to speak, teach him the text (Deuteronomy 33:4) “Moses commanded us the Torah as a possession of the congregation of Jacob”— so that this should be the means of teaching him to speak (Sukkah 42a). From this they (the Rabbis) derived their teaching: When the babe begins to speak, his father should speak with him in the Holy Tongue, and should instruct him in the Torah. If he does not do this, it is as though he buries him, as it is said here, “And ye shall teach them unto your children to speak of them, etc [18].”

Rabbi Ovadiah ben Jacob Sforno, a 16th-century Italian rabbi and physician had a similar understanding: the purpose of the tefilin commandment is to incite the wearer “to understand them through intensive study; so that you will observe them willingly. Train your children in the regular performance of the commandments so that you will make them a regular part of your conversation with your children [19].”

Finally Rabbeinu Bahya emphasizes again transmission across dimensions of geography, time, and generations:

you are to put these My words on your hearts, etc.” our sages in Sifri Eikev comment on this that even after you will be in exile you continue to be obligated to obey the commandments of the Torah. You are to put on the phylacteries, attach mezuzot to your houses, in order that all these commandments will not be strange to you when you return to your homeland [...].“You shall teach them to your children to speak about them.” From the time your son (or daughter) is old enough to talk you must instruct him in Torah. One of the first lessons should be the verse *השם ונל הוצ הרות* (i.e. the law was transmitted to us by Moses) [20].

It cannot be a coincidence if Kafka makes the Officer a firm, adamant and explicit advocate of the *tradition* promoted by the Old Commandant, and if he is so fearful that the flame will soon be extinguished by the new powers that be. I now cite the longest paragraph of the story, with cuts made only for the sake of emphasizing the Officer’s devotion to the transmission of the flame:

<sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy 11:19–21.



This process and execution, which you now have an opportunity to admire, have no more open supporters in our colony. I am its only defender, just as I am the single advocate for the legacy of the Old Commandant. I can no longer think about a more extensive organization of the process—I'm using all my powers to maintain what there is at present. When the Old Commandant was alive, the colony was full of his supporters. I have something of the Old Commandant's power of persuasion, but I completely lack his power, and as a result the supporters have gone into hiding. There are still a lot of them, but no one admits to it. [...] You should have seen the executions in earlier days! The entire valley was overflowing with people, even a day before the execution. They all came merely to watch. They all knew: now justice was being carried out. [...] *The Commandant, in his wisdom, arranged that the children should be taken care of before all the rest. Naturally, I was always allowed to stand close by, because of my official position. Often I crouched down there with two small children in my arms, on my right and left. How we all took in the expression of transfiguration on the martyred face! How we held our cheeks in the glow of this justice, finally attained and already passing away! What times we had, my friend!*

Moreover, while tying (with *straps*) the tefilin around the middle finger of the weak arm, one is, according to the Ashkenazi tradition to recite a seemingly strange passage from the book of Hoseah, one of the Bible's minor prophets, which I will cite in the KJV translation:

And I will *betroth* thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even *betroth* thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord [21].

If, finally, it was still necessary to draw again the connection between Deuteronomy 11:18 and inscription in one's own flesh, I will now let the Talmud (Kiddushin 30 B) speak in both the original Aramaic and through the translation provided by Adin Steinsaltz:

The Sages taught: "And you shall place [*vesamtem*] these words of Mine in your hearts" (Deuteronomy 11:18). Read this as though it stated *sam tam*, a perfect elixir. The Torah is compared to an elixir of life. There is a parable that illustrates this: *A person hit his son with a strong blow and placed a bandage on his wound. And he said to him: My son, as long as this bandage is on your*

wound and is healing you, eat what you enjoy and drink what you enjoy, and bathe in either hot water or cold water, and you do not need to be afraid, as it will heal your wound. But if you take it off, the wound will become gangrenous [22].<sup>8</sup>

One cannot help oneself to note the anachronistically Lacanian<sup>9</sup> play on words (ves-amtem/sam tam). Kafka, whose rite of passage into adulthood included the laying on words into his heart, developed a nightmarish illustration into his vision of the penal colony, maybe it is conceivable that if *this* tradition of torture, the simple law that prescribes to “*be just*” was merely death, as the poor traditionalist officer died almost instantly after programming the machine to inscribe “*Sei gerecht*” on his own flesh?

My conclusions will salute the heretics. Karaite Jews read literally the biblical text, and wondered, with a blend of Socratic irony and anguished orthodoxy, and opined that one could not extract, from verses commanding Jews to inscribe their heart and soul, an obligation to clothe oneself in straps wrapped respectively on the heart and on the head. Kafka saw, or maybe dreamt, the commandment differently: what would it mean to literally burn the law onto one’s flesh? And would this gesture of perfect orthodoxy not be inextricably linked to death? Kafka evidently sensed that observing the law (Judaism speaks, in solemn terms, of *keeping* or *guarding* the commandments<sup>10</sup>) with perfect earnestness was bordering on monstrosity, yet the Officer, who could be plainly described as an executioner and even a torturer, speaks like the prophet of a dying religion, as a fervent doцент, as, maybe, the last keeper of the Father’s religion, the old religion. It is a common experience for more assimilated Jews, when discussing with older traditionalists, to experience a feeling of horror and utter puzzlement at the old law, yet, the feeling is mixed with a sense of awe at the inscrutable past and at the byzantine wisdom of what is older than us. It is not unreasonable to think that these old men are closer to God than us; let us at least refrain from congratulating ourselves for following the new commandant and forsaking the old one. “Clarity belongs to God—it is God, not us that sees everything. We, as stated admirably by Kundera, we walk in the fog. Finitude is our lot. We seek [...] now as we did before, and nothing is more nefarious than oblivion of the fog wrapping us” [23].

<sup>8</sup> הכמ ונב תא הכהש מדאל לשמ מייח מסכ הרות הלשמנ מת מס תתמשו (חי, אי מירבד) ר"ת קתאנהש המ לוכא קתכמ לע וז היטרדהש זמז לכ ינב ול רמאו ותכמ לע היטר ול חינהו הלודג אייה ירה הריבעמ התא סאו ארייתמ התא זיאו זנוצב זיב זימחב זיב קוחרר קתאנהש המ התשו ימוג הלעמ.

<sup>9</sup> "Si Freud a consacré un livre au trait d'esprit, le Witz, Lacan y a rompu le discours de toute une vie d'analyste. Tandis que le premier considérait le bon mot comme une voie d'accès privilégiée à la scène inconsciente, au même titre que le rêve ou le lapsus, le second l'a érigé en principe méthodologique". Sédat, Jacques. 2012. *Le mot d'esprit et l'esprit des mots*. Études. N°6 p. 804.

<sup>10</sup> In Hebrew "רובנו" (Leviticus 5:12). Jewish tradition insists that this order and "רובנו" (be mindful) were “pronounced as one utterance”, as in the poem known as *Lekha Dodi* composed in the sixteenth century by Salonica-born Shlomo Halevi Alkabetz.

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