

ABSTRACT

*ZOT TORAT HA-‘OLA: THE BELIEF IN THE CREATION
OF THE WORLD IN REMA’S THOUGHT*

Dvir Warshavsky

This paper examines the fundamental principles of the philosophy of Rabbi Moshe Isserles (Rema, 1530–1572). In his book *Torat ha’ola*, Rema contrasts the incorrect belief in the eternity of the world with the correct but slippery concept of the belief in the creation of the world. For him, unlike the classic medieval philosophers, belief in the creation of the world is not a dogmatic perception, but rather a transformative state of mind: He posits a close connection between the annihilation of the world and its creation, as well as between the impermanence of the universe and its arbitrariness; All these concepts underscore awareness of the world’s dependence on God and God’s ongoing relationship with the world. They bring man to a state of wonder and perception of the lack of triviality within existence that leads him to relate to the world as ‘holy and sanctified’. This awakens within him a sense of awe and wonder for both cosmic and human existence as well as a desire to beautify it through his good deeds.

Furthermore, Rema perceives the Temple service as the repeated representation of the conceptual connections that he creates. The Temple service – especially the destruction inherent in sacrificial worship, specifically in the burnt offering (*Korban ha’olah*) – inspires the participants in the cult with belief in the annihilation and creation of the world. This belief is contrasted with the belief in the eternity of the world, which Rema regards as the source of all sin and as based on the tendency to perceive the existence of the universe as stable and eternal.

In this paper, I examine the complex nature of the belief in the creation and annihilation of the world within the Rema’s *Torat ha’ola*. I show how these concepts have a central place within the religious consciousness as the Rema understands it, Emphasizing their essential role within the symbology of the book.