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# Ten Da'at

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# Da'ati

"*Ya ne ponimayu po-rooski*," we chanted together for yet the fifth time. Tal, Tamar, and Yael giggled behind me as I shrugged and gesticulated, trying in vain to convey that we spoke no Russian. "*Vi ponimayetya, vi ponimayetya*," he kept insisting. "*Nyet nyet*," we kept responding. I was both frustrated and bemused. Here we were babbling in a tower that once again reached nowhere. But although the chasm of language, culture, and mind-set seemed endless, there was a bond, a commonality that existed beyond us and despite us. And, as we learned again and again during our twelve day trip on this the Frisch Student Mission to the Soviet Union, Soviet Jews are hungry for contact with Jews from America and Israel.

Now, they are arriving on our shores, their children are enrolling in our schools. Are we ready to welcome them — to include them? Have we prepared curricula, material, programs? Are we familiar with their backgrounds and experiences, keyed into their needs? But, most importantly, have we prepared our own students to greet them? Have we taught patience, tolerance, acceptance of others ... of each other? Have we taught them that differences can be enriching, or do we laud and reinforce the virtues of sameness? Does their religious self identity depend on a haughty disregard of all other approaches? Do Ashkenazic students view the minhagim of their Sephardic classmates as strange, or worse, wrong? Do they realize that sensitivity and understanding extend beyond the classroom discussion, into the playground and lunchroom? Many of the professionals in this issue of *Ten Da'at* address these and some of the following related areas, but perhaps the painful question must really be: Do we the parents, educators, and community leaders truly personify what we presumably teach? Do we glibly condemn each other — in person, in public,

in print? Do we transmit our own prejudices and insecurities to our students? In attempting to insulate and control their environment do we sacrifice the ideal of *v'ahavta l'reyakha kamokha*? We sing it, we display it, we hoist it on color war banners throughout the Catskills — but is it really real?

Sensitivity and compassion, it can be argued, must emanate from the home. True. But not only has the *v'sheenantam l'vanekha* imperative abandoned its original orbit, today youngsters are often the ones who have a profound impact on the thinking and direction of their parents. As such, we as educators must reconnoiter and re-evaluate.

To begin with, we must refocus on perhaps the single most determining factor of a person's life: self-image. We must be uncompromising in our insistence that teachers actively encourage a child's positive sense of self and feeling of success. This means coaxing out strengths — including non-academic ones; individualizing goals; reexpressing criticism; and reshaping discipline. But it also means that a wholesome acceptance of oneself precludes the need to discard and denigrate others.

Then we must provide our students with a positive religious identification. This means creative and stimulating teaching; meaningful experiential opportunities; focusing on and not denying spiritual needs and questions — sometimes anticipating future needs and questions; and convincing our students that we really do care about them and believe in them. But it also means that religious conviction born of security, confidence, fulfillment and positivism need not fortify itself with an unremitting and unforgiving scrutiny and exclusion of all who are not like-minded.

And, we must formulate within our youngsters a sense of belonging to and a

responsibility for the community. This means designing curricula that reinforces the centrality of the *tzibbur*; arranging for students to participate in the needs of community institutions and individuals; and generating within them a deeper understanding and respect for the Jewish community at large. After visiting the Sephardic, New Square, Boro Park and Lhavitch communities, students of the Yeshiva University High School for Girls realized that in fact they do share much in common with them and that indeed all Jews have much to learn from each other.

This means that whether our marriages are prearranged or not, whether we accept or reject the use of an *eruv*, whether we wear a *kippah s'ruga* or a black hat, whether we teach girls Gemara or don't, whether we read Kafka or "Tales from our Gaonim," whether we educate for two worlds or the exclusivity of one, we must embody and imbue a mutuality of respect, a nobility of acceptance, and a generosity of spirit. Because ultimately this means that a cohesive whole cannot afford the luxury — and should not want the opportunity — of denying its parts.

Our students must now transform our Free Soviet Jewry placards into welcome signs. Let us make certain that the "*Ya ne ponimayu*": "I don't understand," is also transformed — into a message of sensitivity, tolerance, acceptance, and understanding of all Torah Jewry.

Fayge Safran

## TEN LEV:

### Perspectives on Emotional and Psychological Well-Being

# Educating for Two Worlds

Irving N. Levitz

One of the most salient objectives of the Modern Yeshiva Day School Movement is the education of its students for life in two worlds: one world rooted in the Torah imperative; the other inspired by the humanistic philosophies of the Western world. Every educator in a Jewish day school is part of this movement whose objective it is to develop a religiously inspired, culturally enlightened generation of Jews committed to a Torah way of life in the modern world.

Being a modern, religiously committed Jew, however, and attempting to integrate the values of a sacred tradition with those of a secular society present some rather complex dilemmas which are often marked by personal conflict and psychological tension. The better an educator's understanding of the realities and tensions of living in these two worlds, the more sensitive will the education be.

Before focusing on the tensions and dilemmas of religious commitment in a secular world, let us consider these questions: What do we mean when we speak of religious commitment as an objective of yeshiva education? What is religious commitment? Who is a religious person, and how, if at all, can religiosity be measured?

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DR. LEVITZ is a professor at the Wurzeiler School of Social Work, Yeshiva University, where he holds the Carl and Dorothy Bennet Chair. He has a private practice in Woodmere, New York and is the Clinical Director of the South Shore Psychological Center.

Religiosity is multidimensional and thus cannot be measured in given units. Religious commitment is reflected not only in one sphere, but in several. Sociologist Charles Glock<sup>1</sup> conceptualized religious commitment as consisting of five dimensions, each one a separate arena of religious values and expression. (According to Jewish tradition, each of these dimensions is considered of equal importance.<sup>2</sup>)

### **Dimensions of Religious Commitment**

The first is Ritual, *mitzvot maasiyot*. Ritual is a symbolic religious act, such as lighting Shabbat candles, praying with a *tallit*, wearing a *yarmulkeh*, sitting in a *sukkah*, or immersing in a *mikveh*.

The second is the Intellectual Dimension, *lamdut*. The amount and level of understanding of the Torah determines one's degree of commitment on this dimension.

The third is Ideology, *hashkafa*. The greater one's personal adherence to the basic tenet of Jewish ideology, theology and philosophy, and the more integral those beliefs are to a person's life, the greater one's level of commitment.

The fourth Glock calls the Experiential Dimension. It reflects the depth of spiritual experience a person has when contact has been made with God. It is more than just a belief in God; it is literally experiencing God's presence.

Finally, the fifth sphere of religious commitment is the Interpersonal Dimen-

sion,<sup>3</sup> *bein adam lahaveiro*. It is this dimension that reflects one's ethics, morals and standards of interpersonal behavior as a result of one's religious commitment.

### **The Real and the Ideal**

Now these are all very fine values. Translating religious values into real life, however, is often beset by formidable obstacles, resistance and inner conflict — and begins even at a young age. An anecdote in this vein.

Many years ago, long before I became a psychologist, I was an early childhood educator, teaching kindergarten in a Hebrew school. On a particular week, I was teaching my class the story of Adam and Eve, and how God commanded them not to eat from the *eitz hadaat*, and how, in the end, they succumbed to temptation. "What would you have done if you were in the Garden of Eden and God told you not to eat from the Tree?" I asked my class. To a child they each responded with a certainty born of conviction, that they would not eat of the forbidden fruit as did Adam and Eve. Their values were surely in the right place and they had apparently learned their lesson well. A proud teacher might have gone home that day with the comfort of knowing that the class had been impressed with the importance of choosing between right and wrong, the power of temptation, and the need for submission to a higher authority.

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The following week I announced that I had prepared a special surprise for them. On my desk were several containers — all but one were white. One container was red. “The surprises are under these containers,” I said, “and very soon I am going to let you come up and discover them for yourselves. There is one thing, however, that you must remember. You are not permitted to touch this red container. Whatever is under these white ones is yours to have and enjoy. Just remember — this red one must not be touched.” I then excused myself for a moment and invited them to explore the contents of the white containers. From a vantage point outside the room I could see all that was happening. As they turned over each of the white containers, candies and novelties fell out and the room was filled with

*The objective of Torah education should clearly be to affect the formation of a predominantly religious identity with which to process the secular world.*

the jubilant excitement of delighted children. Only the red container remained untouched. The children looked at each other. One youngster suggested that perhaps they could just look under the red one. Others reminded him of my prohibition. Yet another voice suggested that just looking and not taking anything was really no problem; besides, the teacher was out of the room and would never know anyway. Most of the children seemed to agree. When the red container was lifted, out ran a little white mouse. They screamed. Some tried to catch it, while others ran. At this point I re-entered the room and the real lesson of Adam and Eve began. It was a lesson about religious values in the real world.

For the contemporary Jew who attempts to integrate religious values into modern living, there are bound to be some rather complex dilemmas and formidable challenges. Using our five dimensions of religious commitment as a framework, let us observe how each of these dimensions juxtaposes with our modern world.

### 1. The Ritual Dimension

From a psychological perspective, rituals serve a very important purpose in our lives. Rituals exist in every group and in every segment of society, and when group members share a common symbolic meaning their ritual binds them, gives them a sense of common identity and enhances cohesion. So we salute the flag, stand up for the judge, eat turkey on Thanksgiving, shoot off fireworks on July 4th, and consequently share a pride in being Americans. Ritual gives form, structure and symbol, and contains meaning beyond itself. Thus, Shabbat candles are not merely for light, as *mikveh* is not for cleanliness.

Religious ritual can be intensely meaningful. Shabbat, prayer, mourning—even the many religious rituals of daily life are

sensitizing reminders of our higher purpose. Ritual, however, can also be a neutral experience, having neither positive nor negative meaning. It can become simply an act of habit or rote; something to be observed, not contemplated. One can “daven up,” mumble a *brakha*, put on *tefillin*, shake a *lulav* and be, in effect, on automatic pilot.

Ritual can also have a negative meaning. Shabbat perceived as a day of technological restrictions rather than one of spiritual opportunity becomes psychologically experienced as oppressive rather than liberating.

Where *mikveh* is seen as a sexist ritual it will be experienced not with anticipation but with rage, humiliation and resentment. If *tefillah* is experienced as an incomprehensible, rote recitation of meaningless prose, then it too becomes oppressive and its duration critical, so that a “good” *davening* is a “short” *davening*. We all too often hear: “*Shul* was good today — we got out early.”

When ritual observance interfaces with the secular world, it can also have a

divisive effect and be a source of tension. Many a yeshiva-educated young man has entered the corporate or professional world with an overanxious concern and heightened consciousness regarding the impact of his *kippah* on those around him. Many a religiously committed young woman has felt her self-consciousness rising, along with the length of the hemlines as she struggled with issues of *tzniut*.

Students should not only be sensitized to the symbolic meaning of ritual observance, but to its emotional ripple effects as well.

### 2. The Intellectual Dimension

The study of Torah, a central value in Jewish life for thousands of years, was never peripheral or incidental. There is little doubt that in modern times yeshivot have made dramatic strides in the proliferation of Jewish scholarship in this country. In historic proportion, yeshiva-educated Jews of all ages are engaged in the intense study of Torah on a regular basis. But although there are thousands of Torah study groups, there is an even larger segment of yeshiva day school graduates who rarely, if ever, open up a sacred text.

There are many reasons for this, not the least of which is the pervasive influence of a secular world where Jewish scholarship is out of synch; a world that is both goal-oriented and functional, concerned primarily with bottom lines and production lines. In our secular society, studying needs to be a very practical affair. Education is an investment measured by its potential earning power. The Jewish concept of studying “*lishmah*,” as a Divine imperative, is a foreign value in a practical world. It is more important to learn how to make things work better and more efficiently than to find out by way of scholarship why we are here to begin with. “How” is evidently a far more important question in our society than “why.”

### 3. The Experiential Dimension

A spiritual experience is an encounter with God. It is uniquely profound, moving and unforgettable. It is more than an emotional experience, and beyond an intellectual one. It is a sense of submission to the Divine Power and is paradoxically both humbling and uplifting at the same time. The prerequisite for such a spiritual experience is an awareness of one’s vulnerability and total dependence on a power beyond oneself. That is why it is so difficult to have spiritual experiences in

our modern world, for we live in a society that fosters the illusion of control. We are under the impression that in our scientific, technologically advanced age, we are secure and in command. The reality is that we are not. Despite all of our many dramatic innovations, our control of the universe is nevertheless limited; our security, illusory.

Our generation, dazzled by the discoveries of Man, is thus less able to become submissive to God — the psychological prerequisite for a spiritual experience. Educationally, there is much work yet to be done in order to develop effective methods to help our students aspire towards and experience this spiritual component of religious commitment.

#### 4. The Ideological Dimension

It is within the fourth component, that of religious belief, that religious values and those of modern society contrast most sharply. Despite the more recent societal trend toward moderation, there exists an implicit principle that every possible pleasure ought to be experienced by anyone wishing to live the Good Life. In fact, the Good Life tends to be measured in terms of acquisitions and pleasures. A successful life is all too often seen as a function of what is earned, owned and collected. As the current adage goes, "He who dies with the most toys, wins."

With regard to pleasure, our religious ideology clearly dictates the notion of moderation, limits and restraints. It differs dramatically from that of the general society which appears to be strongly committed not only to exploring the outer limits of space, but the outer limits of sensations and pleasure as well. In its commitment to the Pleasure Principle, it is a society that experiments with food, drugs, and sex; seeks new thrills, finds new highs, discovers new peak experiences. As one auto expert put it recently in reference to the Lamborghini sportscar, "Every man *must* drive a 12 cylinder car at least once before he dies." What an amazing philosophy!

The religious notion of sexual restraint, until very recently, was seen by many as both archaic and out of synch with the times. Sex before AIDS was so casual that it prompted one commentator to glibly note that "Sex is nature's way of saying 'Hello.'" The Jewish ethic, on the other hand, dictates a very different ideology of sexual behavior. There are not only restraints before marriage and restric-

tions outside of marriage, but guidelines within marriage as well.

For the young person who is religiously committed, sex is no matter of casual encounter. Yet conflict between religious ideology and societal values can nevertheless be painfully present. There are many yeshiva students and graduates of yeshivot with whom I have worked over the years, who are rooted in Torah but also profoundly affected by the values of their surrounding culture. They are forced (especially during their sometimes long and arduous courtships) to either exercise a disciplined *halakhic* restraint or confront a ravaging guilt. It is not easy to negotiate religious standards in a world whose ideology promulgates: "If you want it...go for it!"

#### 5. The Interpersonal Dimension

Finally, the fifth dimension, namely, man's interpersonal relationship with his fellow man, is a dimension that our Sages perceived of as the essence of the religious personality. Unfortunately, this is also the dimension where the greatest gap exists between religious standards and daily practice. From family relations to business transactions, from communal responsibility to interpersonal sensitivities, the Torah imperative for ethical, moral, kindly and loving behavior is stated clearly and unequivocally. Yet something all too often goes awry when the time comes for lofty principles to be translated into principled behavior.

As we look around us, we observe all too much *sina'at hinam* — unwarranted animosity, questionable ethics, divisive gossip, illegal enterprise, coarse insensitivity, and blatant disregard for the basic needs and legitimate rights of others. All this and more is abundantly evident among individuals, institutions, and organizations within society at large and, grievously, within the religious community as well.

It is not that this area of religious development has been ignored in our classrooms. It is simply that actions and behavior are more impactful educationally than words. It is clear that children learn from every nuance and internalize every subtlety, so that learning the ethic: "Engage each person in a pleasant manner," or "Do not judge another until you have stood in his place" becomes no more than an intellectual exercise when children see parents, teachers, rabbis, and communal leaders model disregard, disrespect and distasteful behavior

toward others. It is the old story of the father called into the principal's office to be told that his son was caught stealing pencils. "I don't understand why he has to steal pencils," said the father. "I bring home plenty from the office."

Glock, as had Hillel before him, describes this interpersonal dimension as the sum total of all the others. For religion to have an impact, its many components must operate in concert. Ritual, practiced by rote, loses its meaning and the power of its symbolism. It becomes impotent in being able to impact on an individual's thoughts and actions. If one's ideology lacks a sense of religious perspective that life is more than mere acquisition and its purpose greater than simply the fulfillment of personal needs; or if one never feels the presence of God, either in the synagogue or as witness to one's every act; and if regular Torah study is not present as an enlightening guide, then there is simply no internalized religious counterforce to balance the enticements of an intensely seductive world.

So these are some of the tensions that occur for those who live in two worlds. Educators in modern yeshiva day schools face the critical task of preparing students with the ability to develop, sustain and deepen their religious commitment in a world rich with opportunity, but fraught with conflicting values that challenge that commitment. What can Jewish educators do to maximize their impact and more effectively prepare their students to contend with those aspects of the secular world which are incongruous with Torah values?

#### ***Jewish Identity Formation: Educational Implications***

To begin with, the first step in addressing these issues undoubtedly lies not only in enhancing the awareness of educators to the kinds of tensions confronting yeshiva students in the outside world, but in developing a heightened sensitivity to the pervasive effects of secular modernism on Jewish identity.

A Jewish identity which lies at the core of the Jewish personality is formulated by internalizing values and priorities from a variety of cognitive, affective, experiential and interpersonal sources, especially from significant role models. Through the filter of these internalized values, identity is formed and the world is perceived, interpreted and acted upon.

*continued*



The process of identity formation which usually begins as an internalization and accommodation to new ideas, the learning of novel behaviors, emotional associations with new experiences, or the naive merging of one's self with valued others, eventually crystalizes into the formation of internalized *schema*. Whether these schema are formed primarily of religious values, secular values, or a combination of both (where neither religious nor secular schema dominate), is undoubtedly affected by the educational experience.

There is a timely need for Jewish educators, administrators, religious mental health professionals and learned laymen to re-evaluate the effectiveness of modern yeshiva education with regard to its impact on Jewish identity formation. Several key questions need to be ad-

nevertheless lacks a sufficient religious counterbalance to withstand the pervasive secularizing effects of the general society. At best, there emerges a "religiously observant secularist",<sup>4</sup> who publicly displays the ritual practice and symbols of Jewish identification sufficient to maintain membership in the Orthodox community, but whose identity is primarily that of a secularist. At worst, the primarily secularist yeshiva graduate, given sufficient exposure to the modern world, simply defects from Orthodoxy altogether.

There are, indeed, significant numbers of yeshiva educated men and women who, in fact, leave the fold as they leave their Orthodox friends and family for the world at large. Whether this is a result of insufficient inoculation against secular

with which to process the secular world, and filter it in a way that is consistent and congruous with Torah imperatives.

### ***Jewish Identity: Religious Dominance***

Although individuals with a primary religious identity may regularly visit, engage with and move about the secular world, they are essentially there as transients. Psychologically, they do not reside there. The values of the secular world, carefully screened for congruence with Torah values, are not per-se their values and do not therefore present them with the moral dilemmas and conflicting standards reminiscent of their dually identified co-religionists. Since psychologically they reside in one world only — the Jewish world — there is a greater consistency of internalized Jewish values. The more integrated these values are within the personality, the more stable is the Jewishness of identity and the less conflicted is the experience of living as a committed Jew in a secular society.

What this analysis of Jewish vs. Secular or Dual Identity formation suggests for the educational policy of most Modern Orthodox day schools is that there needs to be a reassessment of psycho-educational emphasis.

The following suggestions are neither exhaustive, prescriptive or even necessarily original. They have for the most part long been known as salient educational variables affecting the internalization of Torah values and consequently the formation of a strong and stable Jewish identity.

### ***Sensitizing and Synthesizing***

There is a notion prevalent among many yeshiva educators, that we need only present a rich educational exposure to both religious and secular offerings, and yeshiva students themselves will sort out conflicting values.<sup>5</sup> The apparent assumption is that exposure to the Torah ethos of the yeshiva milieu together with the students' own innate synthesizing capability is sufficient to affect the formation of a fully integrated Torah personality.<sup>6</sup> This notion, in our time, is essentially flawed.

Secular values, reflected in societal norms are simply too subtle, too indigenuous and too pervasive to reach conscious awareness before they are internalized as schema, sacralized, and made part of identity. Unless a yeshiva education brings to consciousness the

*Without a carefully orchestrated consciousness raising to secular values, we might be endangering the commitment of . . . yeshiva graduates by sending them off in a state of unpreparedness to engage in a secular world.*

dressed. What, for example, needs to be done educationally in order to increase the probability that graduates of modern yeshivot emerge with dominant Jewish identities rather than either secular identities or conflicted, often tension filled and diffused dual identities? How well prepared are yeshiva students for engaging with two worlds? Do they emerge filtering the secular world through a religious prism, selecting the halakhically congruous and discarding the irreconcilable, or through a prism of secular schema where religion is prescribed and compartmentalized so that it does not interfere with secular goals and aspirations?

### ***Jewish Identity: Secular Dominance***

Indeed, it appears even to the casual observer, that significant numbers of modern day school graduates do in fact emerge from their years in yeshiva with basically dominant secular identities. Where identity is primarily secular, even when flavored with a modicum of Jewish content and select ritual practice, it

values, inadequate internalization of Judaic values, or both, the consequential losses are the same.

### ***Dual Identity***

For the *dually-identified* yeshiva graduate, maintaining a sense of self integrity, while balancing the demands of both secular and religious value systems, is significantly more complex. Where there is no clear dominance of either value system, moral imperatives are often conflicted, behavioral patterns are frequently inconsistent and as a dually identified Jew one is left feeling very much the stranger in both worlds. In a very real sense, one indeed belongs fully to neither.

The worth of a Jewish education whose objective, whether implicit or explicit, is the formation of a dually-identified, religious/secular Jew seems questionable at best, negligent at worst. To educate for two worlds need not mean to prepare students for psychological residence in two worlds. The objective of Torah education should clearly be to affect the formation of a predominantly religious identity

tenets of secularism and offers an opportunity for students to openly engage with, confront, and struggle with secular/religious issues within an open-ended and supportive, non-judgmental, yet guided educational setting, their preparation for living in two worlds may be sorely deficient.<sup>7</sup>

There are some who are skeptical of this approach and are concerned that an experiential, open ended, and critical encounter with modern values and secular thought could endanger the religious commitment of more students than it would strengthen.<sup>8</sup> These concerns, of course, are of serious import and are not to be taken lightly. David Hartman, despite his own proposal that beyond a well founded traditional Torah education students need to engage experientially and intellectually with modern values and insights, nevertheless expresses concern that "...exposing the religious Jewish student to challenging alternatives to their personal beliefs may prove harmful to particular students."<sup>9</sup>

In his penetrating essay "Integration of Judaic and General Studies in the Modern Orthodox Day School,"<sup>10</sup> Jack Bieler cites David Hartman's proposal and concerns, and goes on to address them in a way that appears to be both educationally sound and psychologically well grounded. Bieler affirms that, "General studies subject matter that is inimical to Torah will naturally cause dissonances within the student whose religious outlook has not been firmly established, but who nevertheless desires to commit himself to tradition." Bieler goes on to suggest that "after gaining a modicum of familiarity with traditional sources and thought, as well as confidence in the credibility of the Torah's general outlook, a student will welcome the challenge of confronting alternative approaches and traditions, critically evaluating them, and then carefully determining what is acceptable to and enhances Jewish tradition and what is objectionable." Essentially Bieler's proposal confirms the need for an educational process whose objective is to first formulate a firm Jewish identity and then inculcate that identity with a conscious yet sensitive encounter with Torah incongruent values. I certainly concur with Bieler's proposal as well as with his caveat that "timing and the readiness of students to accept the primacy of Halakic Judaism as an evaluative device for all secular phenomena and experience"

needs to be determined. In a carefully structured way this encounter with secular values can be introduced into the teaching process with age appropriate material and developmentally sensitive method across *all* grades. Without a carefully orchestrated consciousness raising to secular values, we might certainly be endangering the commitment of a far greater number of yeshiva graduates by sending them off in a state of unpreparedness to engage in a secular world.

### **Compartmentalization and Jewish Identity**

Several other areas require our focused concern. There is a need to look at the impact of a compartmentalized education on the identity formation of the yeshiva student. Is the institutional structure itself, with its secular and religious department (often vying for dominance) a model for a dual Jewish identity? Do students learn that the Torah and secular worlds each have their own areas of containment and consequently learn to compartmentalize their own identities into separate Jewish and secular value systems? Compartmentalization may inadvertently be one of the more critical variables and psychoeducational influences affecting the formation of the dual Jewish identity. Whereas a highly compartmentalized dual curriculum (with approximately equal weight given to secular and religious departments) would exacerbate the formation of a dual identity, an educational setting that implicitly or explicitly gives greater value to the secular will simply produce students with primary secular identities. When the most valued measure of a school's success is a function of its graduates' rate of acceptance into Ivy League schools and the ethos of education is weighted in the direction of S.A.T. scores, college, career, and financial success, then the value of Torah studies and the impact of Torah education is significantly weakened. The effects on a student's Jewish identity can be formidable.

Not only is educational ethos of central importance, so too is educational modeling. It may be critical from the perspective of Jewish identity formation for students to be instructed not only by religious studies teachers who are knowledgeable and sensitive to the secular world, but also by secular studies teachers who are *bnei* and *bnot* Torah as well. Exposure to models who represent Torah personalities able to negotiate two worlds can be a

potent psychological antidote to institutional compartmentalization.

In conclusion, the psychoeducational issues discussed here pertaining to the impact of modern yeshiva education on the formation of a primary Jewish identity and the preparation of yeshiva students for engagement with the modern world have only partially been explored. The Modern Orthodox yeshiva is clearly not a secularist institution but its permeable walls have certainly allowed it to become secularized. This effect on the identity formation of its students certainly requires further study, re-evaluation and a readiness for change. ■

#### FOOTNOTES:

1. Glock, C., *Religion and Society in Tension*, New York: Rand McNally, 1965.
2. "Hevay zahir benitzva kalla kevahamura," Pirke Avot.
3. Glock calls this the "Consequential" Dimension.
4. Singer, D. "A Symposium: The State of Orthodoxy," *Tradition* 20:1, Spring, 1982, p.71.
5. In his 1943 inaugural address, Dr. Samuel Belkin, in speaking of the integration of secular knowledge with sacred wisdom, stated that "it is not in the subject matter of these fields but rather within the personality of the individual that we hope to achieve synthesis." Though Belkin clearly believed in the primacy of a dominant religious identity he appears to leave the process of identity formation to the individual.
6. This seemingly pervasive educational posture was highlighted in Dr. Norman Lamm's reflection on a discussion he had with Dr. Samuel Belkin. Dr. Lamm recalls: "When I was a student and complained 'Why don't you tell me how to combine the two worlds?' Dr. Belkin, of blessed memory, told me, 'Our job is to give you materials, your job is to let them interact with you.'" From: *A Perspective for the Eighties — Address to Alumni at the Yeshiva College 50th Anniversary Golden Jubilee Celebration*, 1979.
7. This idea seems congruent with Dr. Lamm's comment that: "We... have to do more direction giving. We must give our students more effective guidance so that this confrontation between the Jewish and general world will take place for them in a more well defined way... I... recommend... intelligent assistance ensuring that they do not become cultural schizophrenics, being Jews in one way and general citizens in another." *Ibid*.
8. For a fuller discussion and analysis of this concern and related issues, see: Bieler, J. "Integration of Judaic and General Studies in the Modern Day School," *Jewish Education*, 54:4, Winter, 1986.
9. Hartman, D. "Halacha as a Ground for Creating a Shared Spiritual Language," *Tradition*, 16:1, Summer, 1976.
10. See note 8.

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# Educational Censorship: Pro and Con

Alfred S. Cohen

Censorship of ideas, books, art, and ideology is an old, old practice which is yet very current. From the Catholic Index to the Mapplethorpe exhibit, it arouses intense debate and strong emotion on both sides of the issue. Rock music, pornography, photography, iconoclastic ideologies, all arouse fear of polluting the minds and psyches, particularly of the young and impressionable. But regardless of its general palatability or not, censorship was for many years taken for granted insofar as it concerned students in the elementary or secondary grades. Recently however, even the prerogative of teachers, principals, and school boards to censor learning and reading materials has been called into question.

The object of this paper is to explore the Jewish attitude on this issue, with respect to students in yeshiva high schools — not only censorship of books, but in a broader sense, what can or should be taught to young men and women in a yeshiva setting. Are there topics which must be avoided entirely, such as other beliefs and religions, science and religion, or premarital sex? Do we shield students or expose them? Does the school administration have the right or even the obligation to exclude from the curriculum books or ideas which it finds objectionable? How do

we present contemporary issues or lifestyles which may represent a conflict between our Jewish principles and our emotional response, such as abortion, the Palestinians, popular music, etc.? Does the Torah educator of adolescents have any right or obligation to become involved in issues discussed in the secular studies program?

In a recent court case involving limitation of the curriculum based on the discretion of school officials, the judge ruled that, in essence, the function of school officials is not only to determine the most efficient method of exposing students to as many facts and opinions as possible; “rather, it is legitimate for school officials to develop an opinion about what type of citizens are good citizens, to determine what curriculum and material will best develop” the qualities they seek to foster, and “to prohibit the use of texts, remove library books, and delete courses... as a part of the effort to shape students into good citizens.” Furthermore, the judge noted, “there is no way for school officials to make the determinations involved *except on the basis of personal moral beliefs.*”<sup>1</sup> [Italics mine.]

Plainly stated, education does not function in a vacuum; good educators, whether religious or secular, usually are clear about the kind of people they want their students to become, and their choice of materials is based on their own predetermined goals. Since it is impossible to teach every idea, read every book, explore every culture, “censoring”

material available to students is, without question, inherent in the process of teaching and curriculum development. Thus it would be ludicrous to suggest that Jewish educators should not use this essential educational prerogative. Yet it would be foolish and counterproductive to wield it indiscriminately.

How is the censorship prerogative best utilized? In order to do justice to the importance of the subject, we cannot offer ad hoc answers to each situation that arises. Rather, Jewish educators — and laymen — must have a clear understanding of the objectives of the religious Jewish education they wish to project. Based on a positive notion of what we hope to accomplish in our day schools and yeshivot, we will be equipped to make intelligent and effective decisions when confronting the manifold challenges of Jewish education in America today.

An intriguing approach was adopted by our Sages millennia ago, without guile or apology: In talmudic times, when books were quite scarce, people were not familiar with the text of Scripture or Talmud. It was the custom for a group to assemble, and the Torah, Mishnah, or Talmud would be read aloud and translated. However, the Gemara cautions,

Some [passages] are to be read aloud and translated, and some are read aloud but not translated, and some are not read and not translated.<sup>2</sup>

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The reason for this, Rashi notes, is “lest the ignorant people err” in their understanding of difficult passages. Further examples of selectivity in presenting some religious materials and ideas can be seen in the exhortations to rabbis, “This is the halakha hut is not to be taught...”; “It is prohibited to tell this to an unlearned person”; or “It is forbidden to discuss matters of sexual immorality in front of three people, nor [may one teach] esoteric knowledge (*ma’aseh bereishit*) to two...” In the view of our rabbis, some subjects were left untaught — and therefore unknown — to the majority of people.

We, however, don’t have that kind of total control over what our students will hear and see, not while they are of high school age and certainly not thereafter. This realization must be factored into our decision as to what to teach in class. We can try to limit or remove negative influences, but while hardly anyone would argue that obscene books should *not* be removed from a yeshiva library, does it necessarily follow that we should likewise avoid discussion of ideas which we find morally/religiously offensive? In truth, there are a host of religiously explosive concepts and beliefs which our children are eventually going to be exposed to, whether we want them to be or not. Do we introduce these concepts now, or do we shield the students’ tender minds and hope that later on they will be prepared to make the right choices? The options need to be considered seriously.

The ideal focus of education has long been debated by Jewish thinkers, and convincing arguments can be made for a number of positions. In his introduction to *Hovot HaLevavot*, Bahya ibn Pekuda writes:

At such time when a person delves into these matters, and recognizes all the creations, such as an angel, a *galgal*, a human being, and the like, and perceives the wisdom of the Almighty... he will increase his love for God, and his soul will thirst and his flesh will pine to love the Almighty, and he will be fearful because of his lowliness and poorness and lack of importance...<sup>3</sup>

The *Hovot HaLevavot* not only wants to take the student beyond the usual range of scholarly interests, he even warns that failure to develop one’s spiritual and intellectual potential is itself a grievous evil. Through greater introspection and broader study, a person is able to soar to

the heights of awe and love of God. Failure to explore these avenues robs the individual of the opportunity to serve God in the fullest sense.

One whose intelligence and perceptions are such that he would be able to understand with great depth that which he knows through tradition [but fails to use his abilities]... is punished therefore.<sup>4</sup>

But there are many dissenters from ibn Pekuda’s view that one expands and strengthens one’s *yirat shamayim* by plumbing the depths of wisdom. Rivash speaks for the other position, when he writes that “our opinion is that our Torah is complete,” containing all the wisdom any person needs, and it is not necessary or desirable to look anywhere else for inspiration, for “the perfection of the body and the uprightness of human behavior [lie in] the study of Mishnah and Talmud.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, “whoever removes his heart from this [Torah and Talmud] and gets involved in other matters, removes from himself Torah and the fear of Heaven.” He goes so far as to state categorically that “fear of Heaven, fear of sin, readiness (*z’rizut*), modesty, purity, and holiness” are not to be found except among those who immerse themselves in Torah and Talmud.<sup>7</sup>

Herein is the crux of the debate: one school of thought maintains that the best, really the only way to instill love of G-d and fear of Heaven is by concentrating on the classic talmudic and biblical texts which will inculcate these qualities in the student. Others see the need to open the minds and hearts of the students to the broader implications of our faith and teachings, encouraging them to probe more deeply and perhaps to question and seek the less obvious answers. By extension, this method seems to approve of confronting potentially problematic issues and trying to grapple with them.

One might ask, why is there a need for intellectual probing into areas which are problematic? Without question, the aim of Jewish education is to raise a generation of God-fearing Jews. Why not teach students what they have to know and avoid taking chances by raising problems and questions that they may never have thought of? The catechism is taught with great effectiveness by the Catholic Church; it is a method that assures that the student will know what must be known, what must be done, what must be accepted. And, for many, philosophical

religious inquiry very often does not provide truly satisfactory answers; more harm than good often results from such probing.

If such a “closed” traditional approach has merit, and many argue that it does, it can only hope to succeed in a closed society, where not only children but even adults can be insulated from their environment. If a person is never going to come in contact with the concept of evolution, for example, there is little benefit in teaching the apparent conflict between that theory and our Torah belief, and trying to resolve the problem. There are some, but they are a minority, who do indeed attempt to fashion just such a guarded milieu, and for precisely this reason of protecting themselves from the evils of modern society.

On the other hand, in the open cultural world in which most American Jewish children will function when they mature, it is almost certain that they will eventually be exposed to contra-Torah ideas. Since this is the case, it becomes the responsibility of the Torah educator to “immunize” students before they even perceive a problem, to prepare them for the possibility, for example, that a conflict between scientific theories and Torah teachings exists — and to show them that Judaism has a resolution to this problem. Not only does this help preclude the development of religious doubts later in life, it also strengthens faith and love for Torah, when it is realized that all problems can be resolved through a deeper understanding of Torah. It may be somewhat unorthodox to broach problematic issues with our students, but it is my feeling that, in the long run, if we don’t do it, we will lose them.

Early in this century, Sara Schenirer wanted to establish formal Jewish education for girls. Her innovation was opposed by many leading rabbis who insisted that girls had always learned how to be good Jews from their mothers, and that the home was the proper environment for a Jewish daughter. They considered that halakha forbids introducing the formal study of Torah and halakha to girls. Yet the Hafetz Hayim championed the new undertaking. His rationale for doing so may be instructive for us, as there are certain analogies between the situation then and the cultural/social realities of the American scene now. He explained his reasoning:

*continued*

It would seem to me that this [prohibition against women learning Torah] is only at those times of history when everyone lived in the place of his ancestors and the ancestral tradition was very strong for each individual and this motivated him to act in the manner of his forefathers... However, nowadays when the tradition of our fathers has become very weakened and it is common for people not to live in the same place as their parents, and women learn to read and write a secular language, it is an especially great mitzvah to teach them... so that the truth of our holy heritage and religion will become evident to them; otherwise, Heaven forbid, they may deviate entirely from the path of God and violate all the precepts of the Torah.<sup>8</sup>

The Gemara tells about Rav Hanina and Rav Yonatan who were faced with a dilemma. In the course of a journey, they came upon a fork in the road and had to decide whether to follow one path, which passed by an idolatrous exhibit, or whether to opt for the other, which led by a house of prostitution. Each alternative carried with it some danger; yet, a decision had to be made.<sup>9</sup>

So, too, are we faced with the need to choose the best method in Jewish education. There is danger in raising problems which some students might not be prepared to handle; there is also potential disaster if we do not help our students cope with issues that they will almost certainly be troubled by in later years.

The wise educator has to know how to present a topic, when to present it, and in how much depth the student is capable of delving into the question. But because of the stresses of the complex society in which we live, I believe it is our duty at times to "take the bull by the horns" and deliberately bring up controversial topics, for two basic reasons: (a) to lay the foundation in the student's mind of the Torah view on a difficult issue and (b) to let our youngsters know that the answers to all problems which arise in society, or the home, or the family, or the world — all of them can and should be viewed through the prism of Torah. Torah is an all-encompassing *hashkafa*, a total and integrated world view, it is concerned with every aspect of life, science, culture, behavior, and values; it is not limited to the four walls of the *Beit Midrash*. Furthermore, we want to cultivate love and respect for

the rabbis and their teachings, and there is no better way of doing this than by showing how knowledgeable, wise, caring, and insightful rabbinic teachings are.

Almost certainly, the class will include some students who are or will be interested in psychology; let them know that much of Freud's startling insights were established by our Sages thousands of years ago, that his theory of dreams was long ago anticipated by the talmudic rabbis. Those pursuing medicine would be interested to learn that the halakha has long been aware of the phenomenon of female-transmitted hereditary diseases which appear only in the male, such as hemophilia. That is why the halakha makes special provisions for a baby whose brothers or cousins on the distaff side died after *brit milah*. Students are delighted to learn that the rabbis counseled parents to buy cheap dishes for children to be able to break, as a release for aggressive tendencies.

Simple examples. But by touching upon situations outside the pages of the Mishnah and Gemara, we can help our students realize that all circumstances in life can and should be addressed from the perspective of Torah.

Let us not suppose that all this is easy. There are difficulties and pitfalls in this proposed "open" approach, which arise from deficiencies in our educational system, in our society, and in ourselves.

In ancient times, each father took the responsibility of bringing up his child to be a Torah-observant God-fearing individual. He could gauge the ability of his child to absorb new ideas, he could respond to the unspoken doubts or lack of understanding which he perceived in his young charge. Filled with love and with an intimate awareness of his child's limitations, he could make mid-course adjustments in method and subject matter. That, of course, is no longer the case. We should not minimize the tremendous difficulty — virtual impossibility — of relating to each individual optimally when we are confronting some thirty disparate human beings. In a classroom situation, great caution has to be exercised when choosing topics for discussion — what is beneficial for one may be harmful for another. But despite its obvious deficiencies, group education is still better than no education — when parents are unable due to ignorance or lack of time, to fulfill their fundamental duty of educating their offspring.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, even those Jewish leaders who favored a broad, "open" approach to learning, did not give *carte blanche* to the concept. Rambam, who was certainly an outstanding advocate of introducing "extraneous" topics, is very specific about limiting this type of endeavor:

And I say that one is not fit to 'stroll in the garden' [i.e. delve into deeper aspects of Torah wisdom] unless he has 'filled his belly' with 'bread, wine, and meat'—that is, to know what is forbidden and what is permitted in all the mitzvot.<sup>11</sup>

What this means is that Rambam wanted students first to spend years acquiring a thorough knowledge of Judaism, of Torah and mitzvot, and only afterwards was the budding scholar to be opened up to "outside wisdom." The Ramo lays down a similar caveat: First of all, it is absolutely forbidden ever to teach *k'fira*, something which denies the truth of Torah.<sup>12</sup> And then, just like Rambam, he permits only someone who has "filled his belly with meat and wine" to delve into other subjects.

How can we follow these directives, how do we implement the Rambam's method when a sizable number of our students are not going to continue with their Jewish education, when they are never going to attain the level of intimate familiarity with Torah and mitzvot? Does that mean that we should abandon this approach, that we should limit our discussion in the classroom and focus only on the traditional topics of learning? But aren't these the very students who most need the protection which a broader approach might afford?

Thus, although it may be beneficial to expand the horizons of students, it should not be done until they are solidly grounded in Torah knowledge. What do we do with those students who are not going to have the opportunity to attain this level before they face the realities of modern society?

In truth, I have no ready response. It is very difficult to train one to be Torah observant and God fearing if he or she is not fortified with a strong Torah foundation. Yet at some point this student is going to hear that scientists maintain the world is millions of years old and that it is a chance product of random chemical and physical interactions. If one hasn't been taught how to react to that while still in the yeshiva, is there any hope that one can absorb such information later on one's

own — and emerge with *emunah* intact? Consequently, despite the obvious and inevitable problems in virtually all day schools and in most yeshivot, it is important to introduce and discuss current and topical questions. The benefits of inculcating *hashkafot* which strengthen the students' respect and admiration for Torah usually outweigh the undeniable risks entailed in broaching subjects which might not have troubled the young people before.

How is this to be done — and who is to do it? Our students are acquiring not only factual knowledge, but also values, prejudices, and ideologies in the course of the school day. Not all this information acquisition occurs in the Jewish studies classroom at the rebbe's feet. Many controversial and possibly unorthodox concepts are also being bandied around in the secular studies curriculum. We ignore this reality at our risk.

In effect, I advocate not only that the Jewish studies faculty raise some difficult subjects with their students, but I would further insist that the ultimate determination of acceptable or non-acceptable texts and topics in the secular department is properly within the purview of Torah educators. It is time we gave more careful consideration to the caliber and composition of the secular studies. Perhaps we ought to insist that the English studies teachers share our positive values.

A recent court case concerned a yeshiva high school which had hired a young woman to teach English to senior boys. On the opening day of class, she announced that she was an agnostic bordering on atheism. An early assignment was the reading of a novel, *Down These Mean Streets*, an autobiographical account of a young Puerto Rican growing up in Spanish Harlem. The story includes accounts of criminal violence, sex—normal and perverse— as well as scenes of drug-shooting, graphically described. When the yeshiva decided to terminate her employment, she sued to be reinstated. Although the outcome of the court case need not concern us here, it does raise the troubling issue of academic freedom and censorship. One could effectively argue that there is much educational value in confronting the predominantly white middle class high school student with the bitter realities facing others in our society. If yeshiva students are to function effectively in American society — and most of them will choose to identify with that society — they ought to know about the

problems of that world. On the other hand, a yeshiva has the obligation to assure that its students are not forming opinions which they learn from an agnostic. We are not interested in having our youngsters discuss sex with a teacher devoid of concepts of *yir'at shamayim*, family purity, deferred gratification, etc. If our children have to learn about drugs, let it be from a person with positive values.

This places a heavy burden on the Torah educator; it means that he or she must have total familiarity with the subject matter. Consider, for example, the question of the age of the earth, as cited above. Once students are aware of the scientific theory, it is not sufficient to discount it with a contemptuous "that's nonsense." The Torah educator will need to have studied the Ramban and others, on *Beraishit*, in order to make a valid impression. We are going to have to have good answers for hard questions. It might not be comfortable, but the teacher who is able to tackle students' doubts about the Torah position on this issue and others, such as abortion, will have done a real service.

One final note. Probably the most effective tool in the educational arsenal for transmitting values is the quality of trust. The students have to trust their teacher, they have to feel sure that he or she is not just handing them the party line. They need to feel confident that the teacher is willing to admit a mistake, or to admit that some situations are difficult to handle, and that sometimes the Torah's teachings are not easy for a person living in modern society. The teacher too has to project great confidence in the ability of Torah to give direction for any life situation which might arise, confidence in the wisdom of Torah for all times, and intense love and admiration for our beautiful heritage. At the same time, the teacher has to show trust in the *students*. The teacher needs to project an attitude which says, it's okay to have questions, there's no problem in your finding it difficult to accept parts of the Torah, but I trust and believe in your basic goodness, your desire to do the right thing, your honest search for answers that will enable you to go through life steadfast in your faith and firm in your commitment.

The method advocated above is not fool-proof. Often a gap exists between educational theory and practice: What sounds good on paper may not work well, or may even be counter-productive in applica-

tion. Some young people's simple acceptance of all they have been taught might become the firm foundation of a loving and willing faithfulness to all the teachings of the Torah. If we raise problems for them in accepting the straightforward reading of the Torah, they may become confused and ultimately lose their way. On the other hand, for those who will shortly be exposed to all kinds of influences which will challenge their commitment, our teachings may well be the antidote before the problem. Can we hope that their faith will survive the trial without our input? As is so often true in life, we are not given the choice between right and wrong, but between bad and worse. Let us be aware of the dangers in either method, and present our ideas with forethought, care, and caution. ■

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Zykan vs. Warsaw Community School Corp. U.S. Court of Appeals, Seventh Circuit, No. 80-1038, 631 F. 2nd (1980).
2. *Megillah* 25
3. Introduction to *Hovot HaLevavot*.
4. *Hovot HaLevavot, Shaar HaYihud*, chap. 3. The *Shla* concurs in the chap. "*Asarah Maamarot*."
5. See the Maharshal on the *Smag*, Mitzvah 2; see also: *Sefer HaHinukh*, Mitzvah 25; Responsa of the Ramah no. 7; *Hayei Adam* no 10 par. 12.
6. *Teshuva* no 45
7. This is also the opinion of *Havat Yair*, chap. 210 and the Gra on *Yoreh Deah*, 179. See also *Migdal Oz* and others cited in *Pithei Lev*, introduction and *Hovot HaLevavot, Shaar HaYihud*.
8. Quoted in *Journal of Halakha and Contemporary Society*, vol. 1X p. 43.
9. T.B. *Avodah Zarah* 17b. See also *Pesahim* 25b and *Bava Batra* 22a.
10. The Talmud exhorts us to "remember for the good" Rabbi Joshua ben Gamla, "for were it not for him Torah would have been forgotten." He is the one who arranged that each town should provide scholars for instructing the young.
11. Rambam, *Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah*, 4:13
12. Ramah on *Yoreh Deah* chap. 246 par 4. See also *Igrot Moshe, Yoreh Deah*, vol. 3 no.73.
13. Presidents Council, District 25 vs. Community School Board no 25 457 F. 2d 289 (1972).

# Belief—and the Other Side of Belief

Yaakov Jacobs

*"Before the Law stands a doorkeeper on guard. To this doorkeeper there comes a man from the country who begs for admittance to the Law. But the doorkeeper says that he cannot admit the man at the moment. The man, on reflection, asks if he will be allowed, then, to enter later. 'It is possible,' answers the doorkeeper, 'but not at this moment.'...The doorkeeper gives him a stool and lets him sit down at the side of the door. There he sits waiting for days and years....The man, who has equipped himself with many things for his journey, parts with all he has however valuable, in the hope of bribing the doorkeeper. The doorkeeper accepts it all, saying, however, as he accepts each gift: 'I take this only to keep you from feeling that you have left something undone....'*

*"During all these long years the man watches the doorkeeper incessantly and he does not know whether the world is really darkening around him or whether his eyes are only deceiving him. But in the darkness he can now perceive a radiance that streams continuously from the door of the Law. Now his life is drawing to a close....Before he dies, all that he has experienced...condenses in his mind into one*

*question which he has never yet put to the doorkeeper. 'Everyone strives to attain the Law...how does it come about, then, that in all these years no one has come seeking admittance but me?'*

*"The doorkeeper...bellows in his ear, 'No one but you could gain admittance through this door, since this door was intended only for you. I am now going to shut it.'"*

**T**he reader who never experienced this tale might wonder: is it an obscure midrash, something found in a lost manuscript, or is it a previously unknown tale by Reb Nahman Bratslaver?

"Before the Law" is one of the earliest works of Franz Kafka which he later incorporated into his great novel *The Trial*. In the novel it is followed by a lengthy discussion of the parable's meaning which has the feel of Rashi and Tosaphot on a text—not a far-fetched comparison when we consider Kafka's later life.

Franz Kafka was born in 1883 in Prague, the son of an assimilated Jewish father. His mother tried to maintain some tradition in the household. Her family name was Loew leading to speculation that she may have been a descendant of the Maharal, Reb Yehudah Loew. Later in his life when Kafka was struggling to find his true identity, he wrote in his diary, "In Hebrew my name is Amschel, the same as my grandfather's on my mother's side." Kafka's father took him to *shul* on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, wanting him to have a smattering of Judaism. It was

an experience Franz found tedious and uninspiring.

Kafka began to write when he was in his teens, and wished to make writing his life's work. But his father, Hermann, who domineered the family and terrorized Franz, decided that his son should become an attorney. When Kafka received his law degree he took a position with the agency in Prague that dealt with worker's compensation. His superiors were unhappy with him because he championed the worker's rights, and as a trial officer he often ruled against the insurance companies.

Kafka's indifference to Judaism, common among the Bohemian circle of writers and artists in which he lived, was turned around by a friend, Jiri Langer. Langer became enamored by the Ostjuden, the Jews from Eastern Europe who were an embarrassment to Prague's Jewish bourgeoisie when they came to the city and walked the streets in their unique garb. Langer, later to be known as Mordechai, travelled to Belz to study with members of the Belzer hassidic court. He thereby began a *teshuvah* experience others of his generation were to follow, a phenomenon which has yet to be chronicled.<sup>1</sup> Finally, Langer came home himself one day in full hassidic regalia,

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and later wrote and published a book called *Nine Gates* composed of tales of the great *rebbe*s he had heard in Belz. Langer's family tried desperately to convince him to give up his hassidic garb, but to no avail. He agreed to modify his dress somewhat but finally solved their problem and his by emigrating to Eretz Yisrael where he lived a full Torah life.

In 1961 Langer's book was translated into English and published in London. His brother Frantisek, a physician and playwright, who did not follow Mordechai's path, wrote an introduction to the book. Frantisek describes what happened when his brother Jiri came home from Belz.

"The attitude of our family to Jiri seemed to us at the time to resemble the situation in Kafka's novel, *Die Verwandlung* (*The Metamorphosis*)—in which an entire family finds its way of life completely upset when the son of the house is suddenly turned into an enormous cockroach, and subsequently has to be hidden from the rest of the world, while the family strive in vain to find someplace for him in their affections. At least Father tried to find a practical solution. He requested a rabbi in Vinohady, a sensitive, erudite doctor of philosophy, to talk to Jiri, hoping that a religious authority of such consequence would lead my brother to modify his ways. But Jiri refused even to speak to him; he looked upon him as an atheist..."

Kafka did not follow Langer to Belz, but his curiosity concerning Judaism drove him to study Hebrew—as a writer he could not content himself with translations, though there was already a vast body of Judaica in the German language. He found a copy of *Sefas Ameinnu, Lehrbuch der Hebraischen Sprache fur Schul und Selbsunterricht—The Language of our People, A Textbook of the Hebrew Language for School and Self-Instruction*. Completely on his own, during the year 1917, he mastered forty-four chapters of the book.<sup>3</sup>

Not content with Hebrew language alone, Kafka prevailed upon Karl Thieberger, the son of a Prague *rav*, to teach him Talmud. And then, in the early 1920's, Puah Ben-Tovim came to Prague to study for a doctorate in science. Her father, himself a Hebraist, was a neighbor of the renowned pioneer of modern

Hebrew, Eliezer Ben Yehudah in Yerushalayim, and Puah was one of the earliest Jews in modern times to speak Hebrew in everyday life. Kafka arranged to study Hebrew with her and perhaps as a result of this experience he began to give serious thought to making aliyah. Tragically, the tuberculosis that was eating away at his lungs and was to kill him at the age of 41, forced him to delay his plans. But the dream was still there.

After Puah ben Tovim left Prague, Kafka met Dora Diamant, a young woman from a Polish hassidic family. Kafka was intrigued by Dora, and although she had run away from *Yiddishkeit*—which she found too restrictive, there was much she could teach him. In his diaries which record his Jewish interests and concerns, he writes how thrilling it was to hear Isaiah read to him in the original as he lay in bed in one of the sanatoria he went to in his fight to remain alive. He talked with Dora about marrying and opening a restaurant in Tel Aviv. But Dora, rebel through she was, would not marry without her father's approval. Kafka addressed a letter to her father asking for her hand in marriage and saying candidly that while he was not yet a fully-practicing Jew, he was a *ba'al teshuva*. Her father took the letter to the Gerer Rebbe, who read it and spoke a single word, "No." Several months later Kafka was dead.

George Steiner, one of the great minds of our time, has described Kafka (and Freud, Einstein, Marx and Wittgensten) as a "meta rabbi," suggesting that when the Jewish genius no longer occupies itself with Torah texts, it keeps running on into secular fields, like an engine cut off from its steering apparatus continues to run without direction, but with greater forward thrust. While the word "Jew" does not appear in any of his fiction, his diaries, which some believe to be his greatest literary achievement, are the most fascinating and instructive record of an assimilated Jew, a writer struggling to recover his heritage and find his way back to *Yiddishkeit*. In his "Letter to My Father," in which he tries to bridge the gap which separated them, he chastises his father for ridiculing his fumbling efforts to achieve Jewish literacy, and for spurning the *Ostjuden* he brought home with him, among them Yitzhak Levi, a yeshiva bohur turned Yiddish actor. In a conciliatory tone Kafka tells his father, "It would have been thinkable that we might both have found each other in Judaism."

We send so many of our young men and women into the world equipped with the ideas and ideals of Western civilization culled from their reading of Shakespeare, Dickens, Steinbeck, et al. Yet we ignore Franz Kafka. Given that the study of British and American fiction is important to prepare yeshiva high school students to deal with the English language and with the ideas they will be challenged to confront when they go on to universities, and into the mainstream of American life, a knowledge of Kafka's life and work is at least as vital. W. H. Auden, one of this generation's greatest critics, said that Franz Kafka is to our time what Shakespeare was to his. After World War II, when the French and then the Germans discovered Kafka, he was claimed by the Germans as their own, though had he not died in 1924 they would have murdered him as they did his sisters. Czechoslovakia's communist regime banned his books. Jews virtually ignored him. Early critics of Kafka, many of whom were Jewish, took no notice of his Jewishness, and his inner life, and his own metamorphosis. Only recently have critics begun to deal with Kafka and the Jewish problem. He is ours. Let us claim him and make use of his tensions, his frustrations and his great art for its intrinsic value, and for what it tells us about the other side of belief, which illuminates and strengthens our commitment to the Torah life.

### Isaac Bashevis Singer's *Der Ba'al Teshuva*

Isaac Bashevis Singer traveled the opposite road. Born into a rabbinic family in Poland where he studied traditional Torah texts, he left his father's home and at the age of sixteen, followed his older brother, I. J. Singer into the secular world and into a career as a writer. Writing to this day in Yiddish, his work has been translated into English, Hebrew, French and many other languages.

From his earliest work through the present, he has written overtly about Jews struggling to remain Jews and overcoming the temptations of modern society.

In 1972 Singer traveled to Israel as a guest of Professor Chone Schmeruk, head of the Yiddish department at Hebrew University, and one of the few critics who works from the original Yiddish texts. Singer was bemused that Schmeruk was giving a course on his literary corpus, as he was bemused when the King of Sweden

*continued*



presented him with the Nobel Prize for Literature.<sup>4</sup> Schmeruk took Singer to the *Kotel* and then to a yeshiva where together they "learned" a *blatt Gemorah*. Singer's work is often autobiographical, or based on stories that people tell him, and so when he returned from his visit to Israel he wrote a two-part essay in the *Yiddish Forward* called "A *Tog ihn Yerushalayim*," interestingly, under the name "Isaac Bashevis," which he reserves for his non-fiction work. He begins his description by saying that he prayed at the *Kotel*—as he always does when he is in trouble and "since I am in trouble all the time I pray every day." He fixes his eyes on a yeshiva *bohur* and he records his thoughts:

"I know that yeshiva *bohur*. I needn't talk to him to know who he is, what he thinks about, and how he conducts himself. His life is an open book for me. I envy him—but lacking his firm belief one cannot live as he does. He has a treasure which is not accessible to me, the skeptic, but I look at him as a pauper looks at a wealthy man."

Still standing at the *Kotel*, a man in black garb walks up to Singer and says, "You don't know me, but I've read your work for years, and I have a story to tell you." The following January, 1973, Singer began to serialize his story in a short novel in the *Forward* called *Der Baal Teshuva*. It is in effect a dialogue between the persona—Singer himself—and a former European yeshiva *bohur* who became a free-wheeling garment industry tycoon with a wife and a mistress and whose daughter is constantly after him for money. One day he abandons his home and family, and ends up in Meah Shearim, where he marries, has children, and leads an authentic Jewish life.

In the process of working his way back, he hears opposing voices in his head: Don't be a fool, one voice says, you'll never be a real Jew. You'll be like the actors on a stage who put on *tallis* and *tefillin* and speak "*frum*," and then go home to live like *goyim*. The other voice says, If you don't believe in Shulhan Arukh, then you will have to believe in Stalin, in all kinds of vacuous theories which lead to nothingness.... You saw with your own eyes what throwing off the yoke leads to: the KGB, the Gestapo. If you don't want to be a Nazi, you'll have to become the opposite.... It's no accident that Hitler and his theoreticians mounted such a hysterical

attack against the Talmud and the *Talmud Jude*.

Throughout the book Singer gives the *ba'al teshuva* the most convincing lines, with the narrator responding, in different ways, "For that you have to believe." Unlike his previous novels serialized in the *Forward*, this book was not translated into English. Singer said that his publisher felt it was not for the English reader. Singer, accepting that judgment, nevertheless told interviewers that this was his best book.

His theme in *Der Ba'al Teshuvah* was not really new. In earlier novels his main characters return to the belief that has eluded their creator. In *The Magician of Lublin*, the Polish Jew who is its hero, and who lives a sleazy life as a thief, a charlatan and a womanizer, wants to return but is unable to resist the advances of the *yetzer ha'rah*. He has himself bricked into a small structure with no door, shutting out all temptation. In *The Slave*, the hero is a Polish peasant who is a slave to a Polish farmer. Bereft of the companionship of other Jews, having not even a *siddur*, he recites whatever parts of the prayers he remembers and dreams about being a free man once again so that he may live as a Jew. In *Enemies, A Love Story*, the hero, who supports his wife and mistress by doing ghost-writing for a rabbi, suddenly is confronted by his non-Jewish wife one Shabbat afternoon. She has been befriended by some of her neighbors in Brighton Beach where they live, who do not know she is not Jewish.

"Why do you write on Shabbos?" she asks him one Shabbos day.

"Why do you iron on Shabbos?" he retorts.

"O.K.," she says, "if you won't write on Shabbos, I won't iron."

"And," muses the narrator, "if you write on Shabbos, your children will be Nazis."

When *Der Ba'al Teshuvah* was eventually published in English, it appeared with an Author's Note. Singer thus deviated sharply from an unwritten law of fiction: the author writes no apologies, no explanations, since his fictitious characters speak only for themselves. Why explain them if they don't exist?

But Singer goes to great lengths to disassociate himself from Mr. Shapiro, the *ba'al teshuva*. As Shakespeare put it, "The lady doth protest too much." Was it Singer, his publisher, or his translators who feared that the reader might conclude that Singer is no longer sure of his rejection of belief? Whatever the state of

his belief, which probably he himself didn't know, his work is like a handbook of *teshuva*.<sup>5</sup> Given the old maxim that a story is true even if the events it describes never took place, *The Penitent* by far excels many of the *teshuva* chronicles written today.

Isaac Bashevis Singer's *The Penitent*, *The Slave*, and a selection of his short stories would be a valuable addition to the reading lists of yeshiva high schools.<sup>6</sup> But beyond the classroom, we need to understand what draws some people to Torah, while so many are going the other way. We need to understand belief and disbelief to understand why we believe. ■

#### FOOTNOTES

1) This writer is engaged in writing such a chronicle.

2) The book was published by James Clarke and Co. Ltd., and was long out of print until it was re-issued in 1976 by Behrman House, Inc., New York.

3) Kafka was to go on to write several novels and short stories which after his death in 1924 gained him wide acclaim. The Nazis burned them, but a few copies survived. In one of those ironies of history, his Hebrew notebooks with neatly printed vocabulary lists in Hebrew and German were saved and were part of a Kafka exhibition which recently traveled the world, with a stop at New York's Leo Baeck Institute.

4) His address to the Royal Academy is a masterpiece and has been published in Yiddish and English in a bi-lingual edition, by Farrar, Strauss & Giroux.

5) When Singer responded to the Swedish Academy after receiving the Nobel Prize, he made a bold statement few if any Jewish leaders would make in public. In an outspoken defense of the much maligned and much misunderstood shtetl Jews, he said proudly: "The truth is that what the great religions preached, the Yiddish speaking people of the ghettos practiced day in a day out."

6) I am informed that Singer's *The Penitent*, and Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* are on the English department list at the Ramaz High School in New York City.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

All of the works by Franz Kafka are again in print and available from Schocken Books, New York. As far as I know editions in cloth are available from the publisher, they are in most bookstores in paper.

All of the works by Isaac Bashevis Singer mentioned above are available from Farrar, Straus & Giroux. Many are also available in paper. *The Penitent* was published in paper by Ballantine. The reader who knows Yiddish will find a treat in *Der Baal Teshuva* in the original, published by *Farlag Y.L. Peretz*, Tel Aviv 1974, which does not carry Singer's disclaimer, unlike *Hachozar B'Teshuva*, (Sifriat Poalim, Tel Aviv, 1986) a Hebrew translation, which does.

# KARAITES IN THE CLASSROOM:

## On the Use of Group Role-Playing in the Teaching of Jewish History

*Jon Bloomberg*

One of the important subjects for study in the history of the Jews in the Middle Ages is the Karaites. The Karaite challenge to Rabbinic authority preoccupied the minds of leading figures of the Geonic period, particularly Saadiah Gaon. Halakhic authorities, especially Rambam, faced the question of how the Karaites should be classified, and hence, how they should be treated, from the standpoint of the halakhah. Karaite views and interpretations form the backdrop against which much of Jewish exegetical and philosophic literature of the medieval period, e.g., the commentary of Ibn Ezra and the *Sefer ha-Kuzari*, must be viewed if it is to be understood properly.

The Karaites are thus a topic which should be included in a course in medieval Jewish history. But how can it be made both interesting and meaningful to the high school student? Following is the approach which I have adopted in 11th grade Jewish history classes and which relies largely, although not exclusively, on the use of group role-playing.

The section of the course devoted to the Karaites begins with the analysis of selected primary source texts in translation.<sup>1</sup> Four passages are assigned, all of them dealing with the person of Anan, the 8th-century founder of Karaism, and with

the beginnings of Karaism. Of the four sources, however, the authors of two are Karaites, while the authors of the other two are Rabbanites, i.e. opponents of the Karaites. Students are asked to compare the two sets of accounts as to their depictions of the character and personality of Anan and their presentations of the emergence of Karaism. Class discussion focuses on the conclusions which emerge.

The vast divergence between the Karaite and Rabbanite sources, even in matters of pure "fact," becomes readily apparent, and students are asked to sug-

gest plausible explanations. In most cases they quickly recognize the authors' biases. They have thus learned a critical lesson for the historian: careful consideration must be given to the question of what biases or personal considerations are at work in the primary sources which one is examining and from which one is drawing conclusions.

The balance of the unit on Karaism consists of two separate group role-playing exercises. In the first, the class is divided into four groups (6-8 students in each). Two groups, playing the role of Karaites, must arrive at an effective strategy for attracting followers to their fledgling movement. The remaining two groups, who play the role of Rabbanites, must plot the means for preventing the spread of Karaism. Students are given 10-15 minutes during which time the teacher circulates to keep the groups focused clearly on the issue and to answer any questions. A spokesperson from each group then makes a brief presentation of his/her group's conclusions, and a short period is allotted for class members to pose questions and issue challenges.

Students will frequently conclude that their strategy—be they "Karaites" or "Rabbanites"—should be to appeal to the masses, those most likely to be attracted by Karaism, with rational arguments regarding *Torah She-Be'al Peh*. The "Karaites" thus propose to convince the masses that reason alone is sufficient for establishing the true meaning of *Torah*

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history is an  
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individual  
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like themselves.*

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*SheBi'Khtav* and that only those interpretations which are in accord with reason should be accepted as valid, while the "Rabbanites" propose to convince the masses that reason is unreliable, that different people using their reason will arrive at different conclusions, and hence an authoritative tradition is indispensable. Such conclusions reveal that students do not yet understand (or have failed to apply their understanding) that ideological struggles which involve power and influence, e.g. contemporary political campaigns, are more frequently fought and won not on the merits of the respective ideological positions of the combatants, but by means of personal attacks on opponents and with appeals to the special interests of those whom one seeks to attract. When their flawed approach is corrected, the "Karaites" usually begin to promote the opportunity which Karaism offers for individualism, i.e. the application of each individual's own reason to the interpretation of the *Torah SheBi'Khtav* without relying "blindly" on the interpretations of others. They also attack the Geonim as being "power-hungry" and as striving to protect their power by limiting access to a true and accurate knowledge of the *Torah*, thereby making this knowledge, and thus the power, the preserve of an elite class. The "Rabbanites" meanwhile stress that allowing individuals to rely on their own reason in interpreting the *Torah SheBi'Khtav* will most certainly lead to fragmentation within the Jewish community, since different individuals will reach different conclusions and arrive at different interpretations. In addition, they mount a frontal attack on Anan, accusing him of being deficient in character and thus unworthy of holding a leadership position.

In the second role-playing exercise, students examine the emergence of Karaism from another vantage point. Here the focus is on the personal considerations which enter into and frequently dominate the decision-making process of each individual. Students are again divided into four groups. Each group is given an identity: one is a group of wealthy and prominent bankers and merchants; a second are civil servants in the employ of the Muslim government; the third are rabbinical students in the yeshiva of Sura; and the fourth is a group of simple, uneducated Jews. Given 10-15 minutes, each group must decide whether or not they will become Karaites and then briefly present their decision and its underlying

rationale. Once again the presentations are followed with the questions and challenges of the other class members.

The central point which emerges from this exercise is that, for the most part, decisions are not made in the realm of the abstract and the theoretical but emanate from real-life concerns. Thus, for example, bankers and wealthy merchants will prefer to remain with the status quo, rather than risk their economic well-being by aligning themselves with what might be a short-lived, fringe group—regardless of what they actually think about the ideology of that group. Similarly, uneducated, lower-class people who feel downtrodden, full of despair, and with nothing to lose might very well attach themselves to a new movement which offers some hope—again, without regard to the ideological question.

What are the educational benefits of using such group role-playing exercises in the teaching of Jewish history? Certainly there is student interest, motivation, and active involvement. Beyond these educational benefits the use of role-playing, when done thoughtfully and skillfully can lead to a clearer understanding of history<sup>2</sup>. It helps students understand that history is an aggregate of many individual decisions, frequently by people very much like themselves. The "message," of course, is that their individual choices are important and that they can make a difference. Moreover, role-playing enhances

students' sense of historical perspective—they are encouraged to view events and movements from the perspective of actual participants rather than as "outside" observers looking back from afar. Finally, the kind of role-playing exercises described above help the student understand that causality in history is complex, that events come about as the result of the conjunction of many and varied factors. And, as the student weighs the suggestions of classmates and arrives at a consensus position, the awareness of this complexity and of the role of history, must inevitably be enhanced. ■

#### FOOTNOTES

1. These texts may be found in J.R. Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World*. New York, 1973, pp. 233-240.
2. The following are two additional examples of group role-playing, one each from ancient and modern Jewish history:
  - a. In the context of studying the rise of Christianity, students are divided into groups of "Jewish leaders" and "ordinary Jews," the former are asked to arrive at a strategy for stopping the spread of the new movement, while the latter are asked to decide whether or not they will join.
  - b. In the context of studying the emancipation of French Jewry in the late 18th century, student groups play the role of members of the French National Assembly who favor emancipation of the Jews. Groups are asked to decide which arguments they will employ in attempting to persuade the Assembly to grant Jews the full rights of French citizens.



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# TALMUD: TEXT AND TALMID

## The Teaching of Gemara in the Modern Orthodox Day School

Scot A. Berman

**S**election of textual material and method of instruction are two central issues about which educators must make decisions routinely. These decisions heavily influence a teacher's success in realizing instructional goals. We will examine these two matters — curriculum and method — in relation to the teaching of Talmud in the Modern Orthodox day school.

### METHOD

In Modern Orthodox schools, Talmud is commonly taught via the traditional lecture approach. This method is primarily teacher centered. The typical Talmud lesson utilizing this approach is characterized by the *rebbe* first explicating the talmudic passage followed by a session in which the *talmidim* review in *havruta* the *rebbe's* shiur. After several such lessons the student is expected to take a test on the material covered in class.

This method, when successful, may provide *mastery* of the specific material covered in class, but it does not provide *functional literacy*. By functional literacy we mean the ability to apply study skills acquired in the learning of one passage of Talmud to another passage. In traditional terms, the students utilizing this method will be, most likely, unable to make a

*laining*. Assuming this being the case, a high school graduate, after learning 10 to 20 *blat* yearly since the sixth grade, will have learned a total of somewhere between 70 and 140 *blat*. This represents a mere drop in the vast sea of talmudic folios. And this — without even acquiring the skills to continue self-study subsequent to the completion of day school education.

One might marshal the argument that this method has been utilized quite successfully for centuries in producing functionally literate Jews. However, the circumstances that created this reality were ones in which the *yeshiva bohur* was immersed in Talmud study for as much as seven to eight hours daily over numerous years. Under such conditions, one gains the skills necessary to learn independently by osmosis. This kind of time investment is unfortunately unfeasible in the Modern Orthodox day school setting. An alternative method must be sought which will maximize the relatively limited time appropriated to Talmud study.

The preferred method is one that is skills based aimed at allowing the student to achieve the ability to make a *laining* independently. This method is primarily student centered. Instead of being expected to parrot back information “spoofed” by the *rebbe*, the student is required to first prepare the material in concert with a *havruta*. After preparation, there is formal class, at which time the *rebbe* conducts a review with active student

participation to ensure their understanding of the material.

A systematic approach to the acquisition of skills is the hallmark of this method. The following analysis as applied on the beginner's level will be useful for illustration purposes.<sup>1</sup>

### TEXT, OUTLINING, and LANGUAGE

#### TEXT

The overall goal for the beginner student is to achieve accurate comprehension of the talmudic text. Stumbling blocks that may impede this process are, therefore, removed. Hence, at the beginner's level, a Steinsaltz text is used. The Steinsaltz text is vocalized, which ensures an accurate reading of the printed word and is ultimately conducive to proper comprehension of the text. It cannot be expected that a student have an innate ability to accurately read a nonvocalized Aramaic text. In addition, the Steinsaltz text is punctuated. Reading Talmud according to proper punctuation is another task that a beginning student cannot be expected to have mastered prior to any experience with talmudic texts.

Can a student with little or no prior experience with Talmud study effectively utilize Rashi as an aid to the comprehension of the text? The answer is, generally speaking, no. In fact, Rashi's commentary — made up of a mixture of medieval Hebrew and talmudic Aramaic — may

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actually add to the confusion rather than resolve textual ambiguities. Again, the Steinsaltz text becomes a valuable resource with its modern Hebrew commentary. With the assistance of a Hebrew-English dictionary, a student has the opportunity to use a commentary which will aid in understanding the Gemara.

#### OUTLINING

Another formidable obstacle standing in the way of a beginning Talmud student's successful comprehension of the text is the inability to locate the junctures within the *shakla v'tarya*. This, too, is alleviated by providing a worksheet in which the opening and closing words of every step of the *shakla v'tarya* is indicated. (See Table 1 for the inserted lines in the text illustrating the divisions of the *shakla v'tarya*.)

With these obstacles removed, the student is now prepared to begin deciphering the Talmudic text in *havruta* partnership. For every individual statement of the *shakla v'tarya* the student must provide, on a worksheet, two pieces of information: a) the **function** of the statement and b) what the statement **means**.

Some examples of the **function** of a statement are: to ask a question; to refute a proof; or to answer an objection. These examples are overly simplistic but accurately convey the idea of what is meant by function. A more sophisticated example might be: an *Amora* brings a *tanaitic* source to support his view and refute the opposing view of his disputant. No names or words from the talmudic passage are to be cited while stating the function in order to ensure that the student properly distinguishes what the Gemara is *doing* from what the Gemara is *saying*.

In articulating what the Talmud's statement means, the student is not expected to translate the passage. Even an accurate translation does not imply that the student truly comprehends the text. In order for this to occur the student must digest the terse, stylistically cryptic language of the Talmud, mentally reformulate it and then articulate in writing the true intent of the passage.<sup>2</sup>

It is important that the student incorporate the function of the passage when conveying what the passage means. This ensures true comprehension rather than poorly translated texts. It is possible for a student to recognize the Talmudic passage's function without under-

It is important that the student incorporate the function of the passage when conveying what the passage means.

standing what the Gemara's statement means. Conversely, a student can accurately state what the Gemara means without fully recognizing what it is accomplishing. When the student can provide both elements, the *rebbe* can feel assured that the student properly comprehends that particular piece of the text. (See Table 2 for an example of a completed worksheet based on the selection of Talmud Pesachim 99b, found in Table 1.)

As the year progresses and the student becomes proficient in completing the worksheet, a new challenge is introduced. Worksheets will no longer provide all the beginning and ending words for each talmudic statement. The student, now more familiar with the talmudic text, is ready to begin locating the junctures within the text. By the year's end, the *rebbe* will provide only a blank worksheet in which the student will indicate all the junctures within the *shakla v'tarya*.

#### LANGUAGE

Attention to language is an integral component of the skills-based method. Words that retain a specialized function, in addition to their literal translation, are characteristic of talmudic texts. These words we refer to as terms.<sup>3</sup> One example that all students of Talmud recognize is *tenan*. Its literal meaning is "we learned." Its function, however, is to introduce a Mishnah into the discussion. There are some 200 such terms that appear repeatedly throughout *Shas*. When a student can recognize and apply a term that has already been learned elsewhere to a new passage of Gemara, the chances of properly understanding that Gemara are

greatly improved. (See Table 3 for examples of terms and their functions.)

It is important to point out recurring literary structures<sup>4</sup>. Often terms are embedded in these structures as well. Grammar, too, is important to the skills method.<sup>5</sup> At the very least, common Aramaic prefixes and suffixes should be stressed. A student should be made aware of how feminine and masculine endings of Aramaic words are similar and different from Hebrew words.

This analysis, as mentioned above, outlines the procedure of teaching skills at the entry level of Talmud study. As lower-level skills are acquired, higher-level ones need to be introduced. Space does not permit analysis of the method applied to higher-level skills. However, the common denominator to the teaching of any material — basic, intermediate, or advanced — is in formulating a task analysis<sup>6</sup> of the skill and systematically introducing it to the student in an orderly, logical, and coherent manner.

By so doing, the student will be able to arrive at independent Talmud study in the quickest, most efficient way possible.

#### CURRICULUM: SELECTION OF MATERIAL

Many factors go into selecting material for the study of Talmud. Some include the difficulty of the material, the relevance of the material, whether the material is from a traditional *masekhta* or not, and the merits and/or disadvantages of editing material.

We maintain that the starting point in selecting material must be the students. Who are they? What philosophical assumptions do they work with? How committed are they to religious observance?

Generally, students who attend a Modern Orthodox day school have no *a priori* commitment to halakhah. At best they may observe most mitzvot. Nevertheless, the basis of their commitment is a mixture of rational thinking and considerations of convenience. If it makes sense and is not terribly troublesome, there is a chance they will accept the *din*. Otherwise, the authority implicit in the traditional acceptance of halakhah carries little or no weight.<sup>7</sup>

Choosing material based on whether a *masekhta* is "yeshivish" or not, or choosing not to edit material because it is not the traditional thing to do when dealing with the non-"yeshivish"/non-"traditional" student, seems to be faulty in its logic.

## WHAT IS RELEVANT AND WHAT IS NOT?

In determining what is relevant, it is instructive to first rule out what is *not* relevant. All too often, teachers make the mistake of confusing relevancy with "hot topics." Organ transplants, abortion, sexual conduct, and most recently, AIDS, are only some examples of such topics. These topics, to the chagrin of many teachers, after a brief classroom discussion no longer continue to hold the students' interest and bear little relevance to the life of the average student.

Practically applicable bodies of halakhah may not qualify as truly relevant either. Some institutions decide to study Masekhet Sukkah, for example, simply because its laws apply to the ritual life of the student. However, this consideration may be based on an erroneous assumption if the student is not committed *a priori* to halakhah. We may even be dealing with a student who performs the mitzvah of *lulav* or *yeshivah basukkah*. Nonetheless, a brief overview of the laws may suffice. Beyond that, the study of the *p'ratei p'ratim* of *lulav* or *sukkah* may be meaningless to the student and consequently a poor use of time.<sup>8</sup>

It may be instructive to examine modern psychology to assist in identifying areas of relevance. Erik Erikson identified eight stages of developmental growth within the individual. Adolescence is identified with stage five which is characterized by the achievement of identity or identity formation. Issues of dependence and independence, rights and responsibilities, authority, and interpersonal relationships are some of the most significant concerns of the average adolescent. Texts and topics that directly address these issues are inherently relevant to the average teen-ager, even if the teen-ager is unable to articulate an interest in them. Since the period of adolescence is characterized as a period of great confusion, the *rebbe*, in choosing appropriate texts, has an opportunity to serve the student beyond the teaching of Talmud by helping clarify some of these issues.

The first half of Masekhet Sanhedrin, for example, deals with the establishment and authority of Bet Din. Bava Kama deals with individual's rights and responsibilities in cases of personal damages. Parts of Kiddushin deal with relationships — husband and wife, father and son, father and daughter, *rebbe* and stu-

## By using relevant halakhic texts we can begin to expose our students to the distinctive character of Jewish values.

dent. These and other selections qualify as what we have termed relevant texts.

### RELEVANT TEXTS ARE NOT ENOUGH

By using relevant halakhic texts, we can begin to expose our students to the distinctive character of Jewish values. Gemara, however, mainly consists of legal rulings, not value statements. It is, therefore, necessary for the *rebbe* to address the value or values which are concretized in the form of action by the halakhah and that compose its rationale. It is all too easy for the *rebbe* to teach the Gemara without any attention to the values that underlie the halakhah. The discussion of values lends meaning and relevance to the text for the student.<sup>10</sup> (See Table 4 for a one year proposed syllabus of Talmud study in Masekhet Bava Matzia based on the criteria for selection delineated above.)

Until now we have described the selection of Talmud material for a student who is not *a priori* committed to the authority of halakhah. The question still remains, however, how does the *rebbe* influence students to accept halakhah as authoritative?

The process of evaluating and contrasting Jewish and Western or American values creates a tension. Students will be challenged to second guess their own suppositions about the values they have heretofore accepted without question. If, over time, they see enough examples where Jewish values are superior in wisdom to other value systems, there is a chance that they will realize that the entire system must be superior in nature —

even if they do not understand the rationale for each and every halakhah.

The administration and faculty must carefully monitor this ongoing tension. It may reach a point in which, for some students, editing the Talmud may reinforce a negative concept that not all Torah is worthy of study.<sup>11</sup> Would that all schools be faced with this problem. ■

### FOOTNOTES

1. I have developed this skills based method in teaching Talmud since my arrival at the Ida Crown Jewish Academy in Chicago. The Mesivta, a Talmud intensive tract within the school, was introduced by Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard on the premise that independence in learning is best acquired through a skills based method of instruction.

2. See Nechama Leibowitz's preface to *Limud Parshanei HaTorah Udrakhim L'Hora'atam: Sefer Beraishit*, HaMahlaka L'Hinukh UT-Tarbut Toraniim B'Golah Shel HaHistadrut HaTzionut HaOlamit, Yerushalayim, 1975. Her discussion there is limited to the study of biblical commentaries but her pedagogic wisdom is certainly just as applicable to our discussion. The student's task here is not merely to restate or retranslate the view expressed in the Gemara, but to answer a series of implied questions such as: What information is presumed to be understood in the Gemara? How is what the Gemara is saying related to the function of the Gemara? What does the statement add to our understanding of the Mishnah? For example, see the sample answers provided in the worksheet in Table 2.

3. The first half of my book *Learning Talmud*, unpublished, 1988, is concerned with identifying talmudic terms. Other good resources include Yitzchak Feigenbaum, *Understanding the Talmud*, Feldheim Publishers, Jerusalem: N.Y. 1988; Adin Steinsaltz, *Madrikh L-Talmud*, Beit Hotzat Keter, Yerushalayim, 1984, p. 94-126; and A.Z. Melamed, *Eshnav HaTalmud*, Hotzaat Kiryat Sefer, Yerushalayim, 1976.

4. A particularly good resource for talmudic literary structures is Yitzchak Feigenbaum's *Understanding the Talmud*. (See note 3 above).

5. A good resource for talmudic grammar is Aryeh Carmell, *Aiding Talmud Study*, Feldheim Publishers, Jerusalem: N.Y., 1974, pp. 43-62.

6. For further discussion on task analysis see Kathleen M. Wolfe and Barbara Schave, *Curriculum Design*, Scott, Foresman & Company, Illinois, 1984, pp. 73-78, and John D. McNeil, *Curriculum: A Comprehensive Introduction*, Little, Brown & Company, Boston, 1985, pp. 105-107; note especially his critical remarks regarding the deficiencies inherent in the application of task analysis.

7. For two excellent discussions of this phenomenon see Mayer Schiller, "Realities, Possibilities and Dreams: Reaching Modern Orthodox Youth," *Ten Da'at*, III:2 Winter 1989,

*continued*

pp.23-26 and Michael Rosenak, *Teaching Jewish Values: A Conceptual Guide*, Nachla Press, 1986, pp. 17-34.

8. Masekhet Sukkah or any selection from *Moed* should not automatically be ruled out. The objection comes from its inclusion based on the argument stipulated thus far. The reader is encouraged to consider any part of *Shas* based on the criteria outlined further in this article.

9. See Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, Norton, 2nd ed., New York, 1963.

10. In this discussion *relevance* is equivalent to student interests and *meaning through values* with student needs. See N. L. Gage and David C. Berliner, *Educational Psychology*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1984, pp. 458-460, who equate student interest with relevance. For further discussion on student needs see Robert J. Havighurst, *Developmental Tasks and Education*, 3rd ed., Longman, New York, 1972, pp 14-35, 43-82, H.H. Giles, S.P. McCuthen, and A.N. Zechiel, *Exploring the Curriculum*, Harper & Row, New York, 1942, and B. Othanel Smith, William O. Stanley and J. Harlan Shores, *Fundamentals of*

*Curriculum Development*, rev. ed., World Book, New York, 1957. Since values are distinctive from one culture to another, it is inevitable that Jewish values, at times, will be contrasted with Western or American values. Such occasions of conflict offer students an opportunity to clarify their thinking on the subject and make some judgment regarding these values. For an extensive discussion on relevancy and Jewish values see *Teaching Jewish Values: A Conceptual Guide* (Note 7 above).

11. At Ida Crown Jewish Academy, Chicago, our highest *shiur* does not edit the Gemara so as to communicate the idea that all of the *Torah Sh'B'al Peh* is holy and worthy of study. Generally 85%-90% of the students in this *shiur* spend the year after high school learning in yeshivot in Medinat Yisrael.

Ed's Note: For a copy of Rabbi Berman's *Learning Talmud* contact the Ida Crown Jewish Academy, 2828 W. Pratt Boulevard, Chicago, Illinois, 60645.

TABLE 1

## ערבי פסחים פרק עשירי פסחים

ב גמרא<sup>1</sup> מאי איריא ערבי פסחים? אפילו ערבי שבתות וימים טובים גמי, דתניא: י לא יאכל אדם בערבי שבתות וימים טובים מן המנחה ולמעלה, כדי שיכנס לשבת כשהוא תאוה, דברי רבי יהודה. רבי יוסי אומר: אוכל והולך עד שתחשך. אמר רב הונא: לא צריכא אלא לרבי יוסי, דאמר: אוכל והולך עד שתחשך, הני מילי - בערבי שבתות וימים טובים, אבל בערב הפסח, משום חיובא דמצה - מודה רב פפא אמר: אפילו תימא רבי יהודה, התם בערבי שבתות וימים טובים - מן המנחה ולמעלה הוא דאסיר, סמוך למנחה - שרי, אבל בערב הפסח, אפילו סמוך למנחה - גמי אסור. ובערב שבת סמוך למנחה שרי? והתניא: לא יאכל אדם בערב שבת וימים טובים מתשע שעות ולמעלה, כדי שיכנס לשבת כשהוא תאוה, דברי רבי יהודה, רבי יוסי אומר: אוכל והולך עד שתחשך! אמר ר' זוטרא: ימא לימא לו דמתרצתא היא?

TABLE 2

מסכת פסחים  
פרק י ערבי פסחים צ"ט:

מאי איריא . . . אוכל והולך עד שתחשך

**A) Function:** The Gemara questions the narrow application of the law stated in the Mishna.

**B) Meaning:** The Gemara questions why the Mishna limits the law to include only *erev Pesah* when Rabbi Yehudah in a *braita* states the same law regarding *erev Shabbat* and *Yom Tov* in general.

אמר רב הונא . . . משום חיובא דמצה מודה

**A) Function:** An *Amora* answers why the Mishna narrowly applied its law.

**B) Meaning:** Rav Huna explains that the narrowly applied law was necessary according to the view of Rabbi Yossi, who, regarding *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov* is of the opinion that a person need not refrain from eating *samukh l'minhah*. However, on *erev Pesah* he agrees that one must refrain from eating.

רב פפא אמר . . . גמי אסור

**A) Function:** Another *Amora* answers that the Mishna never narrowly applied its law.

**B) Meaning:** Rav Papa explains that the Mishna can be justified even according to the view of Rabbi Yehudah in the *braita*. Whereas the *braita* requires one to refrain from eating at *minhah* and on, the Mishna requires one to refrain from eating already *samukh l'minhah*. Therefore, the law regarding *erev Pesah* is not narrowly applied. It has a stringency that *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov* do not.

וערב שבת . . . עד שתחשך!

**A) Function:** The Gemara questions the previous explanation based on a contradictory *braita*.

**B) Meaning:** The Gemara shows that the difficulty raised by the *braita* against the Mishna cannot be justified according to the opinion of Rabbi Yehudah. A second *braita* regarding the law of refraining from eating *erev Shabbat* and *Yom Tov* and quoting the view of Rabbi Yehudah, stipulates *samukh l'minhah*. Therefore, the narrow application of the Mishna's law cannot be squared with the view of Rabbi Yehudah in the *braita*.

**TABLE 3**

See the boxed in words or phrases in Table 1. These words represent terms. Note also that in every piece of the *shakla v'tarya* there is a term bearing a function. Therefore, it is easy to see the relation between the understanding of a term to the understanding of the Gemara's function. Below find the translation and function of each of the terms appearing in Table 1. All definitions are from my *Learning Talmud*.

הא

"But" or "This" or "That"

הא תניא (התניא)

"But it was learned"

This indicates that a question will be raised from the following source. In the case above it is a question from a *braita* or *tosefta*.

הני מילי (ה"מ, הני"מ)

"These words"

Introducing a statement that limits the application of a case, statement, or halakhah.

התם

"There"

"There" refers to an outside tanaitic source brought in to elucidate further the present discussion. Sometimes the respective terms are used to differentiate one thing from another.

... לא צריכא אלא

"It is only needed..."

Explaining a tanaitic source or halakhah in specific circumstances, usually in response to a question raised upon the source or halakhah.

מאי איריא?

"Why does case X appear (here)?"

This term questions the specificity of a stated case within a tanaitic source when the ruling actually applies more generally.

תניא

"It was learned"

Introducing a *braita* or *tosefta*.**TABLE 4**

Proposed syllabus for *Masekhet Bava Metzia*.

General Theme: Employers and Laborers

Topics: Rights and responsibilities, authority, dependence and independence, relationships.

**I. Conditions of Employment**

A. Changing or misunderstanding of terms and wages of employment  
Chap. 6 p. 75b-78a

B. Damages to rented animals when changes of rental terms take place  
78a-80b

C. Damages of owner's objects by workers on owner's premises  
Mishna 80b

**II. Day Worker's Rights**

A. General terms of day worker employment  
Chap. 7 p. 83a

B. Farm hand's Torah rights to eat produce of field in which he is working  
87a-88b; mishnayot 91b; 92a-93a

**III. Guardians**

A. Categories and definitions of guardians  
93a-94b

B. Exemption of responsibility over guardianship when owner is present  
94a-94b; 96a-97a

C. Disputes between owner and guardian over status and responsibility of guardian  
97a-98b

D. Disputes between buyers and sellers  
100a-100b

**IV. Payment of wages to laborers**

Chap. 9 pp. 111a-113a

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# Tanakh Programs for Computers

Alan B. Rosenbaum

According to Jewish legend, the Golem, legendary creature and defender of the Jews, had no power until the divine name of God was placed in its mouth, written on a scrap of paper. It was only then, when the *Shem Hameforash* was implanted within, that the Golem could possess the powers necessary to complete his task.

Those immersed in the world of Torah may scoff at the attention given to computers in today's world. Computers, some think, are limited to mundane, everyday uses, such as accounting, word processing, and calculating. When, however, they see a computer searching the Tanakh for a phrase at lightning speed, displaying the text in Hebrew in perfectly formed characters, and rapidly printing a list of Biblical citations, they begin to see the vast potential of computers within our Jewish lives. They see a Golem that has come to life.

The use of computers to store the classical Jewish texts began at Bar Ilan University in Ramat Gan, when the Responsa Project was initiated in the early 1970's. This mammoth project involved entering the major texts of the Responsa literature, and devising a unique search program capable of finding any possible form of a word in the text. In time, with the cooperation of the Institute for Computers in Jewish Life located in

Chicago, a Global Jewish Database was created in which the complete text of the Tanakh, the Babylonian Talmud, the Aggadic Midrash, and the Mishna Torah of Maimonides were entered as well, ensuring that these enduring works would be on computer. Today, computer terminals at Bar Ilan and other locations in Israel enable researchers to access these works instantly. In Chicago, a terminal at the Institute provides access to scholars in the Diaspora.

The major drawback to a mainframe-based information retrieval system, is that the user is retrieving the information from a remote computer — in this case, the mainframe located at Bar Ilan. The user does not actually possess the software containing the program and information itself, and must communicate via modem (at a relatively high cost) with the Bar Ilan computer, each time access to the database is needed.

With the prolific expansion of the personal computer in schools, homes, and businesses, computer technology has improved, and the perspective on computerized databases (such as the Tanakh, or Talmud) has changed. Today's fine personal computers — both IBM and Macintosh — are faster, more powerful, and have greater storage capabilities than the original PC's of yesteryear (or last year, for that matter).

Recently, a number of Tanakh programs have become available for the IBM PC and the Macintosh. These software programs allow the user to ac-

cess the Tanakh computer, at one's leisure, without incurring expensive on-line charges. Users pay a one-time fee to purchase the software — as they would for a standard word processing or accounting program.

## Computerized Bible Software For The IBM PC

In the world of computers, the IBM Personal Computer has become the de facto standard. Machines compatible with the IBM machines, known as "clones," have helped increase the PC share of the marketplace. It is paradoxical then, that the majority of Tanakh software has been developed for the Macintosh, rather than the PC. The only Hebrew-based product currently available for the PC is the *Otzar HaTorah Hamemuhshav* — The Computerized Torah Treasure. Developed in Israel, it consists of the Tanakh, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, Shulhan Arukh, Midrash Agaddah, Zohar, and the Mishna Torah, all in one self-contained software program.

The *Otzar HaTorah Hamemuhshav* offers powerful search functions, with the capability to search for works by prefix, suffix, root, and other characteristics. For example, a user can request to see all citations in over 60 different Midrashei Aggadah where the name Yaakov appears within a proximity of 15 words from the word Esav. At the same time, the user can also request that the search include all forms of the word Yaakov (e.g. with any

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prefix) or even include sources where Yaakov is referred to as Yisrael. Once the search is complete, the computer will display a list of two line excerpts from the text, or the entire text, all of which may also be printed on paper. The *Otzar HaTorah* requires an IBM PC or compatible, with EGA graphics monitor, and a 40 megabyte hard disk. *Otzar HaTorah* is a valuable addition to any library, school, or institution whose faculty and/or students need to research and compare citations from the Talmud and Tanakh. Its major drawback is its meager documentation, which makes mastering the program somewhat difficult. However, the sheer number of books available, and its speedy search function, (searching through the entire Talmud Bavli for a word or combination of words can be completed in under three seconds), make it a worthwhile investment.

Also available for the IBM (as well as Apple II and Macintosh), but in an English-only format, is *The Word*, which contains the complete text of the Tanakh, with an English-language search program. Unfortunately, for users familiar with the original Hebrew of the Tanakh, searching by English words and phrases is often a cumbersome task.

The Macintosh world contains a greater variety of choices when it comes to Hebrew-based Tanakh software. *MacBible*, developed by Zondervan Publishing, contains the complete text of the Tanakh, in Hebrew, including pointed text and cantillation marks. *MacBible* takes full advantage of the renowned, easy to learn Macintosh interface, and features a rich search program that offers the user such advanced features as wild card character search, exclusion of characters, and much more. For example, finding all verses in Tanakh that have the words *hesed v'emet* is quite simple. What is truly impressive, is that *MacBible* easily allows the user to find all cases where the two words occur anywhere in the same verse, not in consecutive order.

Text from the program can be printed in exquisite detail on dot-matrix or laser printers. *MacBible* is available for \$179.95, and is an excellent program. Additional Greek, and English texts are also available.

The second program available for the Mac, *Torah Scholar*, is at once both similar, and different from *MacBible*, or for that matter, any other Bible research program. Developed in Israel, *Torah Scholar* includes the complete text, in

Hebrew and English of the Humash. The Hebrew text is unpointed, but the user has the option of viewing the text in linear fashion, akin to the look of a linear Humash. Like the programs mentioned above, *Torah Scholar* features search capabilities to find words and phrases in the text, although they are not as comprehensive as those of *MacBible*. But *Torah Scholar* goes far beyond other programs as an educational tool, with its superior "hypertext" linking features. Hypertext, one of today's most popular buzzwords, allows users to link associated thoughts and concepts easily. *Torah Scholar* epitomizes this concept by allowing users to write a comment, thought, or question, and "link" it to a particular verse. Then, they can scan a picture with a computer scanner, and link that picture to the note or the text itself. For example, in studying the section that deals with the Mishkan, a user could write a note on the topic, scan a picture of a model of the Tabernacle, and link the picture to the note.

*Torah Scholar's* elegant implementation of the Macintosh interface makes the program easy-to-use, from its choice of three beautiful Hebrew fonts (including an approximation of *stam*), to its thoughtful dialogue box that allows the user to jump to a specific *sidra*. Those who find mystical significance in the counting of letters and spaces in the text will find the program's "scan" feature, which allows the user to scan the text for word interval searches, to be quite useful. In addition, *Torah Scholar's* unique "*Gematria Calculator*" calculates the numeric value of any word in seven different *gematria* values. What is perhaps most exciting about *Torah Scholar*, though, is its expandability. The next version of the program, which should be released as of this writing, also includes the commentary of Rashi on the Humash. Imagine — just click on a verse, and Rashi's commentary immediately appears. Plans are also afoot to make the program compatible with the IBM, and to add additional commentaries. *Torah Scholar's* one major drawback is that it does not include vowels, which for some, may be a significant omission. Nevertheless, the program is the most versatile of all the Bible programs reviewed.



## Conclusion

The programs described above, with their rapid search features and amazing printing capabilities, can help the serious student in scholarly research. It is important, however, to emphasize to students that no computer program can make an *am ha'aretz* into a *talmid hakham*. What these programs can do, is make research more efficient and useful.

With new advances in computer technology, such programs will become even more extraordinary. In the next few years, compact disks (similar to music CDs) that can hold all of Tanakh, *Shas*, and *She'elot U'teshuvot* on a single disk will become commonplace. Faster, more powerful machines will be available at a fraction of the price that today's computers command. The Golem will be primed and ready — waiting for the next generation of Tanakh programs. ■

## Guide to Programs Cited:

### Otzar Torah HaMemushav

Price \$1200.00

Available for IBM PC and compatibles; from Computerized Torah Treasure, 59 Rabbi Akiva Street, Bnei Brak, Israel, (03) 783-262

### The Word

Price \$99.95

Available for IBM/compatibles, Apple II, & Macintosh; from Bible Research Systems, 2013 Wells Branch Parkway, Suite 304 Austin, Texas 78728, (800) 423-1228

### MacBible

Price \$179.95

Available for Macintosh; from Zondervan Electronic Publishing, 1415 Lake Dr. S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49506 or Davka Corporation, 7074 N. Western Ave., Chicago, Illinois 60645, (312) 465-4070.

### Torah Scholar

Price \$295.00

Available for Macintosh; from Davka Corporation, 7074 N. Western Ave., Chicago, Illinois 60645, (312) 465-4070.

# OMEK MIKRA:

## A Method for Teaching *Humash*

Bruce Rachlin

Our students study *Humash* but do they understand it? They can translate *psukim* but can they discern the concepts? They may read Rashi and Ramban but do they penetrate the thought processes which resulted in their comments? In short, assuming that students have knowledge do they also have understanding? The following approach, called "*Omek Mikra*," addresses these concerns.

What is the premise of *Omek Mikra*? What is its *hidush*? In a word it is structure. The *Humash* is a series of ever expanding logical structures. Even its minutest units — its individual words — are the reflection of concepts. Nothing is arbitrary. It is these concepts which have dictated the choice of a specific word, phrase, *posuk* division and placement of each part within the whole.

In fact all units within the *Humash* — *posuk*, *stumah*, *petuhah* and *sefer* — are ever expanding conceptual frameworks. The sum of the *p'sukim* within a *stumah* form a whole thought; the *stumot* within a *ptuhah* form a whole topic and the *ptuhot* within a *sefer* form a strand of topics woven into one theme which is the summation of that *sefer*. For this reason the Ramban says that *Sefer Beraishit* is *Sefer Yetzira* — the Book of Creation, for all of its threads deal with formation and

shaping of world, man, intellect, purpose and Jew, among a host of others.

The significance of this is that students can learn to approach the study of *Humash* in a structured, systematic fashion. There is a way of thinking within the *Humash* which will consistently unlock its meanings because it is its very structure which reveals its concepts. The understanding of *Humash* is organic; it flows from reasoned analysis. And, it is this structured reasoning which is at the heart of the *mefarshim*. Even the *midrash* responds not solely to eclectic inspiration but to the structural necessities of the *posuk* from which it springs.<sup>2</sup>

And finally, it is not only the sophisticated, logically mature student who can fathom this. Children can be part of this process. Given the tools, schooled in the techniques of structured reasoning, even young students can enter a learning curve which will develop over their lives.

### THE TEXT

The first step in this process is to divide the *posuk* into its logical parts. Since each *posuk* is a series of rationally related word structures, it is subject to structured reasoning. For example: "*Vayitzer Hashem Elokim et haadam afar min haadama vayipah b'apav nishmat hayim vayehi haadam l'nefesh haya*" (Ber.2:7) becomes quite naturally:

1. *vayitzer Hashem Elokim et haadam afar min haadama*
2. *vayipah b'apav nishmat hayim*

3. *vayehi haadam l'nefesh haya*.

It can be seen from this division that not only does the *posuk* fall into natural parts but that variations are possible.<sup>3</sup> For example, "*Vayitzer Hashem Elokim et haadam afar min haadama*" might have been subdivided as:

1. *Vayitzer Hashem Elokim et haadam*
2. *afar min haadama*.

In this way, nuances of focus may be achieved. Generally the process is relatively unambiguous and, in any event, can be guided by the teacher. More importantly, the analytic process now naturally focuses on each major aspect of the *posuk*.

The next step is to analyze each logical part. This is initiated through questions which are the vehicle of this process. The key is ultimately to ask oneself "all" questions: Is this word spelled as it usually is? Is this word or phrase of common usage? Is it unusual? Is it repetitious? Is there ambiguity? Can I define what this word means? What is this word, phrase, *posuk* implying? Does this correspond to my understanding and experience? It is important to examine each word and phrase in turn, systematically, comparing it to similar variations which appear. But, in this process one must become naive again. One both forgets and remembers what one knows for the sake of knowing anew.

With younger students one might choose a single issue on which to focus. For example, in the *posuk* above a teacher might ask what issue the word *afar*

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raises: e.g. Did God really use *afar*? From where did this *afar* come? etc., and, having answered, move on to the next logical part of the *posuk*.

Later, as student proficiency grows, one would require students to raise a multiplicity of issues in the attempt to thoroughly analyze the logical parts. Such a hard focus on “*Vayitzer Hashem Elokim et haadam afar min haadama*” might be expected to yield at least the following: Why is *vayitzer* used rather than *bara* or *asah*? Why two *yudin* in *vayitzer*? Why *Hashem* and *Elokim*? Did God genuinely use *afar*? Is this what man is or has it some other meaning? Was this a particular *afar* having some unique qualities? Why *min haadama*? In contrast to what other possibilities? Or is this a reference to a place? Students would also raise structural questions. For example: What is the conceptual relationship between the three parts of this *posuk*? What is the concept of the *posuk* as a whole?

How does one teach students to uncover the issues? In the beginning they must be shown the process and the issues by reasoning them out together. Students can be pushed, cajoled, flattered and told that there is something here — find it. Teachers must sensitize students to one and then another and then another type of issue, repeating the analysis at each opportunity, finally showing that these questions lead to significant answers. Students soon become sleuths. They no longer take the *posuk* at face value. And, when nothing is taken for granted, there is an excitement to finding the subtlest of points. It is even more gratifying to discover something that the teacher has not.<sup>4</sup>

By the time students reach high school, the teacher need no longer raise the issues. Prior to class analysis, students should divide the *posuk* into its logical parts and raise the problems in the *posuk*.

### THE MEFARSHIM

What about *mefarshim*? Beyond anticipating their issues how does the *Omek Mikra* approach interact with the study of *mefarshim*? Obviously, *mefarshim* provide answers to most of the issues one has raised in analyzing a *posuk*. But this is true precisely because the *mefarshim* was also involved in the same analysis.<sup>5</sup>

The *perush* at one and the same time offers insights and extends our sensitivity to structure. A useful example of this interaction is Rashi's comment on the first *psukim* in *parshat K'doshim*. The *posuk*

says “*Daber el kol adat bnei Yisrael v'amarta aleyhem k'doshim tihiyu ki kadosh Ani Hashem Elokeykhem.*” Rashi comments “*Melamed shene'emra parsha zu b'hakhel mipnay sherov gufey Torah t'luyin bah.*” Rashi's point ultimately is that just as historically there will be a mitzvah of *hakhel* — that is, teaching to the *rabim* — so too here we have an earlier instance of such a mitzvah due to the centrality of the mitzvot which are part of the *k'doshim tihiyu stumah*.<sup>6</sup> However, consistent with our analysis of structure, we would want to ask how Hazal, quoted by Rashi, deduced this information. We would begin with the observation that this command could have been said more simply: *Daber el...bnei Yisrael...kedoshim tihiyu*. Thus, at least the phrase *kol adat* seems superfluous, and possibly *v'amarta aleyhem* as well.<sup>7</sup> Hazal seem to deduce from this that there is a particular mitzvah of *amirah* to *kol adat* and this would be consistent with the nuance of *edah* — a group professing common commitments. Gather the people, Hazal say, for this is the heart of what I would say to them.

Thus it becomes apparent that Hazal responded both to the structure of the words and to their nuances — which is of course itself a type of structure, a choice to build meaning through significant subtleties. In other words, the *structure* carried meaning for Hazal and that is precisely the premise of the *Omek Mikra* approach. The *mefarshim* thus act as guides to the structure and to its significance. As students reason through a *perush* their sensitivity to the text increases, they find answers to queries and, equally significant, they begin to see

themselves as part of a great historic process. They become *talmidei Rashi*, encompassed within the vitality of the learning tradition.<sup>8</sup>

### THE CONCEPT

In order to make their understanding a living process, students should be encouraged to develop their own *hidush*. Thus, when posing questions from the *posuk*, student insight should not only be solicited but *required*. The ability to do this cannot be left solely to intuition, but must be developed. The first step is, as discussed, through the process of analyzing the *mefarshim*. The next step is through a similar reasoning process using insights of teacher and students. For example, in the *Posuk* “*Vatomarnah ha'myaldot el Paroh ki lo kanashim ha-Mitzriyot haIvriyot ki hayot heyna*” one would ask, why call him “Paroh” when preceding *psukim* refer to him as *melekh Mitzrayim*? The answer lies in the structure. The previous usage, *melekh*, reflects the perspective of the speaker — Paroh himself. It is he who refers to himself as *melekh Mitzrayim*, a figure of absolute authority. But in our *posuk* it is the *miyaldot* who speak and they, by their actions, have shown that they will not respond to such illegitimately employed authority.

This leads us then to the next issue. Why has the *Humash* used such an unusual phrase as “*ki lo k'nashim ha-Mitzriyot haIvriyot*?” In sensing this strangeness and posing its alternative, we sense the answer as well. The actual phrase is derogatory. It refuses to accord to the *Ivriyot* the term of respect — *nashim* — which is reserved for Egyptian women.

*continued*

Students can learn to approach the study of *Humash* in a structured, systematic fashion.

But if this is correct then we have a contradiction in the *posuk* itself. It is these *miyaldot* who have defied *melekh Mitzrayim* to preserve Jewish life. For what conceivable reason would they derogate the very women for whose children they have endangered themselves? Here logic suggests that they have done so for the simplest of reasons — to persuade Paroh that in fact they share his prejudice to better convince him of their ruse — *ki hayot heyne*. And as we are alive to the structural subtleties, we can marvel at how the *Humash* has first conveyed to us the *miyaldot*'s genuine view — *vatomarna hamiyaldot el Paroh* — so as then to demonstrate their subtlety in manipulating Paroh's own attitudes in furthering their ends.

Thinking can be taught. One of the single most important goals in teaching *Humash* is to foster a pattern of rigorous analysis and insight.

A final point. The process of *Omek Mikra*, in identifying the structure and nuance of the *Humash*, sets the stage for many wholly unexpected thematic points. These are limited only by the thoroughness and creativity of the teacher and student. However, one's ideas, in fact, tend to be more rigorous and reliable in having to account for the many structural issues raised by *Omek Mikra*.

The very process of *Omek Mikra* provides a means of restoring the students' sense of wonder. It draws them to the text of the *Humash* and the *mefarshim* and satisfies their desire for consequential reasoning. *Omek Mikra* reforges an incandescent link with the sensibility and mind of the *mesorah*. It invigorates both student and teacher and allows the learning process to flourish. ■

#### FOOTNOTES:

1. There is an indication of this in concepts such as *ayn mukdam u'n'uhar baTorah*. There is no chronological order, rather there is a logical order. Even that which appears as chronology is in fact logic. This idea allows us to understand why particular events from particular perspectives are presented in narrative portions whereas other whole periods of lives and chains of events are simply ignored. The reason is the obvious one — we all presume that the *Humash* is not interested in narrative, it is interested in concepts.

2. It is not being suggested here that there is only one right or necessary meaning to a *posuk*, *stumah*, *p'tuhah* or *sefer*. To the contrary there are multiplicities of meanings. The genius of the *Humash* is that it has imbedded myriad meanings within its structural nuances. This in no way, however, dilutes the significance of its structures. What it does is create awe of the

Divine intelligence which has created a multiplicity of levels and meanings within single texts, words and their relationships.

3. If students want to divide a *posuk* in a particular fashion which seems unintuitive to the teacher, he/she need only ask why the student sees it in this fashion. Normally the student is on to something which can then or later be discussed, or the student will become intuitively uncomfortable with the suggestion and drop it.

4. When each word is the object of scrutiny students can sometimes feel that the process is arbitrary. If the teacher questions why this word rather than a second, students will sometimes feel: "Well it had to say something, so why not this." In dealing with these sorts of issues it helps to indicate that we are looking for particular nuances and to point to other uses of the word to establish its nuance. It is also useful to point to halakhot which flow from particular terms as they often offer definition of nuance.

5. It is crucial to remember however that each *perush* is responding on a particular level to a problem. It is important to show consistency in our choice of *perush*. In other words, we should focus on those which are pursuing a common logical strand unless we specifically want to contrast possibilities of interpretation. However, simply to study *perushim* for a multiplicity of comments defeats the purpose of showing the logical development of the *Humash*. The fact of such consistency in the *mefarshim* allows a teacher to show how the *Humash* develops a view of a particular person, moral circumstance, halakhic concept over many *psukim*, incidents, or halakhot. This is an avenue for using *Omek Mikra* as an extensive approach.

6. It is a fascinating challenge to *Omek Mikra* to show that the *psukim* from *Vayikra* 19:1 through 19:22 form one set of logically developing concepts. In fact this can be shown despite the disparate quality of the mitzvot. The *mefarshim* are involved in this exercise. As one example see the Sferno, ad loc.

7. Whether *v'amarta aleyhem* should be considered part of the *drashat Hazal* is an issue beyond our scope but serves here as playful provocation for those interested in *parshanut*.

8. One may rightly feel that to this point the comments on *mefarshim* are much ado about nothing. Why will students want to commit themselves to these mental gymnastics any more than many do to the *Gemara* learning process where mental drift is legendary? This question deserves two answers.

First, certain individuals are excited by ideas per se. For them abstractions are as real as experience — to some more real. For most students, however, a different question hovers over their lessons — "So what?" What difference does this make to me? Teachers ignore "So what?" at their peril. Moreover all who ignore "So what" impoverish the significance of the learning experience. The ultimate learning goal lies in action and perspective which leads to action: Torah as framework and focus.

Learning must therefore be applied. In the case of our *Rashi* the opportunities are multitudinous. What is central to leading a good life? Isn't sanctity a removal from real life involvement? Why is discovering this a group process? If individuals must execute these mitzvot would it not have been preferable for each to be initiated into them on his or her own? and on and on. Not every issue will be discussed or discussed specifically and directly. But the "So what" must be kept squarely in focus and made a central part of lessons.

## The Jim Joseph Foundation

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# THE DAY SCHOOL: A Modern Orthodox Jewish Community's Reflection or Guiding Light?

Jack Bieler

One of the problems in defining the nature of a contemporary Modern Orthodox day school and its appropriate educational program, is that the question of what Modern Orthodoxy is and what a Modern Orthodox school is is seldom raised in public. Consequently, everyone — students, parents, faculty and administrators — pursue their own private course without ever forming a consensus or an invigorating vision. Whereas those to the right of Modern Orthodoxy appear to have a fairly well-defined conception of what they represent and what their educational goals are, Modern Orthodoxy is more often concerned with what it is *not*, rather than with what it *is*. “We are not against intense Torah study, and we do not discourage strict halakhic observance, and we are not antagonistic to general studies, and we do not discriminate against women, and we are not opposed to Zionism, and we are not ready to discount Western culture,” are some of the claims one hears. But what *do* we advocate? Do our lives and our schools truly demonstrate positive approaches and attitudes on all of these positions? Do we promote Torah study and halakhic observance as seriously as we should and might? Do we value intellectuality and

broad learning beyond what is needed to succeed professionally? Do girls and women receive as much consideration as they could within our communities and schools? Do we care about Hebrew language and Israel in a serious manner? Are we familiar with, let alone do we value, the best of the civilization in which we find ourselves? It is hard to proceed with communal and educational projects until there are some clear answers. While keeping things ambiguous and ill-defined might promote *shalom bayit*, in the sense that categories are often divisive and create friction between those who fall *within* defined parameters and those falling

*without*, consistency and clarity are critical components in determining how effective the education of our children will be. However, even the slightest modicum of consistency will escape us unless we begin to grapple with who we are and what we represent. My thoughts are here presented not as the last word on the topic, but rather as a means of stirring up debate and discussion, which hopefully will prove fruitful and constructive rather than sterile and destructive.

The Talmud<sup>1</sup> records a debate with regard to the nature of the compensation that a teacher of Torah, specifically of Tanakh, receives. The Talmud had earlier stated that the teaching of Torah was *not* to become the source of one's livelihood. Such a position was based upon the assumption that a Torah teacher is considered as continuing in the footsteps of the first Torah pedagogue par excellence, Moshe Rabbeinu. And since Moshe was taught by God for no fee, so too should the modern-day Torah instructor not be compensated for his or her teaching—“*Mah ani hinam af atem b'hinam*.” While this should apply under the best of conditions, the Talmud recognizes the reality that some teachers were being monetarily compensated, and, therefore, *Amoraim* searched for a means by which such a practice could be deemed acceptable halakhically. Thus two approaches emerge in the Talmud, both contending that payment is not for the teaching of Torah but for some other simultaneous

What does the parent body expect of the school that educates its children?

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service that is being provided: "Rav amar *sekhar shimur veRav Yohanan amar sekhar pisuk ta'amim*." Rav said that a Torah teacher is paid to guard the children — in effect, a Talmudic version of a day care center. On the other hand, Rav Yohanan contends that the payment is in exchange for transmitting the *manner* in which the words of Torah are to be pronounced and chanted, rather than their content and meaning. In truth, the Talmud acknowledges that Rav Yohanan's outlook, the teaching of *pisuk ta'amim*, can only be applied to the study of Tanakh — the only primary text that is read with a particular

**A true Modern Orthodox day school . . . must not only preserve the Orthodoxy of the past, but grapple vigorously with the challenges of the here-and-now.**

cantillation. And Rav's position, *sekhar shimur*, at least when taken literally, would be relevant only for the education of small children who require constant supervision. Nevertheless, it can be maintained that certain implications of Torah teaching in all forms, at all levels, to all ages, arise from the debate between Rav and Rav Yohanan. Rav Yohanan, who emphasizes proper reading and cantillation, could be understood as stressing the passing down of an ancient tradition to the younger generation. Preserving the pronunciation of a text and its distinct mode of public recitation are *agendi* that are independent of time and circumstance, and which enable the contemporary Jew to feel connected to ancestral co-religionists. Such a perspective sug-

gests that this might not only apply to cantillation and pronunciation, but to the very ideas and methodology that are transmitted. The halakha, *mahshava*, theology, *weltanschauung* to which students of Torah ought to be exposed should first and foremost be conceptualized from the perspective of linking the young Jew of today with our eternal people and heritage. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, in describing what it was like to study with his father, Rav Moshe, writes that it was as if the Rambam was sitting across the table from him, personally participating in the Talmudic discourse.<sup>2</sup> Such an approach inspires a deep desire to recreate, for students, the resplendent *batei midrash* of Eastern Europe — those life-giving reservoirs of Torah.

On the other hand, the emphasis presented by Rav, that of *sekhar shimur*, promotes a different set of considerations. While on the most obvious level, protecting a child is certainly a service that a responsible parent would willingly pay for, "*shimur*" or guarding, can have far broader implications. Perhaps what the parent, teacher, and the Jewish community at large must be concerned about is not only the students' physical welfare, but also their spiritual orientation and belief system as well — particularly in light of modern day challenges to observance and faith. If this is a valid interpretation, then the immediate surroundings in which teacher and students find themselves cannot be downplayed, let alone ignored, in the interests of connecting to the past. A comprehensive and lasting *shimur* requires that considerations of present and future be incorporated into the planning and presentation of a Torah learning program, thus assuring its survival beyond the walls of the school.

The implication then is that not only is the teacher being paid to see that doors are secured, windows are closed, rules of fire drills are obeyed, and that students do not run in the halls, but that *what* is taught will contribute to the preservation of the student's religious well-being throughout his or her Jewish life. A true Modern Orthodox day school, as well as the community that it services and hopefully represents, must seriously undertake the responsibility to not only preserve the Orthodoxy of the past, but to grapple vigorously with the challenges of the here-and-now. We have to strive not only to meet Rav Nahman's requirements, but also those of Rav. We cannot

be concerned exclusively with the elements of the tradition, as Rav Nahman appears to be, but also with the student who is to study the sources. To paraphrase the title of a book by Neil Postman, we do view Jewish education as a "conserving activity," as opposed to some views that ignore or even negate the modern world and participation in it, in the interests of focusing upon, preserving and even recreating our past. It is our mandate to confront and anticipate challenges that our historical era presents, and even incorporate the best of these ideas and outlooks into our religious experience while being careful never to compromise our traditions and tenets of faith.

However, if this mandate is to be accepted, then as day school parents and Torah educators we must become fully conversant with the world of our children and/or students and/or community. And, we must ask ourselves a crucial question: What type of student do we wish to graduate from our institutions — i.e. with which *yediot*; *hashkafot*; *middot*; commitments — to faith, people, worthy cause; interests — in academics, extra-curricular matters, hobbies, politics; and work ethic — commitment to excellence and quality? Obviously, having fashioned such a profile, we can then formulate those programs, both curricular and extra-curricular, that could further the development of this "ideal." Part of the planning would include a partnership between the elements *within* and *without* the school thus ensuring consistent messages and maximum educational development. But, before these practical concerns are approached, a most critical issue must first be considered: What does the parent body expect of the school that educates its children? On the one hand, parents might expect the school to simply reinforce whatever takes place at home, in effect, to prevent an erosion of the student's adherence to the family's level of mitzvah observance or Torah study. The converse, however, also applies. Thus, the intensification of a student's interest and observance beyond the aspirations of the family can be less than appreciated, if not downright resented. Such a parental stance could even be Talmudically justified,<sup>4</sup> at least to some extent. A *braitah* records that the responsibilities that a parent has include circumcision, education, marriage, the learning of a craft, and, add some, swim instruction. This *braitah*, however, pointedly names the *parent* as being personal-

ly responsible for this education and training. Those individuals who actually impart the instruction are designated as *shlihim*, including the teacher. Since the Talmud<sup>5</sup> regards “*shluho shel adam kemoto*,” then a *shaliah* acts only with the permission, or as the Talmud refers to it, the *da'at* of the *sholeah*. Thus, if a *shaliah* is not authorized to carry out a certain action, then that action has no halakhic significance. Therefore, if this model is adopted, then the Torah educator must ask what the community is empowering him or her to do for its children — what are the provisions of the mandate by which our *shlihut* will be considered valid and in consonance with what the parents themselves would do for their offspring were they in the position to personally oversee their children’s education?

However, an alternative model could be constructed in which the day school extends beyond a replication of what already exists at home and within the community at large. Such a model would be based upon the Jewish tradition that suggests that the maintenance of a religious status quo for an individual is not possible, and even if it were, it would not be optimal. In *Masekhet Avot 4:2*, Ben Azai presents such a view when he states that one should pursue the opportunities to perform even the apparently most insignificant mitzvah just as one would try to carefully carry out the commandments considered most important, in light of the axiom that just as the performance of one mitzvah leads to another, so too committing one transgression eases the path to another inappropriate action.

Ben Azai’s assumption that one’s actions are qualitatively interrelated, suggests that rather than viewing an individual’s life as a series of finite activities, it is more appropriate to conceive of one’s actions, ideals, and dreams as comprising a continuum that is in constant flux. The positive “ripple effect” of the performance of a single mitzvah and the concomitant “slippery slope effect” of committing a single transgression, lends credence to the position enunciated in the Talmud<sup>7</sup> that an individual must eternally view him/herself as if at a crossroads, i.e., that the number of mitzvot performed perfectly balances the number of *averot*. With the very next action, be it good or bad, the balance will be tilted in either direction.

The implications of one’s previous actions, the degree of change that effects every individual, and the concept that all

people should be directed towards achieving their highest levels of holiness, produces powerful possibilities for the enterprise of traditional Jewish education. Were parents to realize that their children will probably not follow exactly in their footsteps, then they might empower the school to try to direct changes toward higher rather than lower levels of holiness and Jewish commitment. A school built on such a religious dynamic could not confine itself to concern for only its students. The realization that each action is both a result of some previous activity or influence, as well as a catalyst for subsequent actions, reflected in constant change and development, means that a student’s knowledge, moral sensitivity, social awareness, idealism, religious commitment, sense of closeness to God, etc., will be constantly reforming — either intensifying or slackening — along with those of his peers, teachers, administrators, parents, siblings, synagogue co-members, Rabbi(s), communal leaders, and anyone else who serves as a role model for a younger person’s religious development. Unfortunately, however, these role models are not always in consonance with each other. For example, does the school’s attitude to Torah learning have adequate reference within the adult community? Is there a consistency between the prayer experience in school and that of home and synagogue? Are the adults in the community interested in halakhic issues? How much *hessed* pervades the community, in light of the emphasis placed upon such activities within the school? Are students given reason to feel that even the most spiritual school experience constitutes merely a temporary situation that will be outgrown upon graduation, as one enters the “real” world? Although it could be maintained that a great degree of individual diversity must be expected even within the most homogeneous of communities, a school can nevertheless create a shared atmosphere of collective interest and exploration, whereby every individual is challenged to raise his/her own personal level of interest, concern and commitment with regard to things Jewish. Even if actual practices and interest levels cover a wide range, the quest to fulfill the demand of “*ma’alim bakodesh*” can be a catalyst for Jewish communities and for the day schools that stand at their respective centers.

In light of all this, it is recommended that the scope of curricular and extra-cur-

ricular planning should be expanded to include serious, ongoing opportunities for interaction with the adult community in its every manifestation. Family education cannot be confined to three or four programs, if that, over the course of the year. The interaction between school and synagogue must become much more synergistic. Schools and Jewish communal organizations must view themselves as more than just recipients of the community Federation distributions. The school and the local senior citizen population must become active partners in the creation of programs for the entire community. Not only does the school thereby become a catalyst for the religious growth of the entire community, but such an approach is an important factor in assuring the younger generation’s continuation of the Jewish traditions of the past. The assumption that religious practice and belief will be perfectly reproduced in generation after generation is beyond reasonable expectation. Thus, although we are expected to carry on the customs which have been entrusted into our hands much as an inheritance, it is unrealistic and unfair to presume that our children will turn their lives into carbon-copies of our own, just as we do not perfectly mirror the lives of our forebearers. We are challenged by the times as well as our religious heritage to retool the schools that are expected to pass on our traditions. They must become the spiritual focus that is informed, aware, instructive, and embracing, not only of its students, but of the entire Jewish community. ■

#### FOOTNOTES

1. *Nedarim 37a*.

2. *Ish HaHalakhah—Galui VeNistar*, Ha-Mahlakah L’Hinukh U’Tarbut Tbraniim B’-Golah, Jerusalem, 1979, pp. 230-2

3. *Teaching as a Conserving Activity*, Delta, New York, 1979.

4. *Masekhet Kiddushin 29a*.

5. *Ibid.* 41b

6. Ben Azai would perhaps take one step further a similarly-minded comment by the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus, to whom is attributed the saying, “You cannot step twice into the same river, for fresh waters are ever flowing in upon you.” (Quoted in *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. 1, by F. Copleston, Image Books, Garden City, NY, 1962, p. 55) It could be contended that not only is the river in a state of constant change, but so is the individual who is stepping into it. And, apparently according to Ben Azai, the first time that you wet your foot will have an impact on whether or not you decide to step in again.

7. *Masekhet Kiddushin 40a-b*.



# Community and Halakhic Plurality in our Schools

Joel B. Wolowelsky

Consider the following scenario: The month of Elul arrives and a fifth grader, eager to absorb his rebbe's Torah, listens attentively to the history of the writing of *Unesaneh Tokef*. It's a moving story and the student is affected not only by the history of the *piyut* but by the rebbe's personal reflection on how hard it would be to imagine the *Yamim Noraim* davening without its emotional refrain. The student retells the lesson to his father who is also moved by a story that he had never heard before about a *piyut* that he cannot recall saying. Indeed, the father cannot find the *piyut* in his *mahzor* and the boy mentions this to his rebbe. The rebbe, sensing the sincerity of his student, concludes that he is dealing with a *baal teshuva* family. Putting his arm around the boy's shoulder, he counsels him gently: The time has come for the father to buy everyone an Orthodox *mahzor*.

This is a true story. The father and boy, however, were from a *frum* family and their *mahzor* was indeed an Orthodox one. And, like perhaps a majority of people in *batei kenessiyot* around the world, their *mahzor* did not have *Unesaneh Tokef*. This *piyut* is unknown in the Sephardic world and its absence has not affected the intensity of *kavanah* and *teshuva* of generations of pious Jews.

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I heard this story a few years ago from the boy, then a college student. I laughed as he told it, until I saw that even after all these years he resented the pain and embarrassment his teacher had inadvertently caused him. Since then I've been told countless similar stories in numerous versions. They were of Ashkenazic teachers who forgot that Sephardim were among their students; *mitnagdic* teachers who didn't include *hasidic* customs in their "holiday sheets"; or male teachers who didn't realize that many of their female students have a different experience in *shul* and home rituals.

But all had a common ingredient: teachers who were oblivious to the reality that many Torah-true Jews have legitimate religious lives which differ from their own.

The problem may not be as prevalent in yeshivot tied to a particular *hasidic* sect or whose parent-body is, for the most part, alumni of the same (or similar) *yeshiva gedola*. It is far more common than it should be, however, in community schools that attract families with a variety of *minhagim*. For example, the Sephardic presence in our schools is now quickly rising because long-standing American Sephardic communities are maturing and because current emigration from Israel is bringing increased numbers of Sephardim to America. The fact that only a very small number of teachers are Sephardic or have any significant exposure to Sephardic customs clearly magnifies the problem. The issue is one of sensitivity as

well as an ability to relate to the legitimate plurality within the halakhah and how to present that plurality.

It is not by accident that the Ashkenazic Ramo recorded his rulings alongside those of the Sephardic Mehaber rather than publish them separately. All Torah scholars understand the fact that *Torat Yisrael* has many legitimate manifestations. Both Ashkenazim and Sephardim suffer when a "tunnel vision" gives students the myopic view that their own customs constitute the totality of *minhag Yisrael*.

Insensitivities abound. "*Hodesh Elul* is upon us and the *shofar* is sounded each morning to remind us of the need to do *teshuva*," begins one school newsletter. Yet it is only in Ashkenazic synagogues that the *shofar* is sounded each morning. In Sephardic synagogues, the call to *teshuva* is marked by the recitation of *Selihot*. This could easily have been reflected in the opening sentence.

Or consider the wording in the Passover bulletin which states that rice may not be eaten on the holiday, and then notes the exception to the norm by adding a comment that Sephardim eat rice. But the halakhic norm is that rice is not *hametz* and the note should have been that the Ashkenazic community has accepted a custom to refrain from eating it. The difference is not a subtle one. The first suggests that Sephardim are the exception to the halakhic standard, perhaps not as committed or "*frum*" as those who refrain from eating rice. When there are

differing valid traditions within the halakhah, each has the right to be presented as authentic.

Indeed, Passover is a particularly difficult problem, not only because there are a myriad of different community customs, but because the Haggadah text itself contains a number of differences, such as in the order of the *Ma Nishtana* questions and the lack of a *berakhah* for the second and fourth cups of wine. A school's model *seder* as well as the classroom lesson must be approached creatively if they are to reflect the various traditions of the students in the school.

The teaching of halakhah in general presents a serious dilemma. In the early grades, the problem can be solved by carefully reviewing halakhah sheets that are distributed to be sure that they reflect differing traditions. But the issue is more problematic in the middle grades when all students use a particular book such as the *Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* or *Peninei HaDat*. These texts may simply be unacceptable if a significant number of Sephardic students are enrolled in the school. In any event, the halakhah curriculum must be carefully planned. And, perhaps it is time to produce a new, more encompassing halakhah textbook.

The problem, however, extends beyond curriculum. For example, consider a yeshivah's nursery or kindergarten. Often there is a model *aron kodesh* in the room, but rarely is there a small model Sephardic Torah in the *aron* together with the Ashkenazic one. Usually, none of the pictures distributed for Simhat Torah depict the *Sefer Torah* used in Sephardic synagogues.

Dealing with daily *tefillah* remains the most vexing issue. The *siddur* texts are not significantly dissimilar, but the tone and accompanying tunes are so different that a single *minyan* becomes at best a counterproductive *hinukh* experience for the group whose *nusah* is different. In the upper grades, the solution is to provide separate *minyanim* drawing students from more than one grade level. (And it's important to realize that girls as well as boys need separate services.) In the lower grades, where the emphasis is on learning to read, it is preferable to keep the class intact. But it is important that the *siddur* presented at the "siddur party" and used in class should either be one that is familiar to the students' families (often requiring the use of more than one *siddur* in class) or be a specially constructed "learning *siddur*" to be used until stu-

dents are old enough to participate in separate *minyanim*.

The above is far from exhaustive, but it is hoped that awareness and sensitivity will encourage educators to focus on and resolve the problem. Only then can all students begin to feel that their school is truly their own. ■

## A Beginning Checklist

### Census:

It is advisable, as a first step, to determine the number of Ashkenazim and Sephardim (or Yemenites or Iranians) enrolled in the school.

### Decorations:

Many schools have pictures of *gedolei Torah* displayed. Are *hakhmei Sepharad* — including contemporary Sephardic rabbinic leaders — among them? (Similarly, if there is a picture of *rashei yeshivah*, there should be one of *hasidic rebbes*.) If the text of, say, *havdala* is displayed, Ashkenazic and Sephardic texts should be shown.

### Sifrei Torah:

There should be Ashkenazic and Sephardic model *sifrei Torah* in the *aron kodesh* of the kindergarten and nursery, even if all students are drawn from one community exclusively.

### Siddurim:

Each child (and parent) in the early childhood division should recognize at least one prayer and tune recited in the class from his or her synagogue. The *siddur* party deserves special attention. When the model *sifrei Torah* are brought in, for example, the Ashkenazic and Sephardic models should *not* be apportioned according to the student's *minhag*. It is important to convey that, although encased differently, the Torah inside is the same and belongs to everyone.

### Shabbat Party:

The weekly Shabbat party in particular should provide for all different *minhagim*. For example, most (but not all) Ashkenazim say the *berakha* after lighting the Shabbat candles, while many Sephardic *poskim* hold that the *berakha* should be said before lighting the candles. Each Thursday, the girl who will light the candles should be asked which procedure is followed in her home. This should be repeated every week, even if the teacher knows the tradition of a particular home.

The goal is also to convey to students that there are different valid traditions and what goes on in their homes is only one of them. The Sephardic children should be taught to conclude the *berakha* for wine with the word *gefen*; Ashkenazim with *gafen*. For Sephardim, the fourth paragraph of *Shalom Aleihem* is "*Beshivtehem leshalom*." All students should sing all five paragraphs. The teacher should alert the class to all the different customs. The same is true with regard to *Adon Olam*. The Sephardic version has three or four lines that Ashkenazim omit.

### Model Seder:

It is a good idea to involve parents in the planning of the model seder. Various family *minhagim* and special songs can thus be included.

### Tefilla:

*Tefilla* can best be maximized in separate *minyanim* for Ashkenazim and Sephardim. At the very least, important differences should be accommodated. For example, when *Hallel* is said on *Rosh Hodesh*, Sephardim omit the *berakha* while Ashkenazim do not. A Sephardic student should not say the *berakha*. Similarly, one should be aware that according to many (but not all) *poskim*, Sephardic women should not say a *berakha* before taking the *lulav*.

### Texts:

All the halakhah texts used on each grade level which are community-specific, (e.g. the *Kitzur Shulhan Arukh*) can be problematic. Halakhah texts, *parasha* sheets, and holiday memos should all be reviewed to make sure that they address all *minhagim*. (It is wrong, for example, to have two different answers to a test question "When do we begin saying *selihot*?" Rather than having each child respond according to his or her own *minhag*, everyone should know both *minhagim*.)

Most important, we must be wary of any situation in which children are treated differently. No checklist exists that can sensitize an educator to all the needs of each individual child. Addressing each situation in a thoughtful, deliberate and sensitive manner will not only accommodate and encourage different *minhagim*, but will convey the value of considerateness, acceptance, and respect — *middot* that will, hopefully, last a lifetime.

# The Israel Experience:

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## A Closer Look from America

*Esther Krauss*

**O**n a trip to Israel last January, as one in a throng of parents visiting with their children during inter-session (*our* intercession, not theirs), but also as an educator visiting with former students, I was both moved and disturbed by an enlightening discussion I had with a young woman who was in the midst of her second year of study at one of the prestigious educational institutes for women in Jerusalem.

I was touched by the sincerity and, yes, naivete of her account of the soul-searching that the Israel experience had evoked in her; by the hyper-critical, somewhat jaundiced view of American orthodoxy that had emerged from her limited contacts with a parallel Israeli orthodoxy, and by the concomitant process of religious self evaluation that comparison had stimulated in her. She was a particularly sensitive and serious young woman for whom Israel had been an appropriate catalyst for the kind of spiritual questioning and growth that every Jew should undergo on the road to maturity. I'm not sure that it could or would have happened in the same way, with the same intensity, in America.

I was equally impressed by the intellectual growth, by the satisfaction from "*shteiging*" in learning, in *behiut*, in textual skills, in the use of *sifrei kodesh* and

reference materials that she so eagerly described to me.

I was disturbed, however, by her statement that much of her growth had taken place in this, her second year. Although I've always maintained that the Israel experience ideally requires a second year, because it takes students at least half a year to adjust to the cultural changes and to find their niche, that was not her explanation. She explained the disparity between the first and second year in other terms, most notably that this year she did not have the "distraction" of her American friends, nor did she now have to deal with constant visits by well meaning parents interrupting the momentum of her studies with two months of nightly forays to the beckoning local restaurants that exist in such delectable abundance in Jerusalem. As a result, she felt free this year to become totally involved in and absorbed by an authentic, comprehensive and intensive learning program, conducted solely in Hebrew this time, together with Israeli students for whom studying was serious business.

This conversation substantiated many of my previously held, often unorthodox and certainly unpopular opinions about the educational "success" story of the American yeshiva student studying in Israel. It also provoked me to examine more carefully what this phenomenon represents and what its potential is for American Jewish education, were we to become more actively involved in exploiting it. We hesitate to criticize the Israel

experience for fear of being considered anti-Israel, anti-learning, or just plain anti-religious. The argument goes that in spite of the acknowledged fact that the streets and eating places of Jerusalem are filled with our students at all hours of the day and night, engaged in less than serious or particularly uplifting activities, it is still better and more Jewishly productive than what they would be doing on American campuses. That sounds like a big compromise and, incidentally, also a devastating critique of what we are all about educationally.

I am not at all suggesting that we universally discourage our students from studying in Israel, although I'm still not convinced that it is appropriate for all students. I'm simply suggesting that we observe the phenomenon more closely and that we confront its implications for those who go, for those who are left behind, and for the large number of students who return after one or two very intensive and productive years of Jewish intellectual and spiritual growth. I'm concerned, for example, about its adverse effect on students who don't really want to or can't go, some of whom succumb to the subtle social and peer pressure and go in spite of their hesitation, and on the others who remain behind often at loose ends Jewishly. I'm also concerned about the undue financial pressure on parents who can't really afford to send their children or who simply don't think it necessary or appropriate to do so.

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I also question the timing. Going to Israel immediately after high school might not yield maximal result. It just might be more productive for students to go later on in their college careers, when they are personally and intellectually more mature, although that does present some practical problems related to marriage and career goals.

In spite of all those hesitations, I acknowledge that this movement is a laudable expression of and outlet for our increased economic prosperity. Despite the fact that a student who was considering Israel once told me that she had been advised by an American friend studying there that if her parents offered her a car instead she should take the car, a large number of our students *do* opt to take advantage of their parents' increased affluence by spending the year in Israel, welcoming the independence, the opportunity to become acquainted with a culture and society different from their own, forging personal ties with the land of their inheritance, intensifying their religious commitment and increasing their Jewish knowledge — each student in the way and at a level commensurate with his/her interests, abilities, talents and maturity.

It is appropriate, therefore, to assess this reality, define some of its problems and suggest some ways to enhance the experience. One caveat, however, is in order. These are observations, based for the most part, on the experience of women studying in Israel, and their experience does differ in some significant ways from that of the men, particularly those men studying in the more intensive Israeli yeshivot. To begin with, men's yeshivot are not usually located in Jerusalem, a fact that alters the picture considerably. Furthermore, the yeshiva experience there, as it is here in America, is characteristically a much more intensive, all encompassing one. The student-rebbe, and in some cases the student-Rosh yeshiva relationship is much closer and its influence much more far reaching. In addition, the educational expectations and self-perception about the need for and the love for learning are already highly developed in many of these young men. For them, Israel serves as an ideal place to fulfill their clearly established and accepted obligation to learn, whereas for women it is the place where some of them first begin to feel a parallel love and need for Torah learning.

Although it would be instructive and enlightening to explore these differences,

there remain many common factors and observations that are applicable and relevant to all students.

A crucial factor that determines the impact of the experience on each student is the appropriate choice of a school. We bear the responsibility to be fully acquainted with the nature of each of the Israeli programs and to steer our students to the one most suited to their particular needs. Concomitantly, the Israel schools should be required to articulate more clearly their goals, their philosophy, and the uniqueness of their programs. Our students are not all equally gifted or motivated academically. Not all of the Israel schools need to attempt or pretend to focus exclusively on the intellectual. Each, however, should present a well articulated philosophy and each should, in my opinion, offer a fuller Israel experience. By that I mean a better understanding of the Israeli people, a greater proficiency in the Hebrew language, greater familiarity with the land — its government, its politics, its conflicts. All these should be an integral part of every school's program.

In pursuit of this goal, we might incidentally also alleviate the present problem of too much unstructured time for students, especially on weekends and during *hagim*, when they often wander aimlessly through the country looking for a place to spend Shabbat or Yom Tov. As a result, streams of students fly back to spend a long Pesah break at home. What a shame for them to miss experiencing Eretz Yisrael during the *Shalosh Regalim!* But it is up to the schools in Israel to structure those times and experiences, to exploit them, to make them more meaningful.

We bemoan our students' lack of knowledge about Israeli politics, as well as the Jewish community's lack of consistent, effective, active and vocal support for Israel. The year or so that our students spend in Israel should be used to develop those qualities in them. Most students return enamored of Israel, usually thinking and talking about Aliyah, but I fear it is superficial and short lived. Their connection to and feeling of responsibility for Israel is not sufficiently intensified when they return. Their relationship with Israel at that point should have progressed beyond merely continued annual visits as tourists. This can effectively be accomplished while they are there, but even more so if we prepare them better in advance and strengthen it upon their

return. We have no right to abdicate responsibility for inculcating our students with a love for Israel, expecting Israel to do it for us.

That is equally true, academically. There is no question that many of our students make enormous intellectual strides in Israel. I often wonder how and why some students are turned on to learning only in Israel. Certainly, "*Ein Torah k'Torat eretz Yisrael*" — Israel offers an exclusively Jewish intellectual experience where one can more easily become immersed in Torah learning. Certainly, there is also much to be said for the removal of the distractions characteristic of American secular culture (although, unfortunately, our students have transplanted and imported too much of that culture to Israel). But there is more to it than that. We simply can't afford to leave Torah education almost exclusively to Israel.

There is much to be gained from our working in tandem with Israeli schools and with their outstanding educators. We can learn a great deal from Israeli educational expectations as well as from their methodology. We might be moved, for example, to standardize our curriculum in yeshiva high schools and to introduce testing patterned on the Israeli Bagrut. If we were to aim at adequately preparing our students in Hebrew language, in knowledge and skills for sophisticated Judaic studies programs on the college level in Israel, our own education might be greatly enhanced. At the same time, we must also make demands on them. The Israeli educational experience should be a natural sequence to ours.

Finally, we have a responsibility to provide numerous places and opportunities, particularly for women returning from a year's study in Israel, to continue learning. We must provide them with enough environments that will encourage and motivate them to do so. Let us tap the enthusiasm and commitment with which they return from Israel, and not let it fade into a beautiful memory by ignoring it or frustrating it through indifference or neglect.

In sum, it would serve us well not to accept the Israel phenomenon uncritically. If our students continue to study in Israel, they must be adequately prepared, and it must be followed up effectively upon their return thus ensuring that their experience is truly a profound and comprehensive one. ■

# The Israel Experience:

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## A Closer Look from Israel

Norman Amsel

A student who has been an “underachiever” in yeshiva high school decides, at the last moment, to join his friends for a year at a yeshiva in Israel before going to college. He returns a year later as a *ben Torah*, keeping mitzvot he never observed in high school and with a sense of respect and deference for his parents and former teachers. It is difficult to believe that it is the same boy. Yet this story has been repeated numerous times in many schools. What is it about the learning experience in Israel that has such a major impact upon a young man or young woman’s life? Is there a secret? Is it brainwashing? What happens during that one year that cannot be replicated elsewhere?

The phenomenon of the American post high school student who “takes off” a year to study Torah in Israel is not a new one. However, its popularity during the last ten to fifteen years has not only changed the program quantitatively, as many more students are exposed to intensive Torah learning, but the program itself has also undergone changes due to the dramatic increase in the number of students choosing the “Israel option” after high school. The following general analysis of the basic Israel learning program will attempt to explain its attrac-

tion, successes and failures, examine how it has changed in recent years, and offer possible suggestions for the future.

Undoubtedly, each person’s experience in Israel is unique, and the special chemistry combining one’s specific background, individual personality and a particular yeshiva’s program and personnel do not allow for generalizations *per se*. Nevertheless, there are certain common factors which are unique to the year of study in Israel which contribute to its overall positive effect.

To begin with, there are two elements that are not available in the United States: time and a twenty-four hour environment. When one has the time to really learn a piece of Gemara properly or a *pasuk* in depth without the “interference” of secular studies, SAT’s, or television, the intellectual faculties and sense of appreciation for learning are enormously enhanced. Time also allows for discussion about important philosophical issues and questions of *hashkafa* which could not be delved into properly in high school. These discussions sometimes continue in the dorms late at night as the time and environment make it conducive for introspection and seriousness. Unlike in yeshiva high school, men and women who continue to learn on their own time or on a bus are admired in Israel, and are not viewed as “nerds” as they might be in the States. Without the pressures of television and homework, and without the focus centering on tests and grades, there is also time to open a *sefer* on any topic of interest. Gradually, the power of Torah is seen for what it is.

This time factor also allows students to see a Judaism never before experienced. *Tefillah*, for example, is not rushed or bound by a schedule. Although the time of *davening* in shuls and schools in America is often altered to accommodate work and class schedules, in an Israeli yeshiva, the time of *davening* is the same on Monday, Thursday or Rosh Hodesh. The day will start later, but *davening* is not affected. This subtle change and emphasis is not lost on the students.

A second important factor is the teacher-student relationship. In Israel it is not uncommon for teachers to virtually share their lives with the students — inviting them for Shabbatot, *hagim*, and *smahot*. This close interaction surely has a positive effect on the relationship and learning in class. It also helps widen the spectrum of role models for the students. They begin to realize, from close range, not only how one can integrate a Torah life with the contemporary world, but how viable the Aliyah option really is.

A third component which enhances the total experience beyond the classroom is the experiential. Many schools integrate experiences such as visiting Yad Vashem on Yom Hashoa, planting a tree in Yerushalayim on Tu Bishvat, and the many trips with Tanakh in hand, into the school program. Some schools have organized *hesed* programs, and some allow students to experience a taste of the Israeli army and *shmirah*. However, even if a school does not offer a specific *hesed* program, there are now organizations which fill the void. The NCSY Israel Center organizes a program each Friday

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(when most schools are off) called *Nitzoz* (either co-ed or separate men's and women's) where students go to underprivileged non-religious Israeli schools and teach young students Jewish ideas and concepts. *Achi*, another organization, arranges for American students to spend a Shabbat in underprivileged communities. During the weeks when there is no school (usually between Yom Kippur and Rosh Hodesh Heshvan and again during the month of Nisan) experiential programs are also available. In addition to *tiyulim*, there is a *Tokhnit Nisan*, where students work on a kibbutz and are placed with families for Pesah. Of course, in those yeshivot where boys dorm with Israelis or students from different countries (there is no female institution with this provision) the living experience itself becomes a memorable and educational one.

### The Experience Today vs. Years Ago

Today, some schools send more than 90% of their senior class to Israel. It has become the "place to be," and, consequently, many students do not really come for the learning experience itself. Before 1965-1970, only a very small percentage from each class came to Israel to learn. Many came for their "junior year abroad" instead of immediately after high school. This altered the experience in numerous ways. During those earlier years, there was no social pressure to come — quite the opposite. Many parents opposed the idea. College credits were not always guaranteed. Thus, students came for one reason only — to learn Torah. This self-selecting process guaranteed a more serious student. If the student was already a junior in college, he or she was necessarily more mature, with a far greater appreciation of time and of the unique opportunity to learn. In addition, the junior experience was even more valued because it came during college. Some of today's students view the Israel experience as a time between high school and college. After one interesting, new experience — learning in Israel, one goes on to another interesting, new experience — college.

Today's institutionalization of the year in Israel, while overcoming most parental objections, has hindered the overall effectiveness of the program. Dr. David Bernstein, Dean of MABAT, concurs. While the student of yesteryear was forced to make new friends, today's stu-

dent can exist quite comfortably with all his or her old friends, visiting acquaintances and camp buddies throughout the year in different yeshivot. The social pull to "hang out" in Jerusalem on Thursday evening or *motzaei* Shabbat is far greater today when "everyone will be there."

The increased affluence of the Jewish community as well as airline and telephone deregulation has also had a profound effect upon the institutionalization of the Israel learning experience. Before deregulation the price of an airline ticket to the U.S., or even a phone call, was prohibitive. Contact with friends and parents was limited to letters, forcing students to acquire independence and new peers. At the same time, the "old" culture of America was left 6000 miles away. Today, that culture is only a phone call or plane ride away. Many students call home and friends twice a week. (One student last year called Sports Phone twice a day to get the most updated sports scores!) Some students travel home two and three times during the year. In addition, their parents also visit. Thus, "home" is never far away from thought and deed, an inhibiting factor on the total experience.

The affluence of today's American Jewish community also allows for many more trips by relatives and friends of family. Students are frequently invited to the various hotels for meals — certainly not part of the intended Israel experience. Some students even rent rooms at these hotels for Shabbat and Yom Tov. It has also become a "custom" for visiting parents to invite 20-25 of the child's friends for a meal in an expensive restaurant — and all are expected to reciprocate when their parents visit. Thus, each student can eat out in twenty-five restaurants during the year — often sacrificing night learning.

The "Americanization" of Israel has also helped "Americanize" the Israel experience. Whereas students of yesteryear had to learn to live in a completely new culture, today's student can visit familiar pizza shops, Carvel and Chinese restaurants. (In one distant yeshiva, when the food wasn't up to "American" standards for a particular dinner, the students got together and ordered twenty pizza pies to be delivered to the yeshiva.)

Clearly, although the overall program is highly beneficial, this aspect of the "institutionalization" and "Americanization" of the Israeli learning experience is detrimental to its true potential.

### How Israeli Educators View American Education

It is noteworthy for American Jewish educators to view their students through the eyes of Israeli institutions. What are the general strengths of day school education in America? What are its weaknesses? How has the "product" changed over the years, if at all? According to Rabbi Dovid Miller, Rosh Yeshiva of BMT (ITT), the Gemara background of most students has been strengthened during the last 5-10 years. On the other hand, he believes that knowledge of Hebrew has been considerably weakened. In other areas, such as Humash, *hashkafa* and *halakha*, Rabbi Miller sees little change.

The increasing lack of Hebrew was prominent in the response of all the educators this writer spoke with. Dr. Gabi Cohen from Machon Gold, while acknowledging that knowledge and skills vary from school to school and from student to student, pointed out a basic lack of *Ivrit* even in textual learning. Since the goal is to train students to learn on their own, it becomes very difficult when they have no textual skills and no familiarity with basic *seforim* such as the *Shulhan Arukh* or *Shmirat Shabbat Kehilkhata*. Girls should be able to recognize the geography of a page of Gemara, according to Dr. Cohen. And while research skills are adequate for secular work, these same skills have never been learned or applied to *limudei kodesh*.

Another dean of a girls' yeshiva argues that many of the students' secular skills are inadequate. The overall lack of worldly as well as *limudei kodesh* knowledge forces compromise on the level of the courses. Teachers must impart information and skills that should have been learned in high school. Rabbi Aron Rakefet, a veteran Jerusalem teacher at BMT, Machon Gold, Michlala and now Midreshet Moriah, believes that the emphasis in American day schools must necessarily be geared to teaching *shmirat mitzvot* and general Jewish attitudes. No time is really left in the curriculum to teach skills in depth. Only when students come to Israel do they have the time and the inclination to acquire skills and deep *hashkafa*. Many boys, for example, who learned in Israel admit that they could not learn Gemara on their own until they invested the demanding effort and time to "make a *layning*" — time which is often not available in the high school schedule.

*continued*

On the other hand, Dr. David Bernstein is pleased that, in the last few years, more and more girls come with some Gemara background.

## Suggestions

To enhance effectiveness, Israeli institutions should consider the following modest suggestions:

1) To ensure continuity, student visits to the States should be eliminated. Students who return home two or three times a year begin to think about the trip two weeks before and need two weeks afterwards to return to a proper learning level. Many students now miss a wonderful experience — spending Pesah in Israel. Heads of institutions should insist that students stay in Israel unless an emergency arises at home.

2) There should be a limit on the days that a visiting parent may take a child out of the program. This, too, is very disruptive — for all students.

3) Students must be more adequately drilled on political questions involving Israel. When students return home, they are asked about the “situation” and are looked to as “experts” because of their experience. Most returning students are ill-prepared, nor are they trained to become activists on their college campus in behalf of Israel. AIPAC in Israel is willing to send representatives to train these returning students who are possibly one of Israel’s greatest and most effective sources of good will and positive energy.

4) Students should be more exposed to Israelis and Israeli culture. One method is to arrange *havrutah* learning with Israelis in other institutions (even seniors in high school of the same age). This would foster dialogue and relationships.

5) Students must emerge from a year of study with a working knowledge of spoken Hebrew. It is a disgrace for them to return with no more knowledge of Hebrew than when they arrived.

6) Each institution should organize ongoing follow up programs in the United States (beyond the once a year *shiur klali* when the Rosh Yeshiva visits). In this way, part of that special feeling might be preserved and nurtured for a longer period of time.

The Israel learning experience can be a critical component of a complete and fulfilled Jewish education in the United States. Let us make sure that it is. ■

## Focus: Israel Programs

Nathaniel Helfgot

Helping students ask the right questions and focus properly on their needs and aspirations are essential elements of the guidance process in any school. The same is true in the area of post-high school Israel programs guidance as well. It is crucial to provide as much accurate and detailed information about the various schools, the process of application and other elements as early as possible. This should preferably be done at the end of the Junior year when many schools sponsor college application orientation sessions for students and their families. Toward the goal of helping students sift through the wealth of information, rumors, and advice that they are bombarded with about the various programs, the Frisch School in New Jersey compiled the following list of questions for students to consider. These questions help them focus their attention and enable the personal guidance meetings to be that much more effective. They are distributed together with a comprehensive 45 page booklet that includes description and information about the various programs and instructions regarding the process of application.

### Issues to Consider

1. Am I looking for a yeshiva experience, a Hachshara program or a college experience in Israel?
2. Is the school large or small?
3. Are the classes in English or Hebrew or a mix?
4. Is it exclusively an American school?
5. If there are Israelis, is the American program separate or integrated?
6. Do the Americans dorm together with the Israelis and is there much interaction?
7. Are the teachers warm and hospitable or more distant and reserved? Do any speak English?
8. What are the hours of learning in the school? How much *havruta* time, how much *shiur* and/or class time?
9. What is the specific learning method in the school, more analytic or more fast-paced?
10. For girls’ schools — Do they study Gemara as well as other *limudei kodesh*? Is there a *havruta Beit Midrash* component as well as lectures?
11. How many *tiyulim* and trips does the school have every month?
12. Are there mandatory in-Shabbatot every month? How many? What is Shabbat like in the school?
13. What are the physical accommodations of the school? (e.g. food, heat in the winter, distance from Jerusalem, etc.)
14. Is the school religious-Zionist or neutral in orientation?
15. Does the yeshiva encourage volunteer or extra-curricular activities in Israel?
16. Is there a *hevra* thinking of going or am I going it alone?
17. What is the level of independence given to the students (e.g. curfews, other strictures)?

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**Ed’s Note:** Other schools with a similar program are encouraged to contact the Frisch School, Frisch Court, Paramus, N.J., toward the development of a comprehensive nationally applicable guide.

Under the auspices of the Torah High School Network an Israel Guidance Counselors Network has been formed. For further information contact Jeff Lichtman, Torah High School Network, 500 West 185th St., NYC 10033, 212-960-5202.

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# Moral Education in the Guise of a Physical Education Program

Chaim Feuerman

Children's play is their work.<sup>1</sup> In planning learning experiences, early childhood educators have long been guided by this fundamental principle of child development. But once children have reached the middle grades and have "climbed out of the sand box" some educators tend to assume that it is no longer valid. It does, in fact, continue to apply, but in a somewhat different form.

For pre-adolescents and adolescents, "Children's play is their work" means that much of their "real world" exists on the basketball court, the football field and the baseball diamond. It is there that youngsters personally encounter ambition, the striving toward desired goals, recognition, self-esteem, discipline, self-restraint, persistence despite obstacles, competitiveness, rivalry, fair and foul play. In short, at games and in sports young people experience a panorama of human needs as well as the moral issues which are engendered by the struggle to satisfy those needs.

This middle childhood view of play as reality is unlike that of many adults who think of class work as the "real" business at hand for youngsters. In contrast, many middle school children perceive classroom activities imposed upon them by adults as

*Educators should view the playfield as a potential setting for moral education.*

artificial contrivances which lack meaningfulness and seem unrelated to their lives. They view classroom exercises as motions to be gone through in order to get to the "real-life" business of recess and after-school game time.

This perception applies to moral development, as well as to academic curricula. Traditional *middot* programs often, of necessity, involve idealized, rather than real-life, classroom presentations. (One such program is the currently popular "Apples of Gold" *lashon hara* contest in which thousands of yeshiva pupils are participating.) These are often followed by a paper-and-pencil test of students' mastery of the *dinim* of a given target *midda*. Presumably, it is hoped

that if children *know* what is right they will tend to *do* what is right. To what extent this hope is actualized in real life situations is difficult to measure objectively. For although it is understood that if children don't *know* what is right they cannot be expected to *do* what is right; at the same time, if children know what is right, on what basis may we safely assume that they will do what is right?<sup>2</sup>

A significant body of educational research indicates quite clearly that such transfer of training does not automatically occur in students. In fact, it has been shown that teachers themselves need on-site coaching to facilitate the transfer of teaching skills from workshop to workplace.<sup>3</sup> Thus, it appears reasonable to suggest that similar real-life "on-site coaching" enables youngsters to transfer *middot* training from schoolroom to schoolyard. But this can only be accomplished with sensitive educators who are willing to monitor playground activity and to be available at recess, game time and after school programs. It is during these spontaneous times that teachers can ferret out those kinds of interactions that form the basis for a lesson in moral education.

At the Westchester Day School we have developed a moral education program emanating from indoor and outdoor play, physical education activities, and an extra-curricular after-school program of intramural and inter-school competitive sports activities. Although there is no for-

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mal component to our program, the physical education teachers meet with all the students in school on an almost daily basis. As a result, and because they interact with the children in an informal, spontaneous way, they develop an easy, open rapport with them and can detect areas of moral sensitivity which emerge. The teachers confer daily with each other and with members of the administration and faculty. Issues and situations are thus dealt with immediately and directly, and are often reinforced in classrooms and programs as well. It becomes clear that

the physical education teachers must serve as role models for the students and must be sensitive to the values which the yeshiva espouses.

The effectiveness of our program was realized at a Sunday morning teacher-parent-child *minyana* and breakfast that was held prior to a late morning basketball game. The breakfast featured seventh and eighth graders who offered *divrei-Torah* on the theme "Sportsmanship from a Torah Perspective." The children, who prepared their own material, spoke about including everyone

in an activity regardless of ability — "If some one 'goofs' we try not to laugh, criticize or ridicule," declared one child. Said another,

"We try to be sensitive to one another and be considerate of one another's feelings, whether we win or lose. We will even try to pass the ball to someone who rarely gets it, even if it means that we risk losing the game. We value, appreciate and honor consideration of feelings by giving the 'underdog' a pat on the back. We help and encourage each other along."

They spoke of helping members of the other team who might have fallen; of resisting the "temptation to smirk or gloat" in an opponent's downfall, of accepting the referee's decision gracefully, of wearing kippot, eating only kosher refreshments, and of asking themselves, "How should a yeshiva student act differently from others in a situation like this?"<sup>4</sup>

Bearing in mind that children's play is their work, educators should view the playfield as a potential setting for moral education. The game arena is the place where children, with our coaching, can learn positive *middot*. A school's moral education program can and should involve the *real* business of school life for children — recess and play time. In so doing it can touch the children's lives where they believe it really counts. ■

## Torah High School Network News

Gary Menchel, Chairman  
Jeffrey Lichtman, Executive Director

### For Educators

The Torah High School Network has canvassed faculty involved in providing Israel Program guidance for students. Nine people met in early September and shared concerns and information. A bulletin will update our schools on new information. In addition, a group is working on developing a uniform application for yeshivot in Israel. An information guide, authored by Nathaniel Helfgot of Frisch School, is available.

Together with the Jewish National Fund the Network is working on developing curriculum material for teaching Israeli Zionism in our yeshivot.

### For Students

The 5th Annual Student Delegate Conference will take place November 8-11. It is being hosted by the HAFTR H.S. and the Young Israel of Woodmere. The theme is *Kibbutz Galuyot* and students attending the program will be involved in intense Torah study, leadership training, and program planning for the coming year.

A number of member schools are participating in the *Panim El Panim* program especially geared to our yeshiva high schools. This program intensively exposes students to the American political process and the role that the Jewish community plays in that process. Students will meet with congressional figures, members of AIPAC, and other Jewish communal leaders. The program will take place October 22-25.

Plans are being finalized for a first model UN for yeshiva high school students. This program is being jointly sponsored by the Network and Yeshiva University.

For further information please contact:

Mr. Jeffrey Lichtman  
Torah High School Network  
500 West 185th St.  
New York, NY 10033

### FOOTNOTES

1. See Stone, L. Joseph and Church, Joseph, *Childhood and Adolescence—A Psychology of the Growing Person*. New York: Random House, 1957, p. 150.

2. Indeed, in a major presentation at a recent national yeshiva educators' convention, one respected veteran *manahel* with an enviable decades-long track record of implementing a variety of *middot* programs, lamented woefully regarding the serious shortcomings which our students manifest in this regard. This is true, he said, both in yeshivot where the teaching of *middot* is consciously taught and stressed as well as in those where it is not. It would therefore seem that students' *knowing* what is right does not necessarily ensure their *doing* what is right.

3. Joyce, Bruce and Showers, Beverly, "Improving Inservice Training: The Message of Research." *Educational Leadership* 37 (February 1980): pp. 379-385.

4. The students supported their views by quoting statements from Hazal such as "*B'nof oyevekha al tismah*," "*Ain l'kha adam she'ain lo sha'ah*," "*Al t'hay baz l'khal adam*," "*Hevay mekabel et kal adam b'sever panim yafot*," etc.

against Communism. Nor do I process their application immediately. I have found that those who are accepted too easily, also leave too easily. I urge them to consider their decision carefully and thoroughly. Only in this way am I certain that their commitment is serious and genuine. There is not a family who does not return.

It then becomes the rebbe's job to create a warm, inviting atmosphere with much personal, individual attention, forming a close rapport not only with the student, but with the parents as well.

## II. LIMUD TORAH

Motivation, warmth, and personal attention are certainly essential components. The crucial element, however, is still deep and meaningful learning. Without substance there is emptiness. It is only through a sense of proficiency, of intellectual growth, and of mastery of skills and practice that a student's motivation, enthusiasm and commitment will endure.

### A) Resources:

It is very important that at least part of the Torah instruction should be by a Russian-speaking teacher or guest lecturer. Meaningful books in Russian which will inspire students, for example, Herman Wouk's *This is My G-d* and Rabbi Yitzchok Zilber's *The Fire Will Not Burn You!*, are also extremely helpful. One should guard against any Russian translation of the

Humash or Siddur for the Russian language used in these translations is couched in Christian phrases and religious innuendoes. Russian immigrants come from completely atheistic backgrounds and such translations can have a negative and harmful effect. Another highly recommended source of instruction is "Call Torah" (718-252-5100), a telephone shiur in Russian. It is available in Israel, New York, New Haven and Cleveland. (Other communities wishing to set up this telephone shiur may contact the Sinai Academy at 718-256-7400.)

### B) Topics:

It is vital to answer the atheistic questions invariably asked, e.g. the age of the universe; Torah and science. It is also helpful to relate textual topics to familiar events and situations, e.g. Yaakov's struggle against Esav and Lavan re-expressed in Purim, Chanukah, Nazi Germany, Communist Russia. Stories with examples of *kiddush Hashem*, of Jewish heroes and martyrs, are also stories that they can relate to and which will instill within them pride in being Jewish.

## III. COMMITMENT

In *kiruv*, the commitment of the teacher and role model is a vital tool, for it is this connection that results in the *degree* of Jewish commitment. The student's will to actively participate can be generated only by a strong day-to-day bond with the per-

son who has become the role model. The commitment of the student, therefore, is often the direct result of the rebbe or *kiruv* worker's commitment toward the student. A teacher should be in constant contact with the children. Students should become family, feeling comfortable and at ease. In addition to teaching, a rebbe must have the art of listening to students' doubts, fears and problems. The secret of commitment is to *listen*, not to use pressure.

At Sinai our Russian students are not forced to have a *brit milah* or to wear *tzitzit* or *tefillin*, although we do always encourage them to observe the mitzvot. The first step should be to wear a *kippah*, as an outward sign of Jewish identity and pride. The stronger the commitment to Yiddishkeit becomes, the stronger is the motivation and the deeper the Torah learning becomes — which leads to more commitment.

## THE FAMILY APPROACH

Russians are not just Americans speaking a different language — their culture is totally different, as is their attitude towards authority and their concept of friendship and status. We must remember that the Soviet Union has naturally bred a lack of trust. Its citizens don't trust the government, have been taught not to believe in God and are suspicious of their neighbors. Thus, a much stronger family bond exists. One cannot therefore hope to influence a child when the rest of the family is aloof and unresponding. Adult education is thus an absolute must. Seminars, family Shabbatonim, libraries, the family-matching project — and throughout all this — the ever-present contact between the child's rebbe and the entire family.

Our goal is to create leaders for the next generation of Russian Jews. Out of one hundred boys who attended Sinai this year, twelve were mainstreamed to different yeshivot including Ner Yisroel, Chaim Berlin, and Yeshiva University High School for Boys. Many of these boys feel a strong commitment to teach and reach their fellow Russians. Some have become rebbeim in summer camp settings and plan to enter *hinukh*. Oft times it is through the already interested and motivated youngster on the block that a fellow, unaffiliated neighbor (maybe from the same Russian city) becomes curious. It is only through this "*lilmod u'lilamed*" that we can truly hope to reach our goal. ■

Three useful Russian language items, geared to the needs of Russian students, recently appeared in Israel. The first is a *yoman*, a pocket calendar with dates appearing in both Hebrew and Russian. The calendar includes explanatory notes in Russian about the *hagim* and major celebrations, accompanied by illustrations, as well as key dates in Jewish history. It would be a wonderful idea to greet each new Russian student to our schools with this welcome "gift."

To familiarize Russian students with the Yamim Tovim, the eight small *hovrot Hagei Yisrael* authored by Rabbi Menachem HaCohen, are now available in Russian translation. Each one of the *hovrot* includes background material on the holiday, sources, explanations of basic *mitzvot* and *minhagim*, as well as many meaningful illustrations. The *hovrot* include: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Hanukah, Tu B'Shvat, Purim, Pesah, Shavuot and Yom HaAtzmaut. For schools that have previously used these attractive *hovrot*, their availability in Russian will be particularly welcome.

A more detailed and comprehensive two volume work on the Yamim Tovim *Hagei Yisrael Umo'adav* (136 pages) is now also available in Russian. This work, to be used with students in upper grades is also accompanied by many illustrations. It is recommended for use with adult parent-education groups as well. All three Russian language publications have been published by Don Hotzaha Leor, Tel Aviv. ■

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# Soviet Jewish Children in Day Schools

Leonard A. Matanky

**T**he miracle that has led to the mass emigration of thousands of Jews from the Soviet Union is the most significant event of Jewish history in this, the last half of the twentieth century. *Am Yisrael* now has the possibility of rediscovering millions of fellow Jews.

Of the tens of thousands of Soviet Jews arriving on these shores, nearly 18% will be of school age (10% elementary and 8% secondary school). This translates into thousands of Soviet children who need a Jewish education. In Chicago for example, over 400 school-aged children have arrived in just the last year. Through a Russian Transitional Day School and subsequent mainstreaming, over 50% of the eligible children have entered day schools and yeshivot. Yet, the mere physical presence of these children in our schools will not guarantee that they will become active participants in *klal Yisrael*. As *mehankhim* it is our duty to create a positive and welcoming environment for them. We must understand where they have come from and where we can hope to lead them.

There are many stories of Soviet Jews who learned about Judaism and became observant Jews while still in the Soviet Union. Yet, these are *yhidei s'gulah*, not typical of most Soviet Jews. Not only do

the vast majority of Jews coming from the Soviet Union know very little about Judaism, they are, by and large, agnostics. During a discussion about foods that are *kosher l'Pesah* a teacher in a local day school explained to her class that a *hekhsher* means that a Rabbi supervises the production of the food. To this a Soviet child innocently asked: "What's a Rabbi?"

These children do have Jewish identities. Their form of identity, however, is nationalistic and not religious. They know that they are Jews; many of them have suffered because they are Jews. This distinguishes them from the assimilated American Jews who have lost their Jewish identity. Therefore, the efforts, goals, and approaches of *kiruv* must be different from those used with non-religious American Jews. We must continue to foster their current identity while very slowly introducing them to a religious identity.

As the Soviet Jewish refugees continue to arrive, more and more of them will be mainstreamed into our classrooms. Yet, no matter how much preparation they have had prior to mainstreaming, no matter how many transitional programs we devise, these children will not be on the same level as American children of the same age. As teachers we must face this dilemma and find solutions.

The first and most obvious step is to welcome these children into our classrooms with warmth and acceptance. It will be difficult. It means teaching a class with children who have large gaps in their

knowledge. It means finding time to tutor them. But it also means a chance to be *matzil nefashot*.

Before these new children come into class, it is very important to prepare the American children for their arrival. The more that students understand about the Soviet Jewish refugee experience the better equipped will they be to integrate them into their classroom life. Invite a Soviet Jew who has already become part of the Jewish community to describe his/her experiences. Have students prepare a "welcome" party for their new classmate. Create a class project to learn about Soviet Jewish history, both past (e.g. hassidic rabbis) and present.

The new students will need diagnostic testing to determine what they have learned. It is important to identify the most critical areas of study that they must concentrate on and then to develop a plan for remediation. Unlike most of the other children, however, parental assistance cannot be relied upon in tutoring these children. It is not that the parents don't want to assist their children, they are simply overwhelmed by the daily struggle to survive. Many are unemployed, studying English, or in the process of job retraining. Those that are employed carry the tremendous financial burden of bringing relatives to America. And, clearly, many of them are ill-equipped to assist their children in Judaic studies, Language Arts and Social Studies.

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One solution to this problem is peer tutoring. Matching a Soviet Jewish child to an American-born classmate will not only help both children academically, it will also foster social interaction. Experience has taught that friendships are the key to successful and lasting integration.

Since our goal is to develop positive attitudes towards *Yiddishkeit*, we must also provide these children with opportunities to enjoy school as well as to relish just "being Jewish." Going to the zoo or a ball game wearing a *yarmulke* and searching for kosher potato chips is a positive

*Jewish* experience. Of course Shabbatonim and holiday observances are important, but these experiences may be too intense in the beginning.

In formulating approaches, expectations, and methodology it is important to realize what prior school experience these children have had. The Soviet school system is very formal and classroom discipline in elementary schools is very strict. When these children are exposed to our "warm" classroom environment, they may try to test the limits of our compassion. Pity and its concomitant tendency to overlook misbehavior can lead to further

misbehavior. A teacher must be firm, explaining rules and enforcing them. Soviet Jewish parents want their children in day schools. If this opportunity will be forfeited because of misbehavior, the parents will intercede and support a teacher's rules. Don't be afraid to be tough when necessary.

Another aspect of the Soviet school system is its homework policy. Parents are taught to equate the amount of homework with the amount of learning that occurs in the classroom. Combined with the extreme importance placed on academic achievement as the sole means for advancement, Soviet children receive more homework than their American counterparts. As a result, Soviet Jewish parents want their children to receive a lot of homework.

In the Russian Transitional Schools in Chicago, we found that even when teachers assigned a lot of homework, the Soviet Jewish parents still complained. At first we were perplexed, until we discovered that in the Soviet Union all children are required to bring a daily assignment book to school. Each day, teachers record the assignments in the book as well as all grades of major tests and projects. Parents are thus kept informed of their child's work. In America where this system is not used, Soviet parents simply assumed that their children were not assigned homework. It might be a good idea to continue this practice — for the benefit of all the students.

Finally, what about the parents? How can we educate them? The easiest approach is to take advantage of the critical value that Soviet Jews place on the written word. Giving them books in Russian about Judaism, such as Wouk's *This Is My God*, Donin's *To Be A Jew*, Kehati's *Pirkei Avot* and Kitov's *Ish UVato*, will help them learn about *Yiddisheit* and understand our values and beliefs.

A much more difficult solution, but one with infinite possibilities, is to match families, Americans to Soviet Jews. Encourage them to share in outings, holidays and *smahot* and to be supportive. Although this requires a long-term serious commitment, it is extremely effective.

The challenge and the opportunity that we now face is extraordinary. As teachers, our success or failure depends upon our flexibility and creativity. The need is present, the support is available, it is now up to us to make the difference. ■

## TEN V'KACH: An Idea Brokerage

# Kristalnacht at SAR

*Joel Cohn*

**K**ristalnacht 1988, the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the Holocaust, presented a particular opportunity and a challenge for educators. It was an opportunity to once again convey the need for an emotional, intellectual, and active response to the Holocaust. It was a challenge, for although children might have some knowledge of the events of the Holocaust, Kristalnacht, for most, was a relatively new term.

Kristalnacht is synonymous with broken glass. Therefore it occurred to us at SAR that perhaps the most appropriate way to begin a Kristalnacht program was indeed to shatter glass.

As the seventh and eighth grade students arrived with their parents on the night of our program they were asked to inscribe, on a sheet of glass, the names of "Kidoshim" from their families. After all took their seats this glass was shattered with a brick. The sound of the glass shattering was no less piercing than the sound of the shofar on Rosh Hashanna.

As the speaker for the evening was introduced, a glacier prepared an outline for a mosaic with the words "Am Yisroel Chai" prominently displayed. Every participant then placed a piece of the shattered glass, darker pieces within the outlined words lighter ones as background, on yet another sheet of glass.

Many students stayed for almost an hour helping to glue all the pieces into place. We had taken the broken pieces of the lives of the "Kidoshim" and created "Am Yisroel Chai." This most symbolic piece of art now adorns our school building. For many the most meaningful event of the school year was "the night of the broken glass." ■

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# Integrating New Americans into a Jewish High School

*Miriam Jaffe*

**O**ur generation of Americans and Israelis is faced with a tremendous challenge. We must integrate significant numbers of our brothers and sisters from the Soviet Union into a religiously committed society so that they can live meaningful, productive and happy Jewish lives.

The task is formidable. While the new immigrants are very receptive to our helping them socially and culturally, many are wary of our attempts to impose religion upon them. On more than one occasion, I have heard a new immigrant say, "Are you trying to be my friend, or are you trying to make me religious?" The most effective way to teach Jews from the Soviet Union about Yiddishkeit is by befriending them and by showing them that they are genuinely cared about. Their willingness to accept will then follow much more readily.

At the Ida Crown Jewish Academy we have created the following programs to help in this process of integration.

## **Educational Growth**

Students arriving from the Soviet Union enter the Academy at several different levels in Hebrew and English skills. Those who enroll shortly after arriving in America have but an elementary

knowledge of English and virtually no Hebrew language skills. These students are placed in our Ulpan and its parallel ESL program.

A secondary category are those who attended school in America during a substantial part of the previous school year. Many of these students were enrolled in the Transitional School funded by Federation and overseen by our two bureaus of Jewish education, the Associated Talmud Torahs and the Board of Jewish Education. Their English skills are much more advanced and almost all of them can read Hebrew. These more advanced students are placed in our Mechina and its parallel advanced ESL program.

Optimally, within one and a half to two years all students are mainstreamed in all classes. From an intensive Hebrew Ulpan they advance to a Mechina level program and then into regular Judaic classes. Similarly, from a basic ESL level they move to advanced ESL and then are mainstreamed into regular general studies classes. Whenever possible, we seek to place students in regular classes and school settings. Integration is most effectively implemented when new Americans function in the general school society.

## **Personal Growth**

Many students feel overwhelmed by all the new academic and social changes that they encounter. It is very important that we enable them to feel good about them-

selves and that they perceive progress in their personal lives.

Toward this end, we have created a program in conjunction with an organization that works with the elderly. We match our students with an adopted "bubby" or "zaide" who has recently arrived from the Soviet Union. Once a month we organize an activity so that they spend time with each other. In addition, we encourage the students to seek out their adopted grandparents outside of school hours to help them settle into life in America. The purpose is to give our students a sense of accomplishment, that although they are new in this country they are nevertheless able to help someone else. The need to perceive oneself as provider as well as beneficiary is very important.

It is equally important to reduce the students' sense of inadequacy. As in any population, many of them are very bright and accomplished in various areas. Their language deficiency puts them at great disadvantage. A highlight of my students' day is when they test me each morning on the new Russian words that they taught me the previous day. They are especially pleased when I am able to translate words from the Humash or to give them instructions in Russian. And, when the students see how difficult it is for me to master a new language, they are better able to accept their own frustration with English. In fact, they take great pride that they are

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*MIRIAM JAFFE is Director of Activities for newly arrived students from the Soviet Union, at the Ida Crown Jewish Academy, Chicago.*

*The most effective way to teach Jews from the Soviet Union . . . is by befriending them and by showing them that they are genuinely cared about.*

able to master two new languages while I am having such difficulty with only one.

Enlisting the help of previously arrived new Americans also generates great pride as well as eases the transition process. When we wanted to teach newly arrived Soviet students how to put on *tefillen* we asked Soviet students who had themselves learned to perform this mitzvah just a few months before.

The forging of bonds, however, must extend outside of school. Inviting students for Shabbat, or to a family Chanuka party, or by hosting a summer picnic, helps strengthen relationships with faculty.

### **Social Growth**

Each New American encounters serious cultural and language barriers. The difficulties are complicated by the fact that the young student must break into social groups that often have been formed in grammar school. Many "native" Americans have begun to feel some resentment toward the new immigrants. The novelty of the "brother redeemed" has faded and only the burden of resettlement is felt. To counteract these difficulties, we have devised a number of activities.

While it is best to mainstream students quickly, this is not always feasible. To help students of different backgrounds meet each other, we have initiated a "Cousins Program" in which each new American is paired with an American "cousin." Special activities are planned for these groups of students. Care is taken to match them for age, academic and social interest. Common hobbies and avocations are taken into consideration in making the pairings.

Last year, the Academy hosted a student trip to the Art Institute. Some of the "American" students were acculturated Soviet students. The feeling was that art could serve as a common bond and a catalyst for communication. While the trip itself was memorable, there was no follow-up among the students and thus little interaction as the year progressed. RULE: No single event solidifies relation-

ships. This is a step-by step process that needs constant reinforcement. A similar opening activity plus follow-up in the form of the cousins program should prove more successful.

In our school, one of the most popular non-academic activities among girls is crocheting *kippot*. When American students teach their newly arrived friends how to crochet a *kippa* they not only share valued time together, it also enables new American girls to be a part of one aspect of the school's social activities.

Another socially significant area is that of personal hygiene. Kits can be obtained with free samples of various toiletries. Sensitive teachers should be selected to present new approaches to daily hygiene for boys and girls (separately).

### **Spiritual Growth**

The Jewish calendar provides a myriad of religious experiential opportunities. On Sukkot, for example, students and their families enjoyed a *Hol HaMoed* meal in the *sukka*. For faculty and friends, it was an inspiring experience to see these families make the first *birkat sheheheyanu* of their lives.

In conjunction with a unit on Shabbat, a Shabbaton was held. Students first studied the laws of kashrut, with special attention to commercial kashrut. They then purchased the ingredients and prepared the entire meal from challah and gefilte fish and knishes. They were extremely proud to accept the compliments on the Shabbat meal that they themselves had prepared from scratch.

In addition to the calendar, it is important to arrange hands-on experiences to help students internalize what they have learned. Seeing a *sefer Torah*, watching a *sofer* at work, participating in a *seder* before Pesah are all meaningful activities. One class even *kasher*ed a liver during a *kashrut* unit. Although these are generally wholesome educational experiences, for newly arrived students they can provide the crucial bridge between theory and constructive practice.

Life cycle events are also wonderful opportunities for spiritual growth. Few of our students who arrive from the Soviet Union have ever worn *tefillen*, none have ever owned a pair. Through the generosity of numerous individuals, we were able to acquire *tefillen* for the boys. To help our students learn to be active, productive members of the Jewish community, and to enable them to feel that they have earned their *tefillen*, we arranged for students to "pay" for their *tefillen* through communal work in approved *hessed* organizations. We then credit them with \$4.00 per hour and after 40 hours of such work the student earns his *tefillen*. Toward the end of the school year, we organize a public Bar/Bat Mitzva ceremony to take place at a Monday morning service. Before fellow students, faculty and families, new Americans receive *aliyot* and *kibbudim*. After the service, boys and girls offer *divrei Torah* at a festive meal with singing and dancing.

And, for those students who are strongly committed to learning, we arrange for additional *havrutot* in a local yeshiva. These weekly sessions in the evening are stepping stones to an even more intensive learning.

One final note. Our students are often faced with a daily conflict. They spend a full day conforming and participating in an intensive religious atmosphere only to return to a home devoid of everything they have learned. The real key to educating our students is to educate their parents as well. At the Academy we have instituted an Adult Education program that meets monthly. Each session features two lecturers. One speaks in Russian about a topic of Jewish interest, such as the upcoming Jewish holiday and its traditions. The other, speaking in English, addresses social issues that parents may face in raising teenagers in today's American society.

Each of us who has the responsibility of working with and guiding newly arrived students from the Soviet Union has experienced the frustration that accompanies such an enterprise. There are no easy solutions to the myriad of problems that confront both student and educator. But we derive great satisfaction and inspiration from the knowledge that we are doing *avodat haKodesh* in its purest sense. We have the opportunity to play a major role in raising a new generation of proud and observant Jews. ■

## In Our Bookbag

### A Treasury of Sephardic Laws and Customs

The Ritual Practices of Syrian, Moroccan, Judeo-Spanish and Spanish and Portuguese Jews of North America

by Herbert C. Dobrinsky

Ktav Publishing House, Inc.  
Yeshiva University Press  
526 pages, 1988

Reviewed by Avinoam Bitton

**T**he green sukkah sat in a dark courtyard, the corner poles rising above its palm-frond roof. The surrounding children were silent, waiting. As the flames began to lick at the sukkah's walls, hesitantly at first, then with a roar, the children began to cheer...

As the large Shabbat congregation settled into their seats, the young lad fidgeted. It was time. In a clear but somewhat high-pitched voice, the nine-year-old boy chanted the Torah blessings and proceeded to read aloud the weekly portion from the scroll...

What may appear to be a nightmarish spectacle is actually an established custom, an apparent distortion of Jewish practice is normative halakha. These examples are intended to demonstrate the chasm of both perception and practice that separates the great *kehillot* of European and Oriental Jewry — a gap that paradoxically, despite the otherwise unifying effect of a common religion, widens further with increased observance. Indeed, from anthropological, cultural and sociological distinctions, through the gamut of differences in *mitva*, liturgy, poetry, halakha, *minhag* and basic *weltanschauung*, Ashkenazim and Sephardim seem to be two different peoples. That we are not is eloquent tes-

timony to the power of the Torah and destiny that we emphatically share.

The current demographic minority of Oriental Jewry — roughly 15% of the world Jewish total (a reversal of its 85% majority in 1300 C.E.) — belies the importance of understanding their heritage. Sephardim comprise a majority of the Israeli Jewish population, and their *minhagim* are not to be lightly discarded, neither from the standpoint of cultural pride nor halakhically.<sup>1</sup>

Rabbi Herbert Dobrinsky's *A Treasury of Sephardic Laws and Customs* fills an important niche. Most existing Sephardic works are purely halakhic in content, exemplified by the prolific Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, shlita. Rabbi Dobrinsky, however, covers the breadth of Sephardic communal traditions, both those with halakhic/minhagic status and those of a more colorful cultural nature. Because so many of these traditions are environmentally influenced and therefore vary significantly, each set of customs is discussed separately for one of four communities: Syrian, Moroccan, Judeo-Spanish, and Spanish and Portuguese. The not uncommon divergence in practices highlights the dramatic divisions between these groups and serves to shatter the widespread Ashkenazic misconception of monolithic Sephardic traditions. Intra-Sephardic differences are at least as striking as those between German, Lithuanian and Hungarian Jews.

The book is divided into four major sections: Part I, Special Family Occasions, discusses birth, Bar Mitzvah, marriage, divorce and *halizah*, death, mourning and memorial observances. Of note is the rare performance of *yibum* in the Judeo-Spanish *kehilla*, alone among the Oriental communities. The aforementioned example of a minor boy reading from the Torah is commonly done in the Syrian and Moroccan communities on his attaining intellectual maturity — as young as seven years — and it has in fact, a solid halakhic foundation.<sup>2</sup>

Part II, Daily Reminders of the Heritage, is eclectic in scope, ranging from Symbols — *tefillin*, *mezuzah*, *zizit* — and Dietary Laws to Family Life, including

parent-child and marital relationships, and Communal Life, discussing attitudes toward Israel, conversion and apostasy. An interesting and apparently effective weapon in the battle against intermarriage is utilized by the Brooklyn Syrian community. A *takkanah* enacted in 1935 by the Sephardic Rabbinical Council prohibits the marriage of a Syrian Jew with a *ger* — even when the conversion was performed in accordance with halakha — on pain of a *de facto herem*.

Part III, Worship in Public and Private, is an in-depth description of *tefilla* practices and the administrative structure of the synagogue. It is here that the *minhagic* variations of the different communities becomes glaringly apparent — honorifics, *aliyot*, cantillation, format of prayer, the priestly benediction, even the prayers themselves; the differences are too myriad to detail. A Moroccan Jew in the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue would be almost as disoriented as an Ashkenazi.

Part IV is devoted to Shabbat and Festivals in all their aspects. Here too the external influences of the host countries play a role in the wide variety of observances by the different *kehillot*. From the joyous sukkah hurning at the conclusion of Sukkot in Morocco to the elaborate Simhat Torah charades of Salonika, the Oriental communities are displayed in an exotic panoply of detail.

It should be noted that the book is dedicated to a portrayal of the mores of the different Sephardic groups of *North America*, with the understandable dilution that the passage of distance and time entails. An exception is the tale of still-nascent American Moroccan Jewry, with most of the practices from Morocco itself being described. This results in more of an oral history format pertaining to Moroccan customs, imparting a rich and poignant flavor to the portrayal.

In view of the lack of awareness of the diversity and vibrancy of the Sephardic heritage by their Ashkenazi brethren, an educational tool to close this perceptual gap is to be welcomed. Rabbi Dobrinsky's *Teacher's Guide* is geared to different target classes and provides model lessons on

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*tefillin*, Hanukkah, and mate selection that serve to spotlight Sephardic customs. There are also sources and discussion topics on the whole spectrum of Jewish life as discussed in his main book. In addition, the *Teacher's Guide* attempts to supply some of the historical and sociological background matter that could have greatly enhanced the main volume. It is to be hoped that future editions of Rabbi Dobrinsky's welcome work will be organized in a more rigorously scholarly fashion without abandoning its evocative color and flavor. As time passes and memories fade such a book becomes all the more valuable.

Torah, *tefilla* and *derekh erets* form the bedrock of the committed Jew — Oriental and European. An awareness of the many common expressions of these principles integral to the Sephardic heritage, beyond the superficial dissimilarities, leads to the inevitable truth of *Elu ve'elu divrei Elokim hayim*. ■

#### FOOTNOTES

1. See Igrot Moshe, Orah Hayim II, 83.
2. Shulhan Arukh Orah Hayim 282:3.

## Hora'at Tefillah

### A Teaching Package

Prepared by the Pedagogic Center of the World Zionist Organization

*Reviewed by Eliyahu Safran*

**I**n the introduction to his classic work *The World of Prayer*, Rabbi Munk bemoans the sorry state of modern man's capacity to pray:

Modern man has lost the capacity to pray. Rare, indeed, are the individuals who cast free their souls from the paralyzing apathy of our days, from the heavy burden of our daily sorrow, from the disastrous spell of Rationalism and materialistic thought, to pray with deep conviction for the realization of the

ultimate purpose in life. Prayer has lost all meaning to the mass of our people. The worshipper is conscious neither of the comforting and purifying power of prayer nor of its elevating and ennobling effects, for prayer fell victim to a culture estranged from G-d and became degraded to an act of mere habit.<sup>1</sup>

Not much has changed since Rabbi Munk depicted an apathetic, materialistic and estranged world. Perhaps the world we live in is a bit more cynical and a bit less spiritual. It's a "me" oriented society, glorifying the physical and the materialistic, doubting the soul and rooting the flesh. Ours is not a world of prayer, it is a world of wishes. But praying is not wishing, it is feeling ("*rahamana leebe bayi*"), and "feeling becomes prayer in the moment in which we forget ourselves and become aware of G-d."<sup>2</sup> How difficult it is for us moderns to forget ourselves, and how even more difficult to become aware of God.

Undoubtedly, *tefillah* and its teaching has always posed a tough challenge for educators. Teaching *tefillah* really means teaching *ahavat Hashem*, *yirat Hashem*, *pahad*, *romemut*. It incorporates communicating a sense of dependency, submerging the "*zikh*" and ego and developing a level of humility, awakening inner *kavanah* and a cognizance of a constant existential crisis. Perhaps it is this overwhelming challenge that led Ramban to maintain that prayer is only Biblically ordained *be'ait tzara*, when one naturally and spontaneously calls out to God. But when imagining non-*tzara* times and conditions, where do we begin and how do we approach students about that whose essence is in the heart, not the mind — *avodah she'balev*?

Every good teacher is aware of the fact that effective and lasting lessons must ultimately emanate from something real and concrete which students can focus on. Whereas this is true of all teaching areas, in Judaic studies we are convinced that the bulk of teaching time must be invested in teaching "it," not "about it." Fortunately, in attempting to teach *tefillah* we have a built in focus — the *siddur*, and

that is where time and effort should be expended. The late Rabbi Joseph H. Lookstein once said that the *siddur* is the most basic text of Jewish philosophy, theology, thought and *hashkafah*. The *siddur* incorporates in it the most basic Jewish approaches and attitudes towards God, the world, man, nature, values and *middot*. It is the *siddur* that must serve as the focus of our *tefillah* educational activities. Our minimal educational responsibility is to create ease and familiarity with the form and structure in and around the *Beit HaKnesset*, its various functions and functionaries, and most importantly, to provide students with as much comprehension, understanding and insight into the make-up, structure, content and usage of the prayer tool — the *siddur*.

The Pedagogic Center of the World Zionist Organization's Department for Torah Education and Culture in the Diaspora has recently produced a neatly packaged, comprehensive and well organized teaching kit called *Hora'at Tefillah*. This package features nine sections including an excellent teacher's guide with many and varied suggestions for each of the teaching units, three short videos for introspective and reflective discussions on the need and purpose of prayer, as well as a short, attractive anthology *Hitbonenut — Sipurim Ve'Tziyurim L'Tefillah*, a collection of hassidic stories and reflections on *tefillah*. The selection from the rich storehouse of hassidic tales and folklore (a genre of Jewish literature which most of our students are unfortunately not familiar with) are challenging and thought provoking, and can serve as excellent springboards for meaningful class discussions. At first glance not all of the selections relate directly to the world of prayer. Yet, their analysis could lead to a marvelous discovery of answers to students' troubling questions and irritations about *tefillah* that fit right into Unit 1 of the package —

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*Mukhanut L'Tefillah* — *tefillah* readiness. This unit indeed zeroes in on students' gnawing questions such as: Why pray? Why the repetition? Why be committed to a specific text? For whose sake do we pray — God's or man's? Responses and approaches are elicited from a variety of sources including contemporary poetry and prose, pointing out that prayer need not necessarily emanate from so called, stereotypical traditional sources. Selections from Chana Senesh, Leah Goldberg and Abba Kovner are particularly moving and relevant. For schools able to make use of the integrated approach in teaching *limudei kodesh*, selections from both the *Hitbonenut* volume and the *Mukhanut* unit may be taught in Hebrew language classes, while the active *tefillah* unit can be taught in the *dinim orhalakha* classes.

An entire unit (III) in the package is devoted to a thorough familiarization with the structure, function, *dinim* and concepts revolving in and around the *Beit HaKnesset* itself. Responses to the all too familiar questions of who, what, where and when of synagogue behavior and surroundings are to be found through the teaching of this unit, including aspects of *kriat haTorah*, key terms relating to the synagogue "architecture" (i.e. *shul* signs: *mashiv haruah*, *al hanisim*, *parokhet*, *shulhan*, *amud*) and *sefarim* found in a typical *shul* — to name but a few. The unit may serve as the basis for a pre- or post-tour of the school or community synagogue.

The bulk of the classroom work emanating from the package is to be found in Unit II, where 24 major selections from the *siddur* are presented in an attractive, easy to read manner (easily transferable into overhead transparencies) accompanied by sources, summaries of main ideas, specific features, halakhic references as well as suggested questions for classroom discussion, activity and follow up work. This unit is superb!

The *tefillah* package is a most useful educational vehicle for the teaching of the basics of *tefillah* and *siddur*, and may be effectively used and geared for all elementary and high school classes. The units may be presented in different dosages;

ten minutes daily or weekly or one or more full weekly lessons. Accompanied by an introductory guide outlining the units, their purpose and goals, the kit also includes an entire packet of beautifully executed selections and charts easily transferable to overhead transparencies.

The Mahlah and Pedagogic Center is to be commended for this beautiful and meaningful piece of work, allowing educators to open the world of prayer to students in need of the art of praying. The package may be ordered from the New York branch of the Mahlah, (Torah Department, World Zionist Organization, 110 East 59th Street, New York, NY 10022) or from the Pedagogic Center, (24 Abravanel Street, Jerusalem). The cost of the entire kit is \$50.00. ■

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Eli Munk, *The World of Prayer* (Philip Feldheim, N.Y., 1961) p. 1.
2. A.J. Heschel, *Man's Quest for God* (Charles Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1954) p. 15.

## Humash L'Talmid

### Humash L'Talmid

by Shaha and Rena Yonay

Shai Publishing, 1991  
126 Dover Street  
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11235  
718-615-0027

Reviewed by Shoshana Kurtz

A new series of workbooks for the teaching of Humash are now available. They are the work of two prolific author/educators who have published many valuable textbooks and supplementary material for the teaching of Hebrew language, Drs. Shaha and Rina Yonay. Each workbook deals with a *parsha* in Humash Beraishit and Parshat Shemot.

These workbooks are written for students in the Diaspora who are learning Humash in schools that teach Judaic sub-

jects in Hebrew. For many educators, it is a real challenge to teach Humash in the *Ivrit b'Ivrit* mode and not convert a class in Torah into a language lesson. These workbooks are useful tools, for each unit contains vocabulary lists, with translations in simple Hebrew or English equivalents. The workbooks are complete with pictures and drawings which also help second language Humash learners. The questions and exercises as well as the midrashim that are included are written in simple Hebrew. Despite the linguistic simplicity, the materials themselves are sophisticated and very much on the cognitive level of junior learners.

The exercises that are included are diverse and include the development of many useful skills for reading comprehension. Each chapter is divided into smaller segments based on a central theme. There are many questions which probe the details of the text and which require the student to order the events in correct sequence. Additional material such as midrashim and commentaries are included. Beginning with Parshat Lekh Lekha, exercises on Rashi are also included. These often require the student to do higher level thinking. And, at the end of each chapter, there are review exercises. All of these can be easily used for individual lessons, as activities in teacher centers, or for group work.

The format of the workbooks is attractive, colorful, and inviting. They are a valuable addition to a Humash teacher's strategies. ■

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# Responsive Readers

## What About the Intifada?

The conscionable Jewish education of our children should be a high priority of the Jewish community. There exists a pressing need to reevaluate Jewish educational frameworks in light of the distressing situation in Israel and the growing complexity of American Jewry's relationship with the Jewish state. One of *Ten Da'at's* trademarks is its readiness to air all points of view on a broad range of educational issues. Your readers are rabbis, scholars and educators who exercise considerable influence in the Jewish community. It is to them that I address the following reaction to "Israel: The Ultimate Truth" (*Ten Da'at*, Spring 1990).

During the first anguished year of the intifada, I asked a fellow Judaica teacher how she was handling the topic of the Palestinian uprising in her classroom. "Oh," she said, "I'm handling it through omission." Then she went on to talk of other things. I was appalled. For many months, Palestinians in the occupied territories had been engaged en masse in a desperate struggle to rid themselves of Israeli occupation. How could any responsible Judaica teacher choose to deny his or her students access to a discussion of the rage which lay unsuppressed before our eyes?

Over two years later, Jewish education generally — if unofficially — espouses the regrettable position of this teacher. Jewish educators sail along in their streamlined agendas as if the intifada isn't happening, as if its outpouring of fury and spilled blood have had only incidental effect on the course of Jewish events.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Rock throwing Palestinians and the violence of the Israeli response have torn the Jewish world asunder. The intifada's media fallout is enough to bewilder and distress even the youngest of my students. One seven-year-old asked me if the Palestinians were like the Nazis; a six-year-old asked "where the Arabs and Jews were fighting and why no one in school was talking about it?" Zionist reality isn't neat and sweet anymore. Thirteen years of teaching Hebrew and Judaica to children of all ages have convinced me it is high time the organized Jewish educational community formally addresses the issue of demythologizing

modern Israeli history. An era of intifada has taught us that the complexities of Israel's role as occupier must be illuminated to students, as well as a subject rarely touched in the Jewish realm — Palestinian humanity.

First, there must be widespread recognition within Jewish educational circles that *these days* Israel's image is clothed in naked force. The media no longer projects a vision of Israeli pioneers breaking bread around a campfire, or outnumbered Israeli soldiers valiantly protecting their land. Instead, we behold picture after picture of a different Israel altogether; an Israel that kills six hundred armed only with stones, an Israel that detains and injures thousands, an Israel that deports and destroys.

Jewish classrooms here are free of such paroxysms. All our children hear and discuss are time-honored Jewish values and the importance of mitzvot. American Jewish children are beginning to notice that current Israeli reality seems to starkly contradict the ethical teachings of Judaism. Lessons which are pleasant and unequivocal will ultimately lose their validity as televised images continue to thrust the iron-fisted Israeli reaction to the intifada before our children.

Waiting the problem out is not the answer. If the intifada was to miraculously disappear tomorrow, its ramifications would still vitally affect the relationship of Jewish youth with Israel. Nonetheless, our children do not grasp anything about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict other than its manifest violence. Jewish educators must approach this dilemma head on to ensure that age-appropriate treatment of the facts will enable youngsters to see that there is indeed no one view about the nature of the intifada. Segments of the Jewish community in the Diaspora and in Israel differ widely on an interpretation of the uprising, often questioning the wisdom of the Israeli response.

In addition, the recent findings of a new generation of Israeli historiographers outdate much of present modern Israeli history curricula. These findings shed a different light on the Zionist enterprise and the Israeli-Palestinian relationship. Integrity requires that educators study the newly unearthed facts and carefully incorporate them into Jewish history cur-

ricula. The intifada must be presented as a multi-dimensional phenomenon, and be discussed in the context of the most solid historical evidence available. Only thus will Palestinians assume a human form in Jewish classrooms, permitting students to more realistically apprehend what underlies Jewish fear and Palestinian rage.

Lastly, why have educators not turned to Jewish classical texts to create an integrated classroom orientation to the new Israeli reality? The Torah, Talmud, *siddur*, and many *midrashim* possess an enormous, untapped potential for conveying to students traditional views regarding war and peace, the interdependence of peace and righteousness, and the responsibility for *tikkun olam*. Within such a framework, students would gain understanding of the integral connection between Jewish laws of warfare and the issue of peacemaking, something which the media and the world-at-large could never offer them. Employing classical texts, skilled teachers would engage students in the kind of rabbinic dialectic which would help them see the intifada — and other critical issues as well — from a multifaceted Jewish viewpoint. Emphasis would be placed on an exploration of issues from within the tradition.

I personally believe current Israeli government policy in the occupied territories is working against Israel's best interests. In the name of peace, Israel must do everything possible to end her role as occupier. I am aware that not all Jews agree with me. However, all who love and care about Israel — and about our children — must recognize the need to adapt Jewish curricula to the changing time, airing all the facts and all points of view within the classroom. If not, we may eventually alienate a confused, disillusioned generation of Jewish youngsters from the Israel which is so precious to us, and from our very tradition.

Carmela Ingwer  
Chicago, Illinois

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## Kenneth Jacobson Responds

There is nothing in my article on the *intifada* which should lead Carmela Ingwer to conclude that I support not discussing the event in the classroom. On the

contrary, because children (and adults) receive so much distorted information through the media, it is vital to address the matter — but in context and with perspective.

Unfortunately, there is nothing balanced about Ms. Ingwer's positions. Her comments that "Israeli reality seems to starkly contradict ethical teachings of Judaism"; that teachers should demythologize modern Israeli history; that Zionist reality "isn't neat and sweet anymore"; and that there is a "distressing situation in Israel" are representative of one particular perspective which is in a distinct minority.

Clearly, Ms. Ingwer has strong opinions about Israel and would like to see more teaching from that viewpoint. What she ignores is that there are also very strong points of view on the other end of the political spectrum within Israel that don't receive as much attention as their supporters would like. Instead, what is presented and what I tried to depict, was a perspective that represents the views of the overwhelming majority of Israelis and Jews worldwide. That consensus rejects many of Ms. Ingwer's conclusions and sees Israel as I depicted it in my article: a country facing enormous challenges, not without failings, but having a consistent record of maintaining high standards in the face of great threats.

The conflict in the Gulf highlights the very points I made. The Middle East has not changed all that much over the years. Violence and authoritarianism are a way of life in the Middle East. And yet, through it all, Israel has maintained a balance, restraint, and hold on democratic values that is quite remarkable.

Contrary to Ms. Ingwer, I believe that now is the best time to reinvigorate Jewish students in their support for and involvement in Israel. The high standards and fundamental morality of Israel as a society are brought into focus by the aggression of its neighbors. As reflected in the surge of Soviet *olim*, the vitality of Israel has never been stronger.

### More on *Ivrit b'Ivrit*

The first half of Dr. Joel Wolowelsky's excellent analysis of the *Ivrit b'Ivrit* crisis in today's classrooms (*Ten Da'at* Spring 1990), focuses on the "Zionist agenda" of a given school's ideology and *hashkafah*. While this unfortunately is the case, and

schools do indeed adopt or reject the *Ivrit b'Ivrit shita* based on their pro- or anti-Israel attitudes, I believe that an equally strong case is to be made in favor of *Ivrit b'Ivrit* based on the obvious advantages that are to be accrued from Torah study in the Hebrew language and via original Hebrew primary sources. Historically, the classical *talmid hakham* was one who was fluent and conversant with the classical sources and texts which were written and studied in Hebrew, albeit in simplified language and phraseology, e.g. Ramham's *Yad Hahazakah*. It is not at all surprising that Hazal were chagrined and disappointed when the Torah was translated into Greek (... "as the day when the golden calf was made"). Studying the Torah in a foreign tongue was viewed as taking a giant step away from the traditional, historical mode in which Torah was to be transmitted. Yet, today when more Torah is being taught to many more students than in previous generations, we tend to compromise on one of the most essential elements and ingredients necessary to achieve excellence, fluency, and ease with the Torah material being studied — the language. Our generation seems to bask in the "glory" of more and abundant English translations of Talmudic, medieval and contemporary Judaica classics being disseminated, marketed and used not merely among the uninitiated or newcomers to Torah study, but among *benai yeshiva* and *lomdim* as well, if not more so. One may visit well known *batei midrash* of large, prominent yeshivot and find well-intentioned, serious-minded *talmidim* studying Humash, the five *megillot* or *Mishnah Berurah* in English translation.

Why supply perfectly healthy students with crutches when they can walk and even run? True, as Dr. Wolowelsky points out, *Ivrit b'Ivrit's* "payoff is down the road and its immediate cost is some frustration for teacher and student," but the element and vital experience of "*amalah shel Torah*" or the *horeven* over a piece of Ramban, Midrash or *Metsudot* will ultimately leave students with skills and tools that will, in the long run, allow them to study on their own. After all isn't that one of the main goals of any good system of education? It used to be that in many yeshivot and day schools students were assigned to prepare a *d'var Torah* to be shared with classmates on *erev Shabbat*. Students would have to research, study through the *parsha*, *mefarshim* and *midrashim*, in-

vest time, effort and thought and yes, struggle through an *inyan* until they finally understood and felt a sense of accomplishment and gratification. Today, students flee to the "easy rider" approach, seek out the compendiums or anthologies of *midrashim*, *perushim* or *vertelekh* — all in English, and they too deliver *divrei Torah*. What is the difference? Today, there is little or no investment, nor is there *amalah shel Torah*. It's instantaneous! Torah, our Sages taught, is acquired by means of forty eight qualities which require time, effort, understanding, sharp discussion, and deliberation to name just a few. Torah study anticipates toil, which historically came about through the constant usage and understanding of the language of Torah — *Ivrit b'Ivrit*, as well as the *amalah shel Torah* involved in actual text work, for which good educators know there is just no substitute. The "instant" translation approach also removes the opportunities and necessary experiences of actually handling the *sefarim*, leafing through the *dapim* back and forth, familiarizing oneself with the particular nuances, phraseology, methodology and *derekh* of a given *mefarsh*, *sefer* and yes, even of a *masekhet* — all features of the art of being a true *talmid(a) hakham(a)*.

The issue of *Ivrit b'Ivrit* vs. *Ivrit b'Anglit*, or any other foreign language, is ultimately to be measured with gauging the type of product we want to produce. The student taught in Hebrew with usage of Hebrew sources is given the opportunity to become a complete, wholesome, well rounded, enlightened product. Any other approach leaves the student wanting. It is a sad day (as when the Torah was translated into Greek) when students of the most intensive institutions of Torah learning in America, i.e. the day schools, are forced (by their systems!) to study Rashi, Ramban, *midrashim* etc. and even the Humash itself — in English.

Many decades ago, before the rebirth of the State of Israel, the mother yeshiva of America, Rabbi Jacob Joseph School, taught thousands of its students in a Hebrew speaking department of Torah studies. The students and the *rebbeim* were the better for it. Perhaps today there is confusion and blurred vision between producing a wholesome Torah student, conversant and at ease in the *mekorot haTorah*, and producing a student who can buy a falaffel on Rehov Yaffo in Hebrew. The two are obviously not the

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same. One of the avenues available to *all* schools, whereby students may be given a taste and an appreciation of Hebrew while at the same time broadening the horizons and dimensions of budding *talmidei(dot)hakhamim(mot)* is in the structure and curriculum of Hebrew language courses and classes.

The content of such courses should focus on classical medieval and contemporary writings, rich in religious, ethical, moral, philosophical, *hashkafic* lessons and messages. From Rambam's *Deot* to the Rav's *Kol Dodi Dofek*, from Kuzari's analysis of Eretz Yisrael and *Am Ha-Nivhar* to Rav Zevin's *Moadim Be-Halakha* — students' Jewish knowledge and exposure could be enriched and broadened, while being allowed to enter the vast, varied and endless world of Jewish-Hebrew literary creativity — without English language crutches. A moment of great triumph in our school occurred when an entire class agreed that their Hebrew language and literature class was as meaningful and relevant as their English literature class. Students always respond well to sophisticated and thought provoking material. Need we look far to find such material in our *sifrut*? Hebrew language curricula focused on a high level, enriched and challenging material (instead of simplistic *sipurim* plus a weekly dosage of *Yisrael Shelanu*) can serve as a basis for an eventual and gradual return to *Ivrit b'Ivrit*. We must start somewhere.

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Though my youth and relatively few years in the field lead me to doubt my ability to respond meaningfully to someone as experienced as Dr. Wolowelsky, perhaps I am also capable of seeing an old issue in a new light. As a graduate of *Ivrit B'Ivrit* programs in both elementary and high school (and for that matter, summer camp too), I am intimately familiar with the advantages and disadvantages of studying in Hebrew. As a teacher in a (Zionist) non-*Ivrit B'Ivrit* school, however, I have also seen the positive and negative aspects of instruction in English. So far I haven't been convinced by the pedagogic arguments advanced by either side.

Dr. Wolowelsky, perhaps reacting to the dilemma I and others face, moves the debate to a new realm — the ideological; his thesis rests on the assumption that Religious Zionists are by definition committed to *Ivrit B'Ivrit*. As the discussion continues he implies that those who do not support teaching in Hebrew are either incapable of doing so, are not concerned with "teaching fundamental technical tools," or are non-Zionists. There lies my problem. I am fluent in Hebrew and capable of teaching in it, and I spend much class time concentrating on basic skills (even when they are tedious). Hence I must conclude that Dr. Wolowelsky would not consider me a Zionist — an accusation I cannot help but be offended by. It may be that when Israel was first founded, *Ivrit B'Ivrit* schools developed as an expression of Religious Zionism. Now, however, many graduates of these institutions have entered the education profession and wonder if studying in Hebrew was necessarily the most productive approach. For many of today's Zionists, *Ivrit B'Ivrit* cannot claim to be a basic dogma; while no one need "apologize for wanting *Ivrit B'Ivrit*," any claim for a religious ideology built upon the principle needs further defense than that provided by Dr. Wolowelsky.

Rabbi Alan Stadtmauer  
The Frisch School  
Paramus, New Jersey

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### IVRIT beIVRIT: Not In My School

For a long time I have harbored in my heart the heresy of writing an article decrying the employment of *Ivrit beIvrit* in Jewish education. I must therefore thank Dr. Joel Wolowelsky for his article in *Ten Da'at* (Spring 1990) which raised this significant educational issue in the appropriate forum, and offered me the opportunity to turn my *mahshavah* into *ma'aseh*. I do not presume that my remarks alone constitute the ultimate resolution to the difficulty, since there are many specific issues which neither Dr. Wolowelsky nor I have addressed, such as different types of schools, grade school vs. high school, Tanakh vs. Talmud, and the like, which might very well lead others, if not us, to modify our expressed positions. I hope that my comments, even if phrased rather strongly, will be taken as a contribution to a necessary and ongoing dialogue.<sup>1</sup>

Let me begin with my agreements with Dr. Wolowelsky. I am strongly in favor of teaching "fundamental technical tools that will be necessary for a lifetime of study." I am put off at least as much as he by the teaching of soft *hashkafah* rather than solid text. I, too, believe that our students must read the classic texts of Judaism in the original. I agree that students should learn how to read *Gemara*, *Rashi*, and *Tosafot* before tossing around *rishonim* and *aharonim*. I too would probably ban most English "*sefarim*" from the classroom. And I too, speaking rather loosely, am a "religious Zionist." But my experience over the last dozen years teaching Tanakh and biblical Hebrew to students from many backgrounds and on different levels at Yeshiva College and Stern College, coupled with my years as a college teacher of Latin and Greek before that, convinces me that *Ivrit beIvrit* over the last quarter century or more has actually interfered with our students' ability to develop those fundamental skills which both Dr. Wolowelsky and I want them to have and employ for the rest of their lives.

The fundamental language skill which students need to have available for their lifelong Torah learning is the ability to read Hebrew fluently, but not the Hebrew of the Israeli newspaper or supermarket.<sup>2</sup> We must distinguish between spoken and unspoken dialects of Hebrew for several reasons, and should further stress that it is only in the case of the modern period that active as opposed to passive knowledge is demanded. I want my students to be able to identify readily the morphology, vocabulary and syntax of (for example) biblical and mishnaic Hebrew, but not necessarily how to speak or write it. Teaching them how to accomplish the desired goals by speaking modern Hebrew is counterproductive. One of the most important tools, if not the most important tool in a student's reading a text in a language foreign to him or her is his/her native language. Hebrew must be treated, certainly early in the educational process, as a language foreign to our students, in order for them to master it sufficiently. The Zionist notion that Hebrew is not a foreign language is a nice emotional touch, hut from a pedagogical standpoint simply interferes with the process of learning the language.

Imagine trying to teach Latin to an English speaker by translating the Latin not into English, but into French. It sounds absurd, and only slightly less ab-

surd is any attempt to teach English speakers classical Hebrew texts by translating them into modern Hebrew. What results, in most cases, is what I have termed (and perhaps others have as well) the mechanical *vayomer-hu amar* syndrome, wherein the student never masters either classical or modern Hebrew. This occurs because the roots of the source and translation languages are the same and consequently nuanced translation is nearly impossible, and also because it is much more difficult to explain syntactical constructions without the aid of the student's native tongue. There may be an ideal world in which the goals of teaching the biblical text and modern Hebrew together can be accomplished simultaneously, but in most cases the attempt to accomplish these two diverse purposes within one framework will not succeed.

We should begin to teach students from earliest grades both the classical and modern dialects of Hebrew. Lest that sound overly forbidding, we ought to remember that biblical Hebrew is probably best taught inductively, directly from the Hebrew text, without the superimposition of charts and paradigms at earliest stages, and only later on needs to be structured more formally.<sup>5</sup>

I am willing to leave the question of how to teach modern Hebrew to my colleagues in Departments of Hebrew Language and Literature. I know that many of them are as distressed as I am with the nature of Hebrew language education which over-emphasizes the spoken language, and which does not stress sufficiently the basics of grammatical forms, syntax, and the mastery of written texts. These scholars have also stressed to me the fact that a sound knowledge of biblical Hebrew serves as the best foundation for all later forms of the language, from classical rabbinic literature through the ages to the works of Agnon, Hazaz or Yehoshua. But others, of course, will continue to emphasize oral expression in modern Hebrew as their pedagogical goal.

When studying anything in *limmudei kodesh* other than Hebrew language, however, the Hebrew text under analysis must be translated into English (or whatever other language the students know); although the terminology of English may be imperfect for describing a Semitic language, the terminology of modern Hebrew, modeled on that of European languages, is not much better.

Vocabulary and syntax can be clarified much more easily when using a frame of reference, the language natively spoken by the student, as an analogue. The rote translations, such as my *vayomer-hu amar* example, can better be avoided when translating into a different language, and only if such translation is done can we be sure that vocabulary is being mastered.<sup>4</sup>

There are a number of other benefits which accrue to my suggested approach, beyond the proper learning of the language of Tanakh. We are always to be concerned with maximizing the amount of Torah which our students will study, whether chapters of Tanakh or folios of Talmud, and the employment of the student's native language in classroom instruction saves a great deal of time, to put it most simply, and time saved in turn generates more Torah learned. The student who thinks in English, translates into English, and asks or answers questions in English will be able to learn more rapidly and effectively than the one for whom a foreign language presents an additional barrier in the educational process.<sup>5</sup> The level of discourse in the classroom will automatically be raised when the give and take is not hindered by the hesitation which non-native language generates.

Clarity of thought is also increased when the student reasons and argues in a language which he/she speaks fluently. Rigorous textual analysis is enhanced when nuances and shades of meaning can be expressed, and the student is far more likely to be able to do that in English where his/her range of vocabulary and modes of expression are far less limited than they are in Hebrew. A discussion, whether about Jewish history or halakhah, will be pedagogically most effective when students and teacher are operating linguistically at full strength. To exchange the more rapid development of these skills in our students for the ability to speak Hebrew gives up, to my mind, far more than it achieves.<sup>6</sup> If we must choose between the teaching of modern Hebrew language and the teaching of classical Hebrew texts, there is no doubt that the former must be dispensed with for the benefit of the latter. After all, a student can always take an *ulpan* in modern Hebrew later in life, but we cannot afford the luxury of deferring the ability to learn our classical texts.<sup>7</sup>

The only possible excuse for maintain-

ing *Ivrit belvrit* in our classrooms if, as I claim, it hinders other, more important, aspects of learning, is the religious Zionist dimension. But we cannot brook a religious Zionism which interferes with our students' learning of Torah. The equation of the celebration of *Yom ha-Atzmaut* and teaching *Ivrit belvrit* is, quite frankly, demagogic and not pedagogic. It makes the vehicle of learning, the language of the classroom, the *ikkar*, and the learning itself the *tafel*. Furthermore, I know many graduates of such schools as MTA and Frisch, whose *talmud Torah* was conducted in English, who are no less committed to religious Zionism than graduates of Flatbush and Ramaz who learned in Hebrew. Both groups, furthermore, after leaving high school, functioned equally well in the world of the Hebrew-speaking Israeli *yeshivot* which they attended.

It may be that my disagreement with Dr. Wolowelsky is a theoretical one, but I am afraid that it is not, that it is a pragmatic question of educational priorities. If I am right about the issue of how to teach texts in a foreign language, then rather than calling for a strengthening of *Ivrit belvrit*, we should be calling for its elimination. We cannot allow our emotional attachments to *medinat Yisrael* and religious Zionism to deflect us from our primary goal as *mehannekchim*, the training of students who will be able to continue learning Torah long after they have left our classrooms.

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#### FOOTNOTES

1. I should like to acknowledge a number of colleagues and students at Yeshiva University who improved these remarks by their constructive criticism of earlier drafts: Rabbi Shalom Carmy, Dr. Yaakov Elman, Rabbi Nathaniel Helfgot, Mr. Hillel Novetsky, Dr. Shmuel Schneider, and Mr. Howard Sragow. Needless to say, they are not responsible etc.

2. Dr. Wolowelsky obfuscates the issues when he writes, "We need not justify our claim that knowledge of *lashon* is part of the mastery of Torah" (p. 40, final paragraph). The language of the Israeli street is not sacred, the language of Tanakh is. I should note that although my discussion tends to focus on the Hebrew of Tanakh vs. modern, spoken Hebrew because my area of instruction is Tanakh, the same arguments apply to any other Hebrew literacy text, including contemporary literary Hebrew. My quarrel is with oral Hebrew expression in the educational process, not with modern Hebrew in other forms.

3. Not a great deal of time needs to be invested in this effort. Little by little, in the course of the study of Humash, the teacher can identify forms and

functions of the Hebrew verb, at first only the *shalemim*, of course, until the student will eventually be able to recognize all the forms which are in common occurrence in Tanakh and begin to see the system which underlies them. The concomitant formal study of modern Hebrew as a language will supply the framework at a later date. My suggestions presume and demand a teaching staff which knows biblical and other requisite forms of Hebrew properly, just as Dr. Wolowelsky's demand a properly Hebrew-speaking faculty. I am bemused by the question of which one is easier to find.

4. One may correctly claim that "vayomer-and he said" may also lead to rote learning, but the nature of this problem is greater in *Ivrit beIvrit* because of the frequent employment of the identical root in translation as appears in the text.

5. My argument should not be subject to the *reductio ad absurdum* of suggesting that we should abandon the study of texts written in Hebrew completely and operate only in English. We are a People of the Book and of books, and only by maintaining the most intimate connections with those texts can we sustain that critical aspect of our identity.

6. It has been claimed that after eight or ten years of *Ivrit beIvrit* students should be equally at home in both English and Hebrew, but in reality this is not the case. I am told by teachers of *Ivrit* that there is a significant gap between the quality of 10th grade English and 10th grade Hebrew even at "good" *Ivrit beIvrit* institutions. It is for this reason that I should be reluctant to introduce *Ivrit beIvrit* even in the upper grades after the student has been studying modern Hebrew, literary and oral, as a language for several years, but my disagreement with anyone who would adopt that practice would be relatively minor.

7. It is true that language is usually picked up much more easily in a student's formative years than later in life, but it is for that reason that I emphasize the need to study modern Hebrew from earliest grades. It is only if that learning is completely ineffective that "re-learning" of modern Hebrew will be necessary.

### Joel B. Wolowelsky Responds:

Much as I respect Dr. Bernstein's scholarship and commitment to *hinukh* on all levels, I nevertheless find his arguments to be unpersuasive. A good deal of what I would have to say in response to his comments is already contained in Rabbi Safran's letter and I need not repeat those points here.

I do not know Rabbi Stadtmauer, and I certainly have no reason to question his Zionist credentials. I regret that I might have left the impression that *Ivrit b'Ivrit* is inexorably tied to the commitment to celebrate *Yom HaAtzmaut* or produce students committed to religious Zionism. I tried to argue that it was this underlying misunderstanding about the importance of *Ivrit b'Ivrit* that led non-Zionist yeshivot to decline to teach in Hebrew. Rabbi Stadtmauer doesn't say why his Zionist high school does not conduct its classes in Hebrew. If I had to guess, I would suggest that it has more to do with the Hebrew background of the students

entering the school than with basic educational philosophy.

There are two fundamental areas of disagreement between Dr. Bernstein and myself that lead to our difference of opinion regarding a policy of *Ivrit b'Ivrit*. We shall not resolve these differences here, but they are worth laying out for others to consider.

The first is Dr. Bernstein's assertion that modern Hebrew is not sacred and is rather just another foreign language like Greek or Latin. Perhaps he thinks this too is an issue of Zionism, but it certainly is not. His postulate that only biblical and perhaps mishnaic Hebrew is *lashon hakodesh* is simply incredible. Does one fulfill Sifrei's admonition (Ekev 46) to speak to one's child in *lashon hakodesh* only by speaking biblical Hebrew? What of the language of Rambam, of countless authors of generations of responsa literature, of the writers of Torah books in contemporary Israel, and of the lecturers who give *sheurim* in *batei medrash* in Jerusalem? Were all these simply using a foreign secular Semitic language that derived from *lashon hakodesh* in the way — *lehavdil* — French developed from Latin? I just don't know where to begin to argue against this deconsecration of Hebrew. We may not like the fact that much of what is written in modern Hebrew is unworthy of a sacred language, but that no more points to the secular nature of *Ivrit* than would the activities on Dizengorff demonstrate that the land of Israel has lost its *kedusha*. Dr. Bernstein agrees with my assertion that "knowledge of *lashon hakodesh* is part of the mastery of Torah" only to the extent that it relates to identifying the morphology, vocabulary and syntax of biblical and mishnaic Hebrew. I, however, had something else in mind. The technical skills required to read a good Israeli newspaper are basically the same as those required to read contemporary Israeli Torah literature. But aside from that, modern Hebrew is not simply a vehicle for learning Torah, it is part of learning Torah.

Some years ago, I had a conversation with an eighth grader from a non-Zionist yeshivah who was debating the pros and cons of various yeshivah high schools. I commented that one did not offer foreign languages and that I saw that as a shortcoming. He replied that it offered Regents Hebrew. I indicated that I was talking not about meeting state requirements in a foreign language, but rather

about studying a foreign culture and attaining (at least on an elementary level) the ability to gain access to that unfamiliar society. To my amazement he argued, repeating his rebbe's position, that modern Hebrew was a foreign language in that sense also; it had nothing to do with *lashon hakodesh*. I laughed it off at the time. But after reading what a distinguished scholar and serious educator has written here, I will take the issue more seriously in the future.

The second point of disagreement is on the understanding of what *Ivrit b'Ivrit* is all about. It has nothing to do with "Vayomer — *hu amar*" and is really quite different from teaching classical Greek and Latin. It means that from the first grade on, teachers speak Hebrew in class and students are forced to respond in Hebrew, whether orally or in writing. Grammar and the like is introduced as in English: after the students feel comfortable with the language and are using it. If it's done right, students do learn to think in Hebrew; they fit right into an Israeli *sheur* and in fact feel uncomfortable to some extent if their Torah *sheur* is given in English. We've seen this work for decades, but it can't be started in tenth grade or college.

Of course, if a college Bible teacher finds that his or her students never had a solid Hebrew education, the wise thing would be to conduct the classroom discussion in English. Indeed, if I were teaching a college English class in poetry to a group of educationally disadvantaged youth, I might well overlook the sentence fragments and grammatical errors in their responses in order to concentrate on how to appreciate what is for them a new form of literature. But it would never occur to me to commend their elementary and high school teachers for their good judgment in not focusing on these issues when they should have.

Dr. Bernstein argues that if we must choose between the teaching of modern Hebrew and the teaching of classical texts, the former must be dispensed with for the sake of the latter. But the current progression from *Mikraot Gedolot* in English, to the *Mishnah Berura* in translation, to the new Talmud-in-English series shows that when we ignore the former we forfeit the latter. The problem is not that Dr. Bernstein's position is heresy. It is rather, if you pardon the expression, that so many educators take it for gospel.



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