

“The Foremost Amongst the Divine Attributes Is to Hate the Vulgar Power of Violence”

Aharon Shmuel Tamares and Recovering Nonviolence for Jewish Ethics

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Source: *Journal of Jewish Ethics*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2015), pp. 233-252

Published by: Penn State University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/jjewiethi.1.2.0233>

Accessed: 10-06-2016 21:55 UTC

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ARYEH COHEN

## ROUNDTABLE

### “The Foremost Amongst the Divine Attributes Is to Hate the Vulgar Power of Violence”

*Aharon Shmuel Tamares and Recovering Nonviolence for Jewish Ethics*

#### ABSTRACT

In this paper I am trying to recover Tamares for contemporary ethical discourse by putting his nonviolence and pacifism in dialogue with Levinas’s “pacifism” in *Totality and Infinity*. They share a common aim of eradicating war and violence, or for Levinas, war and “bad” violence. However, they come to this end from very different philosophical places. Tamares’s thought starts with a religious humanism which holds that being created in the Divine Image means that humans are at the center of creation and that the purpose of creation is to bring an excellence to human beings. For Levinas it is a basic recognition of the transcendence of another person, which leads to the impossibility of using or harming another person and only leaves open the possibility of responding to their needs, which is the path of peace.

#### KEYWORDS

*Tamares, Levinas, nonviolence, religious humanism, war and peace*

*Journal of Jewish Ethics*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2015  
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Aharon Shmuel Tamares (1869–1931) is one of the less well studied modern Jewish thinkers.<sup>1</sup> His writings are part of what could be called the counter-canon of twentieth-century Jewish thought. (This counter-canon would include Chaim Zev Reines's book *Hapoel Bamikra VeTalmud*,<sup>2</sup> on labor; Chaim Hirschenson's *Malki Bakodesh*,<sup>3</sup> on democracy; and Simon Rawidowicz's *Bavel Vi-yerushalayim*,<sup>4</sup> on Zionism and diaspora.<sup>5</sup>)

In 1893 Tamares succeeded his father-in-law to become the rabbi of the Jewish community of Milejczyce in what is now Poland, approximately ten miles west of the current border with Belarus. During Tamares's lifetime the total population of Milejczyce moved between 1,588 (in 1878) and 2,000 (in 1935) people. There were 627 Jews in Milejczyce in 1878 and 894 in 1935. It was a very small village whose major source of income was catering to the two to four thousand visitors who came to town for the supposed curative properties of its forests.

Before taking the rabbinic helm in Milejczyce, Tamares studied in the Kolel ha-Perushim in Kovno, after which he spent two years at the Volozhin Yeshivah. This latter stay is notable, since the yeshivah at Volozhin was something of a hotbed of Jewish thought. The future first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Palestine, Avraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook, the Yiddish and Hebrew author and poet Hayyim Nahman Bialik, the author and ideologue of the second aliyah Micah Joseph Berdichevsky, and others were at the yeshivah several years before Tamares's stay there. Volozhin was an intense and unique environment. As Yehudah Mirsky puts it: "Haskalah [Enlightenment] and its literature were in the air at Volozhin, in the dormitories, and at times inside the folios of Talmud over which the students pored day and night."<sup>6</sup>

Tamares was a unique figure in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. He was an Orthodox rabbi who led a community most of his adult life, yet he attacked the fossilization of Orthodoxy and what he called *frumkayt*,<sup>7</sup> and at the same time rose to the public defense of a communal rabbi who he sensed was being persecuted by the wealthy members (the *ba'aley batim*) of the community.<sup>8</sup> He was an early supporter of Zionism, yet after attending the Fourth Zionist Congress in London in 1900 he was disillusioned with political Zionism and became anti-Zionist.<sup>9</sup> Yet his anti-Zionism was not articulated in the same way as the majority of Orthodox anti-Zionists. He opposed Zionism because he believed that Judaism demanded that one be pacifist and actively advocate for world peace.<sup>10</sup> Even his writing style is paradoxical. Though deeply learned and steeped in the

world of the yeshivot, his style, even of his *drashot*, is akin to that of the *maskilim* (secular enlightenment scholars). (That he could write proficiently in Rabbinic Hebrew is obvious from his halakhic work *Yad Aharon*.)

In this paper I am trying to begin to recover Tamares for contemporary ethical discourse by putting his nonviolence and pacifism in dialogue with Levinas's "pacifism" in *Totality and Infinity*.<sup>11</sup> While Levinas was attempting a more obviously radical shift in the vocabulary of interpersonal interaction which would make violence "against all reason" unavailable, Tamares was involved in a project of rethinking the religious vocabulary to do the same thing.

Levinas and Tamares are alike in that their life experiences were in some great way shaped by war and violence. For Tamares it was the Russo-Turkish war, the pogroms in Russia and then the First World War, while for Levinas it was the First and the Second World Wars and the Shoah. They share a common aim of eradicating war and violence, or for Levinas, war and "bad" violence.

However, they come to this end from very different philosophical places. Tamares's thought is grounded in a religious humanism which holds as a first principle that being created in the Divine Image means that humans are at the center of creation and that the purpose of creation is to better the situation of humans, to bring an excellence to human beings. Tamares's thinking about violence is grounded in thinking about the self as a paradigm of the universal. I am loved by God, therefore, everybody is loved by God.<sup>12</sup> If I deploy violence against others, violence will soon find me. I am claimed by the Divine Image in which I am created to not succumb to the idolatries of nationalism that demand human sacrifices on the altar of war.

Opting for violence is then most obviously not opting for the path of Torah. In its most concise form, Tamares articulates the path to peace in the following way:

This is the secret that our great seers raised up the lofty ideals of "nation shall not lift up sword against nation." They did not condition this upon the condition of "the appointment of a tribunal in the Hague," nor on the "founding of the League of Nations" by various players amongst the arms bearers, nor upon the condition of "democratic revolution" or even socialist revolution, nor upon the condition of any external change in the world—rather only upon the condition of "and the earth shall be full of the knowledge of God": upon the condition of the purification of the soul in order to know and recognize the glory and inner happiness of a person.<sup>13</sup>

It is this purification of the soul that is the only path to peace and nonviolence.

Levinas starts from the “asymmetrical obsession with the Other.” That is, it is the response to the other person, and refraining from assimilating the Other into the same or the self that is the path of nonviolence or peace. It is in a basic recognition of the transcendence of another person, which leads to (if understood) the impossibility of using or harming another person and only leaves open the possibility of responding to their needs, which is the path of peace.

## TAMARES

Tamares states that the central principle of his religious system is that Torah and the commandments were given in order to improve people and cause them to succeed.<sup>14</sup> Tamares contrasts this with the possibility that Torah and the commandments are for God’s benefit. If this latter is correct, then when a person does not fulfill a commandment or abrogates a prohibition the person must be punished, since that abrogation or lack of fulfillment inflicts a direct harm on God. God then would be something like a tyrant, and it would be incumbent on people to keep God happy—or to suffer the consequences.

In place of this notion of reward and punishment, Tamares has something of a naturalist idea of Torah and the commandments. The Torah and the commandments were given in order to benefit and improve people, to help people succeed materially and spiritually. “Punishment” for sin, then, is merely the natural outcome of not following the prescriptions for material and spiritual success that are inscribed in Torah.<sup>15</sup>

In light of this understanding, *tshuvah*/repentance is not a matter of self-flagellation, but rather a process of improving oneself and one’s actions.<sup>16</sup>

This concept occurs throughout Tamares’s writing. He writes that in acting, a person is throwing seeds into the world. These seeds will find fertile ground and grow. If the seeds are of good, then good will multiply. If the seeds are of bad, then bad will multiply.<sup>17</sup>

For here, with the word of the Holy One of Blessing at the time of the creation of *Adam*/the person “Let us make the *adam* in our image and our form,” the Creator commissioned the person to be a

creator of worlds as God was. . . . His status in the cosmos is definitely constructed by his own hands. Whatever happens to a person within society (מצד ההברה) is the result of the actions that he himself planted originally in the space of the world: if a person does good, he creates waves of good in the air and fixes and purifies, over time, pure and clean air in his environment. If he does evil, he poisons the air and fills it with poisonous mists, which in the end will reach him, and he will inhale of these deathly poisons. This poisoning is actualized by way of all the movements of a person, whether the movements of his limbs or his senses/intentions: When a person raises his fist against his fellow, if he were given the ability to see, he would see how with this he carved in the air fists which are already raised against him; if he raises his leg to kick his fellow, he has already described in the air legs raised to kick him; if he sends an envious look to his fellow, he has already drawn in the air envious looks back at him. If he stands as a lump of clay by the blood of his fellow, already drawn in the air are frozen lumps ready to stand idly by at the time when his own blood is spilled.<sup>18</sup>

Tamara is conceiving of each person as responsible almost completely for his own fate. A person, by her actions, creates the environment in which she lives. Tamara's use of the metaphor of air is telling. It is the very air that a person breathes which is either purified or poisoned by the person's actions. If a person puts good actions out into the world, then that person creates a good world. If a person puts bad actions into the world, he poisons the world and ultimately himself. There is some similarity between this idea and Kant's claim that if a person tells the truth, he creates a world of truth telling in which harm will not come to him as a result of that truth telling. If harm does come to him as a result of truthfully telling a murderer that he has a gun in his house, the harm that befalls him is not a result of his truth.<sup>19</sup>

While this is applicable to all areas of human action, Tamara's focus is on the problem of violence. Violence is never justified, since violence will always create more violence. Tamara takes this argument to its logical conclusion, arguing that this explains one of the most important sites of Divine violence.

It is this lesson that the Holy One of Blessing showed Israel during the last plague of the Egyptians, that when He adjudged a capital verdict

on the evil one, He executed the punishment by Himself. In the language of the author of the Haggadah: “And I passed in this night: I and not a messenger.” The Holy One of Blessing could have given Israel the power to avenge themselves upon the Egyptians; however, the Holy One of Blessing did not want to show them the way to use their own fists. And even if in the present moment it was to defend themselves from the evil ones, however, by this way [i.e., the use of violence] violence spreads in the world, and from defenders they will ultimately become pursuers.<sup>20</sup>

The context here is not just any war, but the exodus from Egypt and God’s war against the Egyptians. In that context, God carries out the violent retribution by *Himself*, not as a show of force or as proof that God is greater than the Egyptian god, but because “the Holy One of Blessing did not want to show them the way to use their own fists.” God did not want the Israelites to be caught up in the cycle of violence since God knew that “even if in the present moment it was to defend themselves from the evil ones, however, by [the use of violence], violence spreads in the world, and from defenders they will ultimately become pursuers.” The seeds that violence plants cause more violence to grow. That secondary violence will not necessarily be violence turned back on the Israelites, but, rather, once they are learned in the use of violence as victims, they will ultimately become the perpetrators of violence as “pursuers.”

Tamares then claims that this trait of nonviolence is the defining characteristic of God. In a powerful and radical passage in the 1910 sermon *Yi’ud Ha-nevi’im* / “The Destiny of the Prophets,” Tamares claims that the only content of the Divine is the hatred of violence and crass power.

The “God of Israel,” that is the aspect of divinity in which God was revealed before our people on Mount Sinai . . . this aspect is: the good traits of the Holy Blessed One, the trait of righteousness and fairness, and that the progenitor of all these Divine traits is to hate crass violence (כח האגריוף).<sup>21</sup>

Preceding this statement was a disclaimer about theology in general. Tamares dismisses all attempts—whether philosophical or kabalistic—to understand and clarify the essence of God, “for it is beyond the capability of any creature to conceive of God.” That path, the path of trying to understand

God, is a distraction and a waste of time. All that can be understood from the perspective of that which was revealed, as opposed to that which is essential,<sup>22</sup> is that God hates violence.

Tamames grounds his claim in the proem to the decalogue:

Is this not how God presented Himself in the first statement on Mount Sinai: "I am the Lord your God who has taken you out of Egypt, from the house of bondage!" This is as if God said: "Know, Israel, that the essence of your God, the God of Israel, is to hate the vulgar oppressive power, to hate the evil tyranny of one person over another."<sup>23</sup>

According to this reading of the decalogue, that which the Israelites, and we in their footsteps, are able to perceive of God is that God despises violence and tyranny. Tamames then goes one step further. Tamames reads the covenantal agreement in Exodus 19:5 in this same fashion.

"Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples." One must understand that the Israelite excellence in the world must also be in this, that they carry the flag of righteousness and hate evil; that they hate crass and oppressive power.<sup>24</sup>

Obedying God faithfully and treasuring God's covenant is translated here as carrying the flag of righteousness and hating oppressive power.

To reiterate and reinforce the argument up to now: God is a God of nonviolence. This does not mean that God does not deploy divine violence against evil, but God abhors all human violence, especially violent oppression by evil people. However, God's abhorrence of violence is not limited to its use by oppressors. If victims use violence, they too will become oppressors. All violence leads to more violence. The essence of God, or the revelation of God that is accessible to people, is the abhorrence of violence in all forms, and this seems to include the violence of standing idly by another's blood.

If this is the positive presentation of God in the Decalogue, the immediately following prohibition against creating idols and/or worshipping them is equally connected by Tamames to both an essential understanding of the correct worship of God and the abhorrence of violence and war.



As Elie Holzer has written, for Tamares, “any ideology or world view that rejects the priority of the human being as a value and subjugates it to another, supposedly more important, idea or concept is idolatrous.”<sup>25</sup> In this way, a Jew can worship God in an idolatrous manner. If one thinks that the Torah was only given to benefit God, so that God would derive pleasure from human actions, and not so that people would be nurtured by it—this is an idolatrous form of worship. In Tamares’s words:

One can worship God in a manner which would not be better than idolatry. For example . . . if one worshipped [God] with the commandments of the Torah but with false understanding, that the Holy One of Blessing needed the service of a person and their performance of commandments. If they intend with this to “support” the Holy One of Blessing.<sup>26</sup>

However, the greatest contemporary form of idolatry, with its own rites and rituals, its priests and devotees, is nationalism. In the rhetoric of war of his time, Tamares notes, the homeland is an “altar,” and dying for the homeland is a “sacrifice”: “The idol called ‘homeland’ and its rite called ‘war,’ in which the evil portion is greater than the stupidity, have not abandoned even modern man, but he has left them in their place.”<sup>27</sup> Tamares understands the orchestration of modern nationalism and war in a very Machiavellian way. The people are brought along to patriotism and nationalism because they need something to believe in—and then they do believe in it. At the same time, they also want to fight. Hence, Tamares archly comments, war involves “the heroism of sticking a bayonet into the bellies of people with whom one has no complaint or difference, only in order to ‘find favor’ in the eyes of the masters and commanders and get from them a piece of round tin called a ‘medal’ for ‘dedication.’”<sup>28</sup>

While Tamares agrees with those who argue that wars are fought for the benefit of an elite, he does not completely agree with their analysis or that revolution is the appropriate solution. Critiquing the fact that only the bourgeois benefit from war while the proletariat suffer, or claiming that changing the material conditions of people will end war is not enough. Tamares calls this critique a *mah betza*<sup>29</sup> [of what worth] critique, that is, it raises the question of what this war is worth since “we” the proletariat do not benefit from it, as opposed to what Tamares understands as the absolute prophetic critique of all war. For Tamares it is not external revolution that

will change society and get rid of war, but an internal revolution. The antiwar platforms of what he refers to as “the democratic antiwar groups”<sup>30</sup> negate war because of the miserliness in the division of the spoils and profits. A true critique of war comes from “the overflow of generosity and love to those created in the Divine image, the overflow of purity and ethical beauty in the soul.”<sup>31</sup>

It is only in the ultimate recognition that all are created in the Divine image, that all are equally deserving of love,<sup>32</sup> and that violence will only bring more violence that peace might come. Peace will never come from war.

On this final point Tamares foreshadows Levinas, who calls the idea that war will eventually bring about peace, a “prophetic eschatology”<sup>33</sup> that is embedded in an ontology of war. It is part of a cycle of war and peace in which peace is merely an interlude between wars. War does not lead to peace, as war and peace have a different relation to being.<sup>34</sup>

Tamares’s argument for nonviolence is sometimes grounded in what might be called altruistic self-interest. This is an idea that Tamares states many times: when violence is used against another person, that violence will ultimately return upon the actor. This is a natural phenomenon, according to Tamares, much like an echo reverberating from a distant mountain.

At other times, Tamares’s commitment to nonviolence is theologically or religiously grounded in the belief that the purpose of Torah is to better humanity. A part of this belief is the understanding that the logical result of the belief that God wants to better my state, that God loves me, is that God loves every other person equally and wants to better their state too. Violence then is opposed to the basic aims of Torah as a tool for the betterment of humanity.

Before moving to Levinas, we should take a moment to note that Tamares’s rereading of the tradition on the basis of a radical pacifism and absolutist commitment to nonviolence is a very strong reading of the sources. One might even call it a “misreading” in the Bloomian sense.<sup>35</sup> That is to say that Tamares’s readings are in no way *pshat* or obvious, literal, or simple. He leverages the tradition based on the hermeneutic appropriation of a type of religious humanism and its consequences, and a certain understanding of prophetic ethics. He then reads this back into key texts and moments. Some of his misreadings or midrashic moves are brilliant—for example in criticizing the practice of self-flagellation as fulfilling the notion of the biblical *‘innuyim* connected with the Day of Atonement, he rereads

the etymology of *'innuyim* (normally understood as afflictions) as coming from the word *'anav* (humble) and says that the practices (refraining from eating, drinking, bathing, anointing, wearing leather shoes, having sex) are intended to bring one to a state of humility rather than pain and suffering. "The term *ve-initem* (Leviticus 16:31), according to this, is very exact, for its true meaning is not affliction and beatings but modesty and submission, in order that one's body should not be sated from the destruction of others."<sup>36</sup> At other times his specific readings are not as brilliant.

However, the systematic understanding of Judaism neither rises nor falls on this or that interpretation. Once one accepts some principles—that the Torah was given for the benefit of people (and perhaps for the benefit of mankind); that actions generate their own reactions in the way that a sound has an echo, and this is reward and punishment; that God hates oppression and war; and that violence will only cause more violence—then the interpretations follow. In *Mussar Ha-Torah Ve-Hayahadut*, Tamares chooses the sermonic form, probably having to do with the fact that he was a community rabbi. However, in *Knesset Yisrael U-Milchamot Ha-Goyim*, his extended antiwar polemic, he uses the essay form.

This is not to say that Tamares grafted a system of nonviolence onto "Judaism." This is not the case. It is patently obvious from every line in his books that, for him, this is Judaism, Torah, and the will of God. To do this, Tamares does what any skilled exegete or preacher does. He highlights those texts that resonate with his message, and he explains away or ignores those that might contradict his central themes.

In this vein, Tamares is a radical exegete. He grounds his understanding of Judaism in the two epic moments of biblical history—the Exodus from Egypt, especially the plague of the first born, and the theophany, especially the first saying of the Decalogue. As mentioned above, in Tamares's hands the former shows God attempting to remove Israel from the cycle of violence, and the latter introduces God as a God who abhors violence and oppression.

## LEVINAS

When we move from Tamares to Levinas, we move to a much more philosophically rigorous but also notoriously obscure thinker. It is far harder to explicate the idea of violence in Levinas's thought than it is in Tamares's. For Tamares it is blatantly obvious that violence is actual

physical harm inflicted by one person upon another. Even the Hebrew term Tamares uses for violence reflects this: כַּחַ הַאֲגֵרֶרֶף, literally “the power of the fist.” Within Levinas’s system, violence is something of an organizing principle and therefore far broader and at times harder to grasp. Levinas does, of course, condemn actual physical violence, for example, in his very important lecture “Cities of Refuge,” a lecture that served as a focal point for Derrida’s eulogy of Levinas on the first anniversary of his death. Levinas there writes:

In Western society—free and civilized, but without social equality and a rigorous social justice—is it absurd to wonder whether the advantages available to the rich in relation to the poor—and everyone is rich in relation to someone in the West—whether these advantages, one thing leading to another, are not the cause, somewhere, of someone’s agony? Are there not, somewhere in the world, wars and carnage which result from these advantages? Without us others, inhabitants of our capitals—capitals certainly without equality, but protected and plentiful—without us others having wanted to harm anyone? Does not the avenger or the redeemer of blood ‘with heated heart’ lurk around us, in the form of people’s anger, of the spirit of revolt or even of delinquency in our suburbs, the result of the social imbalance in which we are placed?<sup>37</sup>

Here, without employing the word *violence*, Levinas invokes the concept of violence, violence in this case committed by those who are “subjectively innocent but objectively guilty.” This is violence in its simple or *pshat* usage—actual *physical* harm inflicted on another. Levinas also dedicates his 1974 work, the second (together with *Totality and Infinity*) of his masterpieces, “To the memory of those who were closest among the six million assassinated by the National Socialists, and of the millions on millions of all confessions and all nations, victims of the same hatred of the other man, the same anti-semitism.”<sup>38</sup> Again this is obviously actual violence in the simple sense of the term. The shade of this violence hangs over Levinas’s project as a whole, and I would suggest that one of the goals of *Totality and Infinity*, at least as worked out in the Preface to that book, is to be unable to think war.

That being said, for Levinas “violence” is far more than the inflicting of physical harm. Violence is something of a very basic relationship with being

(as a verb). There is both “good” violence and “bad” violence. Violence describes, for example, the necessary move of a self to individuate. Violence describes the moment the self experiences the Other overwhelming the intellect of the same—the moment of illumination in which the same recognizes or experiences transcendence or exteriority.<sup>39</sup>

For the sake of the current examination of Tamares’s nonviolence, for which Levinas’s nonviolence might serve as a comparison, I will confine myself to a short passage in the Preface to *Totality and Infinity*.

But violence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance, making them carry out actions that will destroy every possibility for action. Not only modern war but every war employs arms that turn against those who wield them. It establishes an order from which no one can keep his distance; nothing henceforth is exterior. War does not manifest exteriority and the other as other; it destroys the identity of the same.<sup>40</sup>

I am going to use this part of a paragraph to ground my understanding of Levinas’s nonviolence, his critique of war. The “but” that starts the paragraph denotes a discontinuity with the previous part of the paragraph (not quoted here), which contains the allegation that war is in some sense, possibly, a more accurate rendering of the state of being of people than morality. The allegation is put up as something of a straw person, a feint to react against, though a feint that strikes a chord of seriousness and gravity. The allegation is that the realpolitik of war, which is a state in which morality is suspended, is a closer approximation of the true relation to being than morality is. War, perhaps, rends the mask and destroys the deceit in the talk of peace and morality.<sup>41</sup> Levinas turns on this possibility with the “but” that starts the first sentence quoted above.

Levinas’s brief for “morality” and against “war” begins with the introduction of “violence.” Violence is, of course, implied in the previous remarks about war, and even more so in the nod to Heraclitus of Ephesus (“War is both king of all and father of all, and it has revealed some as gods, others as men; some it has made slaves, others free”).<sup>42</sup> War itself, the

subject of this opening, is identified with or defined by violence. However, Levinas has another agenda in mind. As Shalom Rosenberg has argued, Levinas is interested in raising up new or lost meanings of the philosophical vocabulary. To this end, the familiar vocabulary is made ambiguous. There is more than one type of violence. There is good violence and bad violence. Good violence will be introduced in discussing the impact of the Other person on one's intellect.<sup>43</sup> Violence there is the fact of the Other overwhelming the intellect and thereby "establishing" its exteriority or transcendence. We, however, are getting ahead of ourselves. Levinas introduces violence here by defining it.

Violence, according to this initial definition, is not, in the main, or most importantly, referring to injuring and annihilating persons. Violence is the destruction of a person's identity. Identity is here conceived of as the continuity of being.<sup>44</sup> Violence is a disruption in that continuity. Violence is also something more. Violence makes persons "carry out actions that will destroy every possibility for action." "Action" itself is defined later by Levinas as "involv[ing] a violence essentially" (27). This latter "violence" is the breaking through the closed system, as it were, of thought, to "the real." This "transitivity" of thought toward the Other, which is an act, is violent in that it breaks out of the intransitivity of the same. (This, by the way, is "good" violence.)

What is "bad" violence? To "carry out actions that will destroy the possibility for action," I would suggest, is to thwart the possibility of transcending the same toward the Other. This is reinforced not in Levinas's next sentence, but in the one after that. "Nothing henceforth is exterior." This is the result of violence, Levinas claims. There is no ability to transcend the self.

Levinas then says something perhaps surprising: "Every war employs arms that turn against those who wield them." If it is true that war is defined by violence, and violence is defined by thwarting or undermining the ability to transcend the self, then, logically, war is a closed system in which the arms employed will be wielded against those who wield them. Since war "establishes an order from which no one can keep his distance," that is, everyone is implicated in and co-opted to a war, there is then no outside. There is then no Other.<sup>45</sup> This leads to Levinas's punch line: "War does not manifest exteriority and the other as other; it destroys the identity of the same." The essential mechanism of war is the erasure of the possibility of transcendence or exteriority. War is that state in which the Other is assimilated into the same. In this situation, war is essentially the wielding of violence against oneself.

What is not clear from this description is whether the main problem with war is that it destroys the identity of the self and the other by first assimilating the other into the same, and then when mistakenly wielding violence against the other, one is actually wielding that violence against the self or whether the actual problem with war is the fact of the violence that is being wielded. If then, it were theoretically possible to wage war without totalizing, would that be okay? One feels compelled to say that it would seem to be obvious that it would not be okay. However, at least from here, the road to that declaration is somewhat long and winding.<sup>46</sup>

### HERMENEUTICS AND POLITICS

If one read Tamares in light of Levinas, what would that mean for the possibility of utilizing a Tamaresian nonviolence for contemporary ethical discourse? By most measures, Tamares and Levinas have little in common philosophically aside from a basic antipathy to war and (murderous) violence. One of the bases of Tamares's opposition to all forms of violence is the argument that if I am beloved of God, then so are you, and therefore if I am supposed to thrive, then so are you.<sup>47</sup> We are the same in this sense. This is essentially different and opposed to Levinas's understanding of the Other as exterior and transcendent to the self. For Levinas, beginning to think about the Other by thinking about the self is exactly wrong—it is assimilating the other into the self. The only way to act towards the Other is to respond to the Other's vulnerabilities. It is those very vulnerabilities that are revealed in the Other's face—upon which is written “thou shalt not murder”—upon which Levinas's nonviolence is based.<sup>48</sup>

In their opposition to war, or more accurately, their analysis of war, they also differ. For Tamares war is a result of the cult of nationalism. The rhetoric of war, in which the homeland is spoken of as an “altar” and dying as a “sacrifice,” points to the fact that war is a reincarnation of ancient idolatry.<sup>49</sup> The evil of war is connected to the evil of nationalism, if not its necessary byproduct.

For Levinas, the essential mechanism of war is the erasure of the possibility of transcendence or exteriority. War is that state in which the Other is assimilated into the same. In this situation, war is essentially the wielding of violence against oneself.

However, Levinas and Tamares agree that peace cannot come from war. For Levinas it is because war defines a relationship with being, an ontology of war, which is different from peace's relation with being. War and peace are of two different ontological orders. Tamares says more simply that war will never lead to peace. I want to suggest, however, that in this there is something of a philosophical agreement. Tamares's argument is that peace will come when all recognize the goodness that overflows from God to everyone—not just to me. Violence only ever causes more violence. Peace then can never come from violence. Peace is a different order than violence. While Levinas thinks of this as a different relation to being, Tamares sees it as a different relation to God and other people.

The question might be raised why Tamares's nonviolence never breached the canonical discourse of either traditional Judaism or Jewish political activism. I want to suggest that it is because of another characteristic that Tamares shares with Levinas. Levinas's turgid writing and dogged insistence on redefining the technical vocabulary of a certain type of philosophizing is a barrier to popular adoption. (I imagine that an anti-war protestor carrying a sign that reads, "War does not manifest exteriority and the other as other; it destroys the identity of the same!" would be regarded with an intense amount of puzzlement and perhaps ridicule.) "Other" for example, in common parlance influenced by a certain type of social science, means exactly the opposite of that which it means in *Totality and Infinity*.

Tamares, I would suggest, has a similar problem. Tamares's writing is far from turgid. It is lucid and at times lyrical. However, it takes a stance somewhere between the rabbinic and the *maskilic*. The language is the developing modern Hebrew of his time (with the rare Yiddish, Polish, and German words thrown in). However, the subject matter is the tradition. Tamares is trying a wholesale rereading of the rabbinic mythos: revelation and redemption are, for Tamares, about abhorring violence and hating oppression. Some of the audience whom this erudite and creative rereading might impact was perhaps put off by the language—the rational argumentation mixed together with the creative rereading. The audience of Hebraists who would perhaps embrace the language were put off by the deeply religious premises of the thinking.

The Zohar was eventually accepted in certain communities as a popular text while Rambam's Guide to the Perplexed never was because the Zohar was written as a midrash, using the hermeneutic techniques of midrash,



while the Guide made no concessions to that type of writing despite Maimonides own creative rereadings of classical and biblical texts. So too, Tamares's writing had a hard time finding its footing. Recuperating Tamares for the project of a Jewish nonviolence would mean arguing back from the thought—the thoroughgoing rereading of the tradition as nonviolent—to the classical texts.

Finally, and perhaps historically more important, Tamares found himself on the wrong side of the debate over Zionism. After he broke very publicly with political Zionism after the 1900 Zionist convention over issues of militarism and nationalism,<sup>50</sup> his readership was limited.<sup>51</sup> He never to my knowledge joined forces with the Zionist dissidents such as Brit Shalom. As the secular statist gained the upper hand, his writings probably seemed more and more out of touch with the winds of the day. Moreover, the Shoah destroyed most people's patience with arguments for pacifism and a positive role for Diaspora.

However, almost a hundred years and millions of dead after Tamares wrote *Mussar Ha-Torah Ve-Hayahdut*, history has proved that the fruit of violence is actually violence and that war breeds war.<sup>52</sup> It is time, I think, to take up his challenge that in order to stop war and violence, one has to stop war and violence. War and peace are different orders of reality, and peace at the end of a gun is merely a pause before the shooting starts again.

In the end, Tamares's thought contains a strong argument for a nonviolent diasporic community, "purified" by that very diaspora, cleansed of the desire for war and nation. There is an urgent need for this voice at this time and in this place.

## NOTES

1. Tamares has not been totally unheralded. Ehud Luz, Shalom Rosenberg, and more recently and extensively Elie Holzer in Israel, and Everett Gendler in the United States have to some extent written about him, and Gendler has translated parts of *Mussar HaTorah VeHayahadut*. Marc Gopin has also used Tamares as a model of what Gopin calls "remythologizing" in the context of peace making. The texts of Tamares that I will be referencing are *Mussar HaTorah VeHayahadut* (Vilna: S. P. Garber, 1914) (hereafter cited as *MTV*); *Knesset Yisrael UMilhamot HaGoyim* (Warsaw: 1920) (hereafter cited as *KY*); *HaYahadut VeHaHerut* (Odessa: H. N. Bialik-S Burishkin, n.d.).
2. Chaim Zev Reines, *Hapoel Bamikra VeTalmud* (Brooklyn, NY: Moinester Publishing Co., 1935).

3. Chaim Hirschenson, *Malki Bakodesh* (St. Louis, MO: Moinester Printing Co., 1919).
4. Simon Rawidowicz, *Bavel Vi-yerushalayim* (London: Ararat, 1957).
5. See David N. Myers, *Between Jew and Arab: The Lost Voice of Simon Rawidowicz* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press/University Press of New England, 2008).
6. Yehudah Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic in a Time of Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014) 16.
7. See, e.g.: “If a person would want to rebuke his fellow about some harmful act saying: ‘Oh vicious one, why are you oppressing your fellow?’ The challenge which Moses articulated: ‘Evil one, why do you strike your fellow?’—behold if the level of *frumkayt* of the one admonished was such he would be able to turn around his shame by replying: ‘However, I never sleep without a *yarmulke* as you do!’ This would be a winning reply on the Jewish street to silence the one who demands justice for the weak . . .” *MTV*, 129.
8. *MTV*, 139 ff.
9. See the letter to the “*Mizrachim*” titled “Where are you going?” in answer to their invitation to talk at their winter 5663 (1902–3) convention. *Hayahadut Ve-ha-herut*, 19.
10. See *KY*, 77–78 for a bill of particulars of what Tamares sees as the opposition between Zionism and traditional Judaism.
11. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979).
12. Compare Randi Rashkover’s comments on Rosenzweig in her *Revelation and Theopolitics* (London: T & T Clark International, 2005): “To love the neighbor as oneself literally means to love the neighbor as if the neighbor is one’s self, that is one who is loved by God. It is therefore to act as if God’s love extends beyond myself” (66).
13. *KY*, 21.
14. *MTV*, 54.
15. Tamares goes so far as to say that Exile itself is only a natural outcome of Israel’s deeds. The same goes for the servitude in Egypt, etc.
16. There are several other radical consequences of this understanding for Tamares, such as the fact that he reinterprets the division between commandments that are between a person and God and those between people. According to his understanding, commandments between a person and God are only there to teach or inculcate in a person an attitude of loving kindness and openness to other people. “By way of the relationship and the connection between a person and God, which is revealed in God’s commandments, the worth and importance of a person is expressed; it is expressed that a person “occupies space”/תופס מקום. By way of presenting him as a being, who occupies important space, this moves him to respect his fellows and treat them with love and respect.” *MTV*, 57.
17. *Ibid.*, 60.
18. *Ibid.*, 39.
19. “It was only an accident (*casus*) that the truth of the statement harmed the occupant of the house; it was not a free act (in a juristic sense). For to demand

of another that he should lie to one's own advantage would be a claim opposed to all lawfulness. Each man has not only a right but even the strict duty to be truthful in statements he cannot avoid making, whether they harm himself or others. In so doing, he does not do harm to him who suffers as a consequence; accident causes this harm." Immanuel Kant, "On a Supposed Right to Lie from Altruistic Motives," from Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason and Other Writings in Moral Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Lewis White Beck (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 349.

20. MTV, 44.
21. *Ibid.*, 126.
22. While never directly mentioning Maimonides, Tamares might be alluding to his distinction between attribution of action and essential attributes of God, about the latter one can only speak in negatives according to Maimonides. Cf: "Does that mean that statements like 'God lives' or 'God is powerful' are nonsense? The answer is yes if one insists on interpreting them as normal subject/predicate propositions. But they can be understood if one analyzes them as disguised negations." Kenneth Seeskin, "Maimonides," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/maimonides/>.
23. MTV, 127.
24. *Ibid.*
25. "Attitudes Towards the Use of Military Force in Ideological Currents of Religious Zionism," in *War and Peace in the Jewish Tradition*, ed. Lawrence Schiffman and Joel B. Wolowelsky (New York: Ktav, 2007), 388.
26. MTV, 14.
27. KY, 15–16.
28. *Ibid.*, 20.
29. See Genesis 37:26.
30. A common term for socialist groups.
31. KY, 21. It should be noted that while the context of the following two references is Torah and therefore might be understood as referring only to Israel or Jews (though I think that there, too, Tamares intends every person), the context here is obviously universal, Jew and Gentile alike.
32. MTV, 57 במלה אחת: מתוך שמחשיבים את האדם ונותנים לו ערך געלה יתרומם רוחו וייתב לבבו לאהבה ולחמול על כל הנברא בצלם אלהים.
33. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), 22.
34. Hannah Arendt's understanding of the relationship between peace and war is a variant on the common understanding critiqued by Levinas and Tamares: "The end of war is peace; but to the question, And what is the end of peace?, there is no answer. Peace is an absolute, even though in recorded history the periods of warfare have nearly always outlasted the periods of peace." Hannah Arendt, "Reflections on Violence," *New York Review of Books*, February 27, 1969, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1969/feb/27/a-special-supplement-reflections-on-violence/>.

35. Cf. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), xxiii. "What matters most . . . is that the anxiety of influence comes out of a complex act of strong misreading, a creative interpretation that I call 'poetic misprision.' . . . The strong misreading comes first; there must be a profound act of reading that is a kind of falling in love with a literary work. That reading is likely to be idiosyncratic, and it is almost certain to be ambivalent, though the ambivalence may be veiled."
36. *MTV*, 14 and elsewhere.
37. *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, trans. Gary D. Mole (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 40.
38. *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998), dedicatory page.
39. Derrida calls out this problematic in *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999): "That is, when the law of the law exposes itself, of itself, in the non-law, by becoming at once host and hostage, the host and hostage of the other, when the law of the unique must give itself over to substitution and to the law of generality without which one would obey an ethics without law when the 'Thou shall not kill,' wherein both the Torah and the law of messianic peace are gathered, still allows any State (the one of Caesar or the one of David, for example) to feel justified in raising an army, in making war or keeping law and order, in controlling its borders in killing. Let's not insist too much here on the obvious, but let's not forget it too quickly, either" (115–16).
40. *Totality and Infinity*, 21.
41. Though peace has not actually made an appearance yet.
42. Quoted in "Derrida and Deconstruction," ed. High J. Silverman (Florence, KY: Routledge, 1989), 177.
43. Edith Wyschogrod points out that violence is there at the moment of the differentiation of the self from being in general—that this very moment is violent. *Ibid.*, 178.
44. "Selfhood is now envisaged in moral rather than cognitive or productive terms. This moral self is divested of two features John Locke and others have attributed to it: continuity of memory stream and of body. The first feature reduces alterity to a content of present consciousness; the second allocates to one's own body rather than the other's a deciding condition of selfhood." Wyschogrod, "Derrida, Levinas, and Violence," 184.
45. Pace Gil Anidjar. *The Jew, the Arab: A History of the Enemy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 3–5.
46. Cf: "The self's distinctive activities reveal a correspondingly amorphous calculus of violence: the wrenching free from undifferentiated being, absorption of the alterity of world and object through cognizing acts, as well as the generally acknowledged violence of murder and war. At each level there is a specific opening for transcendence although once transcendence appears, it is traduced by the very framework it pierces." Edith Wyschogrod, "Derrida, Levinas, and Violence," 178.

47. MTV, 19.
48. "This infinity, stronger than murder, already resists us in his face, is his face, is the primordial expression, is the first word: 'you shall not commit murder.'" *Totality and Infinity*, 199.
49. KY, 15–16. cf.: 'מלחמה', פולחנו דמתקרי ארץ מולדת ואת פולחנו דמתקרי 'מלחמה', אלא השאירו שחלק הרשעות בו מרובה על חלק הטפשות, לא עזבו אף האדם המודרני, על כנו.
50. KY, 76–79.
51. Tamares testifies that he was not allowed to publish his anti-Zionist views, though I have not found any independent confirmation of this. See *Hayahadut Ve-HaHerut*: "During the time of the strengthening of the Herzelian Orthodoxy, in that troubled time, when all who would question the 'rebbe' would suffer the arrows of his fierce followers, I experienced a youthful foolishness. I had a desire to express my apostasy in public and to place myself in danger. However, thanks to the brutal hand of our Hebrew journalists, who closed the doors of their publications before me, I was prevented from endangering myself" (67).
52. There is also some empirical evidence that nonviolent resistance succeeds more often than violent resistance. See Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephen, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).