

# Ten Da'at

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## Ten Da'at

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## REISHIT DA'AT

### ***Haval al de'avdin vela mishtakhin.***

We mourn the loss of Nehama Leibowitz, teacher of *Torat Yisrael* to *Am Yisrael* in *Eretz Yisrael* for over 60 years. Those who know her from her *gilyonot* and *iyyunim* are the beneficiaries of one of the most remarkable Torah educators, and educational enterprises, in all Jewish history. Those who were fortunate to study with her personally carry their memories of her, and the methodologies ("trickim") they acquired from her, into classes all over the Jewish world.

The most remarkable feature of the current school year is the ongoing celebration of the *yoveil* of *Medinat Yisrael*. All across the country schools have been marking the 50th anniversary with a wide and astonishing variety of innovative educational programs. Some schools have inaugurated semester or year-long courses on Israel or Zionism, others have infused religious Zionist content into the entire array of *limmudei kodesh* classes, and still others have focused on the more traditional commemorations surrounding *Yom Ha-Atzma'ut* and *Yom Yerushalayim*.

What all these programs attest to is a continuing recognition of what *Medinat Yisrael* means to Jews in the Diaspora, and to the centrality it continues to occupy in our religious and national lives. *Kol Ha-Kavod* to each and every school and educator who seized the opportunity and initiated an Israel oriented program this year! The greater challenge, however, still awaits: Keeping the focus we have created on Israel vibrant and relevant throughout the next school year. A 50th anniversary comes

only once in a *yoveil*, but the paramount importance of Israel and religious Zionism must be constant. We welcome both your descriptions of singular events or programs which you conducted this past year, as well as innovative suggestions you may have towards keeping the momentum going.

This issue of TEN DA'AT features an essay on the use of Midrash to enhance the teaching of values in the Tanakh class, prepared— in painstaking detail— by Nathaniel Helfgot, a frequent contributor to these pages. Moshe Bleich's regular "Halakhah Corner" features the issue of calling a teacher by name, Yitzhak Blau— whose family recently became *olim hadashim*— writes on the importance of educational storytelling, and Jon Bloomberg provides a model lesson in medieval Jewish history. A statistical study by sociologist, Sidney Langer, charts the attitudes of Stern College students to women's *tefillah* groups shedding light on the long-term effects of secondary yeshiva education for girls. A hespeid for Nehama Leibowitz, offered by Miriam Bak, and several book reviews, provided by the editors, round out the regular issue.

We are also pleased to present an alphabetical and topical index of volumes I-X of TEN DA'AT. Close to 400 (!) articles have been published since we made our first appearance in Tevet, 5747 (January, 1987), and we now provide you with an efficient way of locating those which are of interest to you.

A special thanks goes to two people who devised and arranged the index with an inspiring combination of educational savvy and cyber-smarts: Devorah Chasky and Susan DeStefano. Gratitude is also due Fayge Safran, first editor of TEN DA'AT.

Jon Bloomberg

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## A SAMPLE LESSON IN MEDIEVAL JEWISH HISTORY: Bishop Agobard and Louis the Pious

Teaching the history of the Jews is an enormous challenge. As I have written previously<sup>1</sup>, this is a major responsibility in Jewish education. Familiarity with our history provides understanding and insight into those challenges which Jews face in the 1990's; they cannot really "know" Israel, which they will all visit sometime, without knowing something about its history, about the Arab-Israeli conflict, about Israeli society, about Israeli politics and political parties, and about religious Zionism. The history of the Jews also provides acquaintance with some fundamental Jewish concepts like *galut*, *ge'ulah*, *halakhah*, *aggadah*. They also consider some of the Jew's historical experiences with antisemitism, with messianism, with the Karaite challenge; these do much in shaping and reshaping students' Jewish self-understanding. Jewish history helps students explore their own identities as they confront our history, with its continuities and its changes.

In this sample lesson I will show how it becomes possible to bring alive the history of the Jews, to make students feel that they are a real part of this history. My focus will be on a letter written by Bishop Agobard of Lyons, France, to Emperor Louis the Pious, son of Charlemagne, leader of the Carolingian Empire. The events take place in France of the 9th century. Let us look first at the letter (the translation is my own):

[I wish to call] the attention of His Piety [to the fact that] it is extremely necessary to be aware of the damage which is

being caused to the Christian faith by the Jews in several [ways]. They deceive the simple Christians and boast that they are beloved to Him [Louis] in the merit of their ancestors, that they enter and leave His presence with honor, [and] that important people desire their [i.e., the Jews'] prayers and blessings and concede that they would like to have had arise among them a lawgiver like the one who arose among the Jews. They say that His advisers are angry with us, because we prevent Christians from drinking their [the Jews'] wine, and, in attempting to prove this, they boast that they have received from them [Louis's advisers and other nobles] large amounts of silver in exchange for wine. And they [the Jews] say that in the canons of the Church there is no [requirement] that Christians distance themselves from Jews in regard to food and drink. They display documents of privilege in His name, sealed with a gold seal, whose content, in our opinion, is not in accord with the truth. They display women's garments, insinuating that these have been sent to their women from His relatives and from matrons of the Court. They speak much about the glory of their ancestors, and they are permitted, contrary to the law, to build new synagogues. The matter has come to such a point that the fools among the Christians say that the Jewish preachers are better for them than are our priests. And the [problem has become particularly acute] after the above-mentioned emissaries decided to move the market days, which had been on Saturdays, to other days, in order that the Sabbath of the Jews not be desecrated.

I generally ask students to read this letter of Agobard at home and answer some specific questions about it. I ask them to classify this letter, to suggest where it might be found in a library card catalogue. They are asked to divide the letter into its constituent parts as they see them. They are asked to characterize the letter: Is it an announcement of policy, instructions to be followed, warnings/threats, description, argumentation? All of the above? Finally, they are asked to identify the problem to which the letter is addressed and suggest why this might be of concern to Agobard.

In class we do some further analysis. How do Jews and Christians get along? What is your evidence from the letter? Do they eat and drink

together? How are Jews treated in a special manner by Louis? What is your evidence from the letter? Do the ordinary Christians and the nobles treat Jews in the same manner-or are there differences? Which privileges do Jews hold? Why might the market days have been changed? Is this in Louis's interest? How? Why is Agobard so upset by Jewish-Christian contacts? What makes this objectionable to him? This discussion leads to the main point: Agobard feels frustrated by his inability to communicate the views of the Church regarding Jewish-Christian relations. The Church talks but no one listens!

Did Agobard have room for real concern? Or was he just a frustrated man of the Church? The former is the case. A priest named Bodo, one who was quite close to Louis, left Catholicism in 838, travelled to Spain and converted there to Judaism. He then proceeded to campaign actively on behalf of Judaism. Beyond this, a number of Louis's close advisers were friendly to Jews. The leaders of the Jewish community were highly respected in the court of Louis and were treated accordingly.

Another letter of Agobard, one which I choose not to use in class, gives a bit more insight into his views of the Jews. Agobard is critical of the Jews' image of God. They believe Him to have concrete form; He hears with one organ, sees with another, speaks and acts with still another. The Jews, moreover, attach great importance to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, believing them to have magical powers. Magic was a crucial part of the Jews' beliefs and thus Agobard thought that magic would be most attractive to Christians.<sup>2</sup>

Did Louis pursue a policy that was clearly favorable to the Jews of the Carolingian Empire? As indicated in Agobard's letter, Louis did permit Jews to construct new synagogues and he did order that Shabbat be avoided as a market day; he allowed Jews to employ Christians, so long as Christians would be allowed to celebrate their feast days and observe Sunday as their Sabbath; he eliminated all restrictions on the Jews' dealings in pagan slaves, including a prohibition on converting them without the owner's consent; and Jews were appointed to governmental positions in which they had power over Christians. All of these were in violation of the Roman law codes in use in the Empire, as well as in conflict with canon law.

Beyond the above, Louis allowed Jews to be governed by halakhah in the Jewish community. He also made no attempt to prevent Jews from

proselytizing among Christians—or even from distributing literature hostile to Christianity.

What led Louis to treat Jews so “gently”? Louis believed that Christianity taught that Jews—and other non-Christians—should be treated with kindness. More significantly, though, Louis saw great advantages in fostering Jewish immigration and settlement, as well as encouraging Jewish commercial activity.

The Christians took a cue from Louis. It was common for Jews and Christians to eat together. It was also common for Christians to work on Sundays and rest on Saturdays. Some Christians celebrated Jewish holidays, ignoring their own. Jews and Christian scholars exchanged ideas and information. Jews had significant influence in Louis's court.<sup>3</sup>

Thus Agobard was a voice in the wilderness. He called upon Louis to adhere to canon law and secular (Roman) law, inundating the palace with letters. But he was an utter failure. In 833 he was in active revolt against Louis; when this failed, he was removed as Bishop of Lyons and replaced by the pro-Jewish Amalarius of Metz.

I find that my students relate well to this 9th century source. They get some feeling as to what the life of Jews was like at this time. They see how Jews and Christians related to one another, how they ate and drank together, how Christians envied the Jews for their religious traditions, with some conceding that they would have liked to have had a leader like Moses rather than Jesus. They see how Louis treated Jews well, largely because he valued their economic contributions. They see as well how Agobard was frustrated by his inability to bring the Christians back.

I conclude this class by asking what the story of Agobard shows us about the situation of Jews living in pre-Crusade Europe outside the town of Lyons. Clearly it shows that Jews and Christians get along well, with no threats of violence and no need to live in separate areas. Jews and Christians respect one another, socialize with one another, eat and drink together. As time passes, however, and as the influence of Christianity is strengthened, particularly through the efforts of monks, Jewish-Christian relations worsen, eventually leading to the Crusades at the end of the 11th century.

## Endnotes

1. J. Bloomberg, “The Study of Jewish History in the Jewish Day School”, *Ten Da'at* 6:1(Spring 1992), pp. 31-32.
2. R. Bonfils, “Cultural and Religious Traditions in Ninth-Century Jewry”, *Binah: Jewish Intellectual History in the Middle Ages*, v. 3 (Westport, Ct.: Praeger Press, 1994), p. 4. For a more detailed examination of Agobard, see A. Cabaniss, *Agobard of Lyons: Churchman and Critic* (Syracuse, 1953).
3. The policies of Louis are discussed by B.S. Bachrach, *Early Medieval Jewish Policy in Western Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), pp. 84-102.

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## MIRACLES AND MORALS: Choices in Educational Storytelling

Two years ago, I asked a mixed class of freshman and sophomores to relate their favorite Jewish story. To my chagrin, twenty three out of twenty four students told a story revolving around the performance of a miracle. Apparently, in my students view, a quality Jewish tale involves rabbis suspending the laws of nature. Rabbinic biographies have reached a similar conclusion as many of them (see the biographies of R. Moshe Feinstein and of the *Hazon Ish*) include a standardized chapter on the miraculous feats performed by the hero. Reading these biographies, one has the impression that a rabbinic career remains incomplete without a miracle or two.

I asked my students to contemplate the difference between two types of stories about rabbinic greatness.<sup>1</sup> Some stories focus on rabbis who perform the supernatural and miraculously save the day. Most compilations of Hasidic stories contain a generous helping of such stories.<sup>2</sup> Other stories glowingly recall the exemplary character traits of rabbinic leaders. These rabbis displayed great beneficence, unusual diligence, tremendous insight etc. I concluded that while the miracle stories are fun and exciting, only the *middot* stories contain educational and moral import for the listeners.<sup>3</sup>

Examples of the second type of story abound in *Hazal*. R. Akiva's willingness to begin learning at an older age (*Avot d'R. Natan* 6:2) illustrates the power of dedication and commitment. R. Yohanan's desire to hear questioning of his opinions rather than proofs for those opinions (*Bava Metsia* 84a) serves as a model for intellectual integrity. R. Gamliel's decision to be buried in simple clothing so that others not overspend on a funeral (*Moed Katan* 27b) reveals both insight and

humility. In contrast to these stories, what values emerge from miracle stories?

The miracle stories are not only educationally neutral but they misrepresent the rabbinic approach to problem solving. The great rabbis I know do not solve problems with the wave of a magic wand but rather with carefully thought out plans and laborious effort. Miracle stories convert rabbis into poor imitations of Batman and Superman. At least those superheroes occasionally face challenges that demand courage and dedication. A rabbinic clapping of the hands takes neither. As the Kotzker said about a reputed miracle worker "I would like to know if he is able to perform the miracle of making one real *hasid*".<sup>4</sup>

R. Kook emphasizes the possibility of a desire for the miraculous dampening human initiative. Functioning within the world of nature places the focus on human effort. On the other hand, depending on the miraculous converts humans from active to passive and from subject to object. Such an approach represents an extension of the positive trait of *bitahon* beyond appropriate boundaries.<sup>5</sup> R. Kook supports our view that miracles fail to reveal human greatness.

A teller of miracle tales probably feels that these stories teach Divine Providence, a fundamental component of Judaism. However, it is not at all clear that Providence functions in such a simplified fashion. R. Yanai stated (*Avot* 4:15) that "we do not understand the suffering of the righteous or the serenity of the wicked", and R. Yaakov added (*Kiddushin* 39b) "Reward for *mitzvot* does not happen in this world". Furthermore, many of these stories emphasize the power of the *tzaddik* rather than God's *hashgaha*. In this spirit, R. Barukh of Medziboz said "When Eliyahu performed miracles, we are told the people exclaimed 'the Lord is God' but nowadays the people grow enthusiastic over the reputed miracle worker and forget to say the Lord is God".<sup>6</sup>

Two other problems occasionally emerge. Some students notice that the real world does not function the way it does in these stories. In our present existence, the good guys do not always so easily emerge victorious. This leads to two dangerous options. Either the student rejects the teacher's message as false or the student begins to compartmentalize his or her world view. These students have a religious way of talking and a regular way of talking, with no harmony between the two modes.

Encouraging an appetite for the miraculous also helps phonies waiting to take advantage of the religiously naive. The result is the *hillul*

*Hashem* of rabbis taking money to dispense magical blessings. The Rizhiner argued that "the more miracle stories are attributed to *tzaddikim*, the more the ground is prepared for deception by clairvoyants, fortune-tellers and charlatan doctors".<sup>7</sup>

Of course, miracle stories often get the students interested and excited. However, excitement and interest must eventually lead to something of substance to have any value. If it leads to something negative, then we must forego that excitement. We would not allow a class entitled "Risqué Stories in the Talmud" just to encourage student interest.

A survey of traditional sources reveals that the rabbinic tradition includes a good deal of ambivalence regarding the miraculous. Certain rabbinic schools objected to interfering with the natural order. When a widower's breasts miraculously lactated (*Shabbat* 53b), R. Yosef exclaimed that the widower must be a great man. Abbaye countered, "how lowly is this person who caused a change in the natural order".

Others objected to reliance on the supernatural. When R. Huna relied upon R. Ada bar Ahava's merit to jointly enter a dilapidated building (*Taanit* 20b), R. Ada was incensed. He cited R. Yanai's maxim that one can not undertake a dangerous activity relying upon a miracle because that miracle might not occur and even if it does, the miracle subtracts from the person's merit.

While many Talmudic stories seem to celebrate the miraculous, several qualifications deserve notice. Many of these stories relate the workings of individual wonder workers not otherwise known for rabbinic greatness. Few halakhic statements survived from the mouths of R. Hanina ben Dosa, Honi haMeagel and R. Pinhas ben Yair. On the other hand, halakhic greats such as R. Akiva and R. Meir rarely appear in these stories. Apparently, greatness in learning and supernatural ability do not always coincide.<sup>8</sup>

One story (*Berakhot* 34b) explicitly distinguishes between religious greatness and miraculous power. When R. Yohanan ben Zakai's son fell sick, R. Hanina ben Dosa's payer saved the boy where all R. Yohanan's supplications could not. In response to his wife's amazement at R. Hanina's success compared to his own failure, R. Yohanan clarified that R. Hanina was not greater than him but merely had a different relationship with God. According to R. Yohanan, miracle stories fail to reflect rabbinic greatness.



Furthermore, the Talmud itself (*Berakhot* 20a) noticed a marked decrease in miracles as the early Tannaim give way to the later Tannaim who in turn give way to the Amoraim and attempted to account for it. It would be logical to assume that this downward slope continued past the close of the Talmud and into our own era.<sup>9</sup>

In the Gaonic period, R. Shmuel ben Hofni argued that miracles happen only to prophets. He classified Talmudic tales of wonder working as not halakhically binding. Even R. Hai Gaon, who took issue with this position, reacted with a great deal of skepticism to tales of miracle men in his day. R. Hai rejected reports of wonders performed in the land of Israel.<sup>10</sup>

Medieval philosophers went even further in limiting the role of miracles. Rambam viewed many miraculous biblical stories as dreams, argued for the stability of the natural order, and attempted to incorporate miracles within that order. In his essay on resurrection, Rambam describes his approach as the attempt "to reconcile the law and reason, and whenever possible consider all things as of the natural order. Only when something is explicitly identified as a miracle, and reinterpretation of it cannot be accommodated, only then do I feel forced to grant that this is a miracle."<sup>11</sup>

The Hasidic tradition also includes elements critical of emphasis on miracles. We have already cited Hasidic statements regarding the pitfalls of miracle stories. The Peshiseha school used to employ the verse "otot u'moftim b'admat bnei ham" to indicate that wonder working was for *bnei ham* but not for Judaism.<sup>12</sup> R. Yitzchak Vorker claimed that God thanked Yitzhak for cultivating the land in a natural way rather than relying on a miracle.<sup>13</sup>

The responses to the tragic Rabin assassination raised yet another dangerous consequence of the focus on the miraculous. Some Orthodox Jews, rather than responding with shock and revulsion to the murder, focused on the kabbalistic curse placed on Rabin and searched for coded hints in the biblical text that killing Rabin was foretold. In this response, miracle stories move beyond moral irrelevance to the immoral. The efficacy of a rabbi's curse becomes more significant than whether that rabbi condones or condemns murder.

If our stories fail to hold up character as the barometer of rabbinic greatness, then lack of character becomes irrelevant. This state of affairs

must change if we are to teach our students basic *middot tovot*. Neither miracle stories nor miracles themselves will create *bnei* and *bnot torah* of the finest qualities.

### Endnotes

1. R. Shlomo Yosef Zevin outlines different types of Hasidic stories in *Sippurei Hasidim* (Tel Aviv 1955) page 3.
2. For a fascinating compilation of miracle stories, see Gedalyah Nagal's *Magic, Mysticism and Hasidim: The Supernatural in Jewish Thought* tr. Edward Levin (Jason Aronson 1994).
3. Certainly, *middot* stories that present rabbis as superhuman become irrelevant and insipid. The worthwhile stories treat rabbis as great while still conveying their human fallibility.
4. Yo'ets Kayam Kadish *Siah Sarfei Kodesh* Part 2 no. 39. All the translations of *Siah Sarfei Kodesh* and *Dor Deah* come from Louis Newman *The Hasidic Anthology* (1963).
5. R. Avraham Yitzchak haKohen Kook *Ein Ayyah* on *Massekhet Shabbat* no. 192-195.
6. Arye Yekuthiel Kamelhar *Dor Deah* (New York 1952) page 174.
7. *Ibid.*, page 139.
8. This point was already noted by Alexander Gutman in "The Significance of Miracles for Talmudic Judaism", *HUCA* vol.20 (1947).
9. One possible explanation for the abundance of miracles in the biblical era as opposed to the paucity of miracles in our own is that God's presence had to be more manifest initially to establish a relationship with the people.
10. Both opinions appear in B. Lewin *Otzar haGaonim Hagiga* pages 13-21.
11. The translation comes from Abraham Halkin and David Hartman's *Crisis and Leadership: Epistles of Maimonides* (JPS 1985) page 223. On the Rambam's stance toward miracles, see also the final chapter of his *Shemonah Perakim*.
12. R. Simha Bunim was the most adamant of rebbes in downplaying miracles. See Harry M. Rahinowicz's *Rabbi Simha Bunim me' Peshisha: Hayyav u'Torato* (Tel Aviv 1944).
13. R. Zevin *Sippurei Hasidim* page 3.

Nathaniel Helfgot

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## BEYOND PARSHANUT: USING MIDRASH TO ENHANCE THE TEACHING OF VALUES<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

One of the central areas of instruction in the modern Orthodox high school is the teaching of *Humash* and commentaries. This area is part of the formal curriculum of Judaic studies with an average of three to four periods devoted to its study in the course of the school week. At root, of course, this study is much more than an academic pursuit. In our educational settings the students are exposed to the Torah as divine teaching. They are taught to see themselves as engaging in the enterprise of *Talmud Torah*.

In the context of the teaching of *Humash* much use is made of material found in the texts of *Torah she-Be'al Peh*, the Oral Law. As Orthodox Jews we see the Written and Oral Torah as going hand in hand, both crucial for an understanding of our place in the world and our obligations to God and man. One of the central quarries of sources mined for these purposes are *midrashim*, both *halakhic* and *aggadic*. This material is used either in its classical forms or through the prism of later adaptations, including their citations in the medieval commentaries. The use of this material in the classroom is multifarious and rooted in a number of different goals. In very broad, and admittedly, imprecise strokes we can outline some of the basic approaches to teaching this material as follows:

1. The text of the *Humash* is often enigmatic and basic questions of interpretation and meaning arise. Today, many teachers, under

the influence of the work of Nehama Leibowitz, z"l, and Meir Weiss, use the method of close reading in teaching the biblical text. In this method the reader seeks to arrive at an understanding of *peshat*, the plain sense of the text, by carefully noting the choice of terms, order of words, shifts in voice, presentation of characters, use of honorifics, first person or third person accounts and other literary devices. This method gives rise to many exegetical problems that are not easily resolved by internal biblical solutions. The solutions suggested in many of the *midrashim* are used to resolve textual and exegetical problems of the first order, which are raised either by the students themselves or by the commentaries that have been prepared by students for analysis. On this level the *midrashim* are used in a purely exegetical context and are seen as part of the continuum of attempts to reach the coveted goal of understanding *peshat*, the plain sense of the text. To that end, only those *midrashim* that fit into this category are utilized and explored. Sometimes a statement more removed from the plain sense of the text may be cited, but only for the purpose of highlighting why it most definitely is not *peshat*. Thus, in many of the worksheets of Nehama Leibowitz there is often a question devoted to articulating the exegetical reasons why *Rashi* or *Ramban* did not cite *midrashic* solution x or y in their comments to the chapter.

The use of *midrashic* material to resolve exegetical problems and note literary anomalies is also popular in many academic circles which share the concern for the close reading of the biblical text and an appreciation of the order, syntax and literary style used by the Torah. Teachers trained in both literary approaches as well as more traditional avenues are often comfortable in utilizing *midrashic* sources in this fashion. The use of *midrash* in this fashion keeps the material in the realm of exegesis, *parshanut haMikra*, careful not to go beyond the boundaries of that framework. *Midrashic* sources are rarely cited solely for their hortatory value or to enliven a lesson; they are part of the building blocks of arriving at a clear understanding of the text. In this scheme it also occurs that whole lessons may be devoted to evaluating the merits of one solution over another. Students are often asked to

cite support for *Rashi* or *Ramban* from the text as the focus of the lesson. The text of the Torah, however, remains the yardstick by which one judges the "correctness" of the various suggestions put forward.

2. On the other side of the spectrum are educators who continue to use *midrashim* in a more haphazard fashion. They often do not attempt to anchor this material in an exegetical framework and are content to cite the sources as is, without any further development. Sources may be cited for their moral messages or to familiarize students with famous or "key" Rabbinical statements or concepts. In addition the sources are used to expose students to Rabbinical terminology, develop textual and reading skills and highlight the importance of the oral tradition. The connection to the text of the Torah is rarely explored, neither is the historical or philosophical context in which the *midrash* operates examined. The *midrashim* are cited as sacred texts for their religious and moral inspiration. In addition they are often read literally, without delving into their symbolic meaning and message.

### The Authority of Aggadah

The first point of departure of this project is an acceptance of the Geonic approach to the authority of *Midrash Aggadah*. This position, set out by Rav Hai Gaon and Rav Sherira Gaon, and recorded in later halakhic works such as *Sefer haEshkol*, was adopted by most of the medieval and modern commentators including such central figures as Maimonides, Abravanel and Rav David Tzvi Hoffman. In a word, it argues that in contrast to *Midrash Halakhah* which originates with the revelation at Sinai, no such claim is made by *Midrash Aggadah*. Representative of this approach is the following passage from the *Introduction to the Talmud* by Rav Shmuel haNagid which is printed at the back of the standard editions of the Vilna Shas:

*Haggadah* is any talmudic interpretation which does not concern commandments...and you need not learn anything but what seems reasonable. You should know that whatever Halakhah Hazal maintained regarding a commandment from Moshe Rabbeinu which he received from the Almighty may neither be

added to nor subtracted from. But as regards the interpretation of verses which is framed according to individual intuition and personal opinion, one need learn from such explanations only that which seems reasonable; and as for the rest, one is not dependent on them.

The Rabbis, according to this approach, never considered *Aggadah* divine in nature, but rather attempted to interpret the Biblical text according to logic, ancient traditions and their understanding of the text before them. This position was one of the bases which allowed for freedom of interpretation in the narrative section of the Torah throughout the ages. This sentiment runs through the *parshanut* literature from the period of the early *Geonim*, to Rashi, Ramban and Abravanel in the middle ages up until our own era. It was a guiding principle in such disparate works as the rationalistic commentary of R. Yosef Ibn Caspi (*Mishneh Kesef*) in the 14th century who writes: "But in matters which do not concern the commandments, I shall favor no authority and let truth take its course" (*Shemot 21:7*), to the mystical commentator, R. Hayim Ben Atar, who writes in his introduction to *Or haHayyim*: "There are times that I will interpret the text with my writer's pen in a fashion different than the interpretations of *Hazal*. However I have already expressed my opinion that I am not, God forbid, arguing with the predecessors...rather permission is granted to the interpreters of Torah to cultivate the soil of the text and yield fruit (i.e. suggest original interpretations)...except in the area of Halakhah where one must follow in the path set out by our forefathers." Similarly we find identical sentiments in the classical commentaries written in the 19th century by such rabbinical luminaries as R. Yaacov Zvi Meklenberg and R. Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin and a full throated adoption of this approach in the textual and scientific commentary of R. David Tzvi Hoffman to the Torah, in the early 20th century.<sup>2</sup>

This approach logically leads to a more critical understanding of the whole process of *midrash Aggadah* and its goals. In this approach one can recognize that some *aggadot* are didactic or polemical in nature, using the biblical narrative as their point of departure for moral and religious teaching. Lest there be some misunderstanding, it is critical here to emphasize the educational outlook that must be the bedrock of such an approach. We are directed, tell us the *Geonim* and *Rishonim*, to

take every *Aggadah* seriously, though we are not obliged to read every one literally. The scaled back literalism or authority that we give to these sources does not in any way speak to the sense of respect and seriousness which should animate our approach to these *ma'amarei Hazal*. If we see ourselves as following in the footsteps of medieval and modern *parshanim* this point needs to be kept in mind. Trivializing the words of the Rabbis in any shape or form was not the intention of any of these exegetes. This point must be stressed in order to ensure that the spoken and unspoken messages conveyed in our classrooms embody a traditional world-outlook.

#### The Aggadic Continuum

The second point of departure in this paper, based on the ideas outlined above, is that *midrashic* comments to the Bible (and here we deal specifically with *Midrash Aggadah*) exist on a continuum. At one end of the line reside those *midrashim* that are entirely exegetical in nature. Their point of departure is the biblical text and problems that naturally arise to any careful reader of the verses. There is much material in the *midrashim* that fits into this category and it has been utilized by many of the commentators, both ancient and modern, in their study of *peshat*. Analysis of these passages in light of the methodology of close reading and the weighing of evidence is a critical part of *Talmud Torah*. We read texts in order to understand their primary meaning. We, however, are not the first nor the most insightful readers of these texts. The struggles and contributions of the great minds who came before us is thus essential to the endeavor.

At the other end of the spectrum reside those *midrashim* that are totally removed from the plain sense of the text and do not resolve any inherent problems in the verses. These *midrashim* often engage in creative and imaginative readings and translations of the texts before us and leave us dazzled by their ingenuity. Yet, in reading them we often feel they are working on a different plane; one far removed from the structured atmosphere of *peshat* with its clear rules of grammar, syntax and context.

In the middle of the continuum stands the vast majority of *midrashim*. This is a group that is hard to classify as exclusively belonging to one camp or the other. The material may be rooted in exegetical

concerns and yet will often go beyond them to express ideas, teach lessons and address problems that the *darshan* would like to raise in his study of the passage.

### The Present Project

This project is mainly concerned with the third and, to a lesser extent, the second type of *midrashic* material and its integration in the high school classroom. We rightly assume and expect that the first level of study in any serious *Humash* class is the attempt to ascertain the plain sense of the text. First and foremost the *Humash* class should be directed to a careful study of the *devar Hashem* and its primary meaning. Students should be trained in careful reading of the text, basic rules of grammar and the significance of local context in understanding a word, phrase or passage. In this type of learning problems of *parshanut* and understanding the text will arise and need to be dealt with in class. *Midrashic* and medieval material will be utilized in the search for a resolution of these problems. We wholeheartedly encourage that study and see it as the basis for the subsequent study represented by units presented below.

The units prepared here are designed to explore a second level of analysis: reading the biblical text through the prism of *midrash Aggadah*. The Rabbis read the Torah carefully, and often saw in its words the springboard to address the basic issues of philosophy, morality and meaning that they and their societies faced. Many of these issues were time-bound; many, however, were and are perennial in nature. It is in the *midrashic* reading of so many of the narratives in the Torah that these ideas, dilemmas and debates come to the fore. I believe that occasional use of this material and level of analysis has great potential for enhancing and enriching the learning and teaching of *Humash* as well as of basic Jewish values.

This project envisions a structure in which students devote one or two lessons every three weeks to the study of one of these units. In an average year that would result in the study of ten units, with a four year curriculum covering forty units by the end of high school. In these units, after the primary level of study has taken place, students will study *midrashim* that take them beyond the plain reading of the text. This study will focus on understanding *what* the Rabbis say, including

their use of literary structure, metaphor and parable. The student will then explore *how* they are rereading or interpreting the text and finally *what* may have been the impetus, exegetical or external, for such readings. The class will explore historical and philosophical background that may help shed light on the issue that stands behind the *midrashim* being studied. In some instances students will be exposed to discussion of basic philosophical issues or moral dilemmas that *Hazal* discovered in reading various narratives in the Torah. In others, students will explore the polemical thrust of some of the *aggadot* that were responding to movements or ideas antithetical to Jewish values. In others, still, the historical debates that split the Jewish people will come to life. The Rabbis saw in the Biblical text a guide that yielded contemporary and immediate lessons for their generation. In many of these units students will hear strenuous debates between the rabbis, with various opinions proffered on essential questions of morality, philosophy and *Hashkafah*. The structured use of these texts and ideas can yield the following benefits for our students:

### How HAZAL Read the Torah

1) Students will learn to appreciate how Jews, and specifically some of *Hazal*, read and learned *Humash*. As traditional Jews we look to these giants for direction in normative Jewish life. In addition, we would like to encourage our students to carefully study the themes and ideas that our forefathers saw and heard in this eternal text. Through this study we can hopefully explore some of the issues the Rabbis confronted on a philosophical, moral and historical plane and which they saw as rooted in the multi-layered richness of the Torah. As we well know, the breadth of Jewish ethics and teachings is not exhausted by the study of the norms of Halakhah, but is enriched by supplements from the other genres of Rabbinical material. It is important that we emphasize to our students that these values and ideas emerge from *reading* the Torah text and commenting upon it. The text is a living reality which shapes our perception and stimulates us to think and evaluate ideas, figures and, hopefully, ourselves.

To be clear about the goals, let me note that I am not advocating the study of *Aggadah* per se. These units are to be part of the *Humash* curriculum, with the focus remaining on the biblical text. We are trying

to bring students into the world-view that saw and sees the *Humash* as allowing for multiple layers of discussion and teaching. We hope to initiate our students into the historical continuum of readers of this text; readers who saw it as *Torat Hayyim*, a dynamic and never ending fountain of instruction. They will hopefully enter into the historical conversation around the text of the Torah that eliminates gaps in time and spans centuries of Jewish life and history.

### Torah and Contemporary Values

2) The study of these issues as they emerge from a broad reading and expansion of the biblical narratives can be an entry point in helping students approach certain basic issues in Jewish thought and morality. Focusing on specific topics the students will confront dilemmas and issues that concerned *Hazal* and have not lost their relevance. The texts and learning can then become a real and dynamic center from which to address issues such as universalism and particularism, good and evil, the efficacy of prayer, power and powerlessness, personal responsibility and divine providence, relationships to non-Jews, creating an ideal political system, legitimate and illegitimate uses of violence, personal expression vs. the needs of the community and many other critical questions with which we all struggle. The discussions that emerge from this study can be another piece in our overall goal of educating thinking and feeling Jews who approach and discuss issues in life and society with the help of tradition and text.

The study of values and Jewish philosophy should not be limited to the formal class on *Mahshevet Yisrael*. First, in many schools such a course does not exist. Second, in the few that it does, it is often built upon a formal study of texts and topics that were of great concern to medieval thinkers but do not trouble modern man as "live" questions. One goal of these units is to take the study of *mahshavah* out of this more formalistic and limited context and make it part of the ongoing study of *Humash* as well. Where feasible, coordination with the *mahshavah* teacher would be desirable. This could also lead to the team-teaching of selected topics that would emphasize the continuity of sources and the notion that the *Humash* and *Hazal* are addressing the central issues of meaning.

### Multiplicity of Meaning

3) In the study of these units students will come to further appreciate the multiple layered nature of studying Jewish texts such as *Humash*. This is a critical value that is not given enough emphasis in the curriculum. Students sometimes come away with a monolithic approach to the reading of texts. They often do not see the wealth and breadth of readings and opinions that have been incorporated within the parameters of the tradition.

As some of this study involves historical and philosophical analysis students will be exposed to approaches to learning sources that will complement the "standard" modes of reading texts. In this aspect the units here fit nicely into a modern-orthodox conception of *Talmud Torah* which does not, a priori, reject out of hand the methodologies and fruits of historical studies of *midrash* and *Aggadah*. The notion of using the fruits of this enterprise is not new to Orthodoxy. The German-Jewish experience and the work of Orthodox scholars and thinkers in the previous and current century certainly provides ample precedent for the successful integration of traditional and modern modes of study. *Gedolei Yisrael* such as Rav Azriel Hildesheimer, Rav David Tzvi Hoffman and Rav Yehiel Yaacov Weinberg, are shining examples of the productive encounter of using disparate methodologies in approaching *mekorot*. To a lesser extent some of the leading sages of our generation such as Rav Kook and Rav Soloveitchik<sup>3</sup>, *zekher tzaddikim liverakhah*, have on occasion used such approaches in various writings and *derashot* that they delivered in public. In addition the writings of master teachers and scholars in our circles such as Nehama Leibowitz, Efrayim Urbach, Yonah Frankel, Yoel Bin Nun and others are dotted with examples similar to the ones outlined in the units below.

### Prelude to Academia

4) Many of our students will later confront more radical approaches to Rabbinical texts in the academic world. We do them no favor by totally ignoring the various methodologies employed in the study of *Humash* and *Midrash* by scholars. Using them and analyzing their strengths and weaknesses in our more nurturing religious environments is a far more sound approach. Our approach demystifies them

while using their fruits within the guidelines of a traditional world-view. Now, of course, a more fundamentalist approach to *midrash* would have no truck with any such notions, but neither we nor our students live, study, or operate exclusively with such a posture. The Orthodox high school graduate who will go on to YU or Bar-Ilan, and certainly Columbia or Penn, even after years of yeshiva study, will be exposed to much of the academic methodology towards sacred texts. Exposure to some of this material in a non-threatening and natural fashion can help enrich our students' full exposure to the experience of *Talmud Torah* as a search for truth. Secondly, it can help inoculate our students against some of the more pernicious aspects of these methodologies.

### Interdisciplinary Study

5) In many of our units other disciplines such as history, philosophy, and literature are used in setting the background for understanding the discussion and debate. Teachers from these disciplines can be brought in to expand on these areas thus resulting in some opportunities for inter-disciplinary work. Students will be exposed to some of the interrelationships between the study of Torah and other disciplines that can help enrich our understanding of the *devar HaShem*.

### Coordination with Adult Education

6) Students will also learn to approach sources of *parshanut* and *midrash* in a manner that parallels some of the learning that is going on in adult-education settings in their communities. Many of the parents of these very students are engaged in serious learning that incorporates discussion of historical, polemical and philosophical perspectives in approaching various Jewish texts. The gap between the world of the parents and that of the children is thus narrowed. This can, if nurtured properly, be the basis for greater interaction between students and parents in the area of *Talmud Torah*. Parents and students can engage in study that is mutually satisfying and helps give the text relevance to some of the issues that all human beings confront. This can lead to serious discussions within the family about values and ethics mediated through the prism of the midrashic reading of *Humash*.

### Coordination with the Campus

7) Finally, and this is somewhat down the road, exposure to these kinds of issues and methodologies helps narrow the gap between students learning in our circles and those educated in other camps within the Jewish people. Many students and adults in other movements engage in forms of study that in part dovetails the approaches outlined above and demonstrated below. As we well know the college campus is one of the primary crisis areas of Jewish life. The attrition rate is high and many of our best and brightest are lost to us forever. In college or beyond when our students leave the more restricted environments of the day schools, they may be able to find some common ground in learning Jewish texts seriously with other Jews who emerged from distinct backgrounds. Jews studying Torah together, and trying to understand and derive meaning in their shared learning can be a productive vehicle in ameliorating some of the sharp tensions and divisions that are now characteristic of the Jewish people. It can also be a positive force in encouraging more intensive study of *mekorot* by Jews of all backgrounds on the college campus.

### Caveats

As I made clear above, the purpose of these units is not to study *midrash*, in and of itself, but to integrate it into the study of *Humash* and commentaries. To ensure the achievement of that goal, a number of points must be emphasized:

A. The units are to be preceded by the careful study and analysis of the biblical text in classic fashion. After the unit has been studied in this manner the other material can be introduced.

B. The sources chosen are ones that are part of the genre of expansion of the biblical narrative. Folk sayings and *aggadic* material found in the sources that are not connected to the biblical text such as the R. Akiva narratives, or those of the fall of Jerusalem will not be utilized. This is not a course in the study of *midrash*; it is an attempt to enter into the historical conversation of Jews who read the Torah in multiple layers of meaning and heard its voice resonate in approaching the existential and moral issues of the day and eternity.

### Subject Matter vs. Subject Matter for Education

C. This paper is predicated on the important distinction between the use of subject matter and the use of subject matter for education. This distinction is similar to one developed at length by Prof. Lee Shulman of Stanford University, between "content knowledge" and "pedagogic content knowledge." As Shulman has written:

Although most teaching begins with some sort of text, and the learning of that text can be a worthy end in and of itself, we should not lose sight of the fact that the text is often a vehicle for achieving other educational purposes. The goals of education transcend the comprehension of particular texts, but may be unachievable without it.

Saying that a teacher must first comprehend both content and purposes, however, does not distinguish a teacher from non-teaching peers. We expect a math major to understand mathematics... But the key to distinguishing the knowledge base of teaching lies at the intersection of content and pedagogy, in the capacity of a teacher to transform the content knowledge he or she possesses into forms that are pedagogically powerful and yet adaptive to the variations in ability and background presented by the students<sup>4</sup>.

In that spirit the units presented below are based on the fruits of some of the modern studies in *Midrash* by scholars such as Yitzhak Heinemann, Nehama Leibowitz, Yonah Frankel, Avigdor Shinan and Efrayim Urbach. However, the study of these sources is not intended to be one in which every nuance and text is analyzed and scrutinized in the fashion and style of the academy. I have chosen to use this vast collection of material as a *resource* for building educational units with the hope that they will help stimulate the learning process and open up areas of thought and discussion in the classroom. I hope that in presenting this material for teachers I have done so with integrity to the sources and their meaning. The review of the units by scholars and other educators to ensure fidelity to the basic contours of the *midrashic* material is the best way to ensure that those boundaries have not been crossed.

### Pre-Service Training

D. The use of this material presupposes a certain type of community, school and faculty. This project is intended for a modern-Orthodox

setting that first and foremost takes the teaching of *Tanakh* and commentaries seriously. In addition it assumes a willingness to see this study in its broadest sense as impacting on the shaping of values and the search for meaning. Teachers most likely to be comfortable with this project are those who have had some serious academic study of Jewish studies (e.g. Yeshiva University's Bernard Revel Graduate School, Hebrew University or Bar Ilan University) alongside intensive learning of *Tanakh* in more traditional settings. However, it would seem to me that even teachers with minimal exposure to this kind of training could easily be prepared to make use of these units. The key would be for the prospective teacher to express a willingness to explore other approaches to what some *midrashic* sources are doing in approaching the text of the Torah.

The teachers of the *Humash* sections could be trained in using this material in an intensive mini-course during the summer months. Two or three major articles on the topic by Heineman, Frankel, and Leibowitz would be distributed well before the sessions. Teachers would then engage in studying the material presented below, analyzing the sources and practicing the methodology. Finally, they would be asked to prepare model units themselves and present it to their colleagues and workshop leaders for evaluation and criticism. This kind of work could be continued in a number of in-service sessions organized throughout the year for the *Tanakh* faculty.

In addition, it is my feeling that introducing three or four sessions of this type into the standard course on teaching *Humash* in the graduate program at Azrieli, Touro or the various teachers seminaries would also be productive. Student-teachers would be exposed to these approaches in addition to the study of pure pedagogy or *parshanut*-centric teaching methodologies.

In order to demonstrate the type of material and pedagogy that I feel should become part of the curriculum below the reader will find two sample units from the larger project for perusal. They deal with passages in *Bereishit* and *Shemot* that are commonly taught in every religious high school.



## Unit 1-Bereishit 17

## Prelude

One of the outstanding models of deep and abiding faith to the Almighty in the Torah is *Avraham Avinu*. He is known in our tradition as the great believer, the *ma'amin*, who followed the call of God to abandon his home and past for an uncertain land and future. Later, it is Abraham who is ready to sacrifice that which is most precious to him, his son Yitzhak, in obedience to the will of the creator. This same quality is evident as well in *Bereishit 17* where God directs Abraham to circumcise himself and his entire household. God appears and commands Abraham, already a man of ninety-nine years old, to circumcise himself and thus enter into a covenant with the Almighty. The moment God completes his charge to him, he fulfills the divine mandate without hesitation:

And God completed speaking to him; and the Lord departed away from Abraham. Abraham then took his son Yishmael and all the children of his household...and he circumcised them on *that very day* as God had instructed him. And Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he circumcised his foreskin... *on that very day* Abraham and his son Yishmael were circumcised.

(GEN. 17:22-25)

Yet if we turn to the midrash here and in a number of other places in *Bereishit Rabbah* a different picture of Abraham's attitude to the divine command emerges. Let us examine two short passages:

At the time that the Holy One Blessed Be He commanded Abraham to circumcise (himself and his family) he went and consulted with his three close friends (as to whether he should fulfill this duty). Said Aner to him: "You are already 100 years old and you are ready to go and afflict yourself with such a procedure?!" Said Eshkol to him: "Why are you ready to go and set yourself apart amongst your enemies?" Mamrei said to him: "This is your God who stood by you and protected you from the burning furnace and hunger, and the war with kings, and now when He commands you to circumcise, will you ignore His request?"

(BEREISHIT RABBAH 42:8)

Said Abraham: "If circumcision is so beloved why was it not given to Adam himself?" Said God to Abraham: "It is sufficient that I and you are in this world, and if you do not accept upon yourself the obligation of circumcision, it is sufficient for the world to have existed till this point."... Said Abraham: "Before I became circumcised people would come by and interact with me; now that I will be circumcised will people come and join me?" Said God to him: "Abraham! It is enough, that I am your God, it is enough that I am your patron; and not only for you, but rather it is sufficient for the world that I am its God and its patron."

(BEREISHIT RABBAH 46:3)

## DIDACTIC NOTE:

*These passages from Bereishit Rabbah<sup>5</sup> are striking in that they do not seem to be addressing any exegetical problem in the text. The first verses of the section present God's directive to Abraham and the section concludes with Abraham's dutiful fulfillment of the mitzvah. The students will immediately notice that the midrash has added two dialogues to the section. One is between Abraham and his friends outlined in the first piece. The second is between Abraham and God outlined in the second piece. In the first piece it is clear that Abraham has reservations about going through with the circumcision. This midrash does not put those reservations explicitly in his mouth. Students might be asked to first read this passage alone and suggest why an individual might struggle with the concept of circumcision or have reservations about it? Students might also be encouraged to think about the objections put in the mouth of Aner and Eshkol. Are these simply a literary device to convey the reservations that were occupying Abraham's mind at this time or do they represent the opposition of the non-Jewish world to circumcision?*

*The second passage is more explicit in that here Abraham challenges God about circumcision on a number of different planes. Students should be asked to clarify the difference between the two passages.*

## A New Perspective on Abraham: Expressing Reservations

The first point that emerges from the *midrash* is a new perspective on Abraham. While the Abraham of the text never wavers nor chal-

lenges the *mitzvot* of God (as opposed to the justice of God as in Sedom), in the *midrash* he does so. Given the lack of any textual basis for reservations on Abraham's part, we must ask ourselves what did these Rabbis want to convey to us in their reading of the section on circumcision? The question to be raised is: Were the Rabbis here presenting for our consideration an alternate model of the religious individual, represented by Abraham? One model of the committed Jew is the person who accepts the commandments without hesitation, doubts or struggles. There were many people who lived with such an intense faith commitment, especially in pre-modern eras that were suffused with a religious consciousness throughout society. In our day there are still individuals who live with such faith and trust. On the other hand, in the past and especially now in the absence of revelation and explicit communication with God, we all encounter Jews, young and old, who do not live with such certainty. We ourselves are often filled with questions, dilemmas and reservations. The midrashic model presented here is of the Jew who may have philosophical, moral or practical problems with fulfilling *mitzvot*.

This can lead to a wonderful discussion in class about the topic: Can one be a religious Jew with doubts or questions or struggles with particular *mitzvot*. Does the fact that one has questions about a *mitzvah*, though one performs it, invalidate or diminish its significance? Is one allowed to try to understand the rationale and meaning behind *mitzvot* as Abraham tried to do in the opening part of the second midrash? All these issues are in the background of the two dialogues that the midrash sees as going hand in hand with the biblical story.

In the first passage in the *midrash*, Abraham is presented as having reservations about undergoing the process of circumcision. And yet in the end he fulfills the will of God; he remains for us *Avraham Avinu*. In the eyes of the Rabbis, the founder of our people was not only the model of the *ma'amin be'emunah temimah* par excellence, he was also the model of the Jew who struggles with *kiyyum hamitzvot* in his life. He is the person who examines the commandments, exploring its reasons and meanings. He is the person who constantly feels the existential need for rational decision and choice about his religious life. *Avraham Avinu* is, in this reading, the Jew who chooses consciously to submit himself to the will of the almighty. He makes a faith commitment that expresses itself in action and behavior after struggle and reflection.

### Universalism vs. Particularism

The second passage in the *midrash* opens up other areas for discussion in the classroom. Abraham presents two separate arguments for his hesitations in accepting circumcision. The first relates to the issue of the selection of *Am Yisrael* on a philosophical level. Why is there a need for one nation to be singled out to enter into covenant with God? Can not mankind as a whole participate in the special relationship with the Almighty? In a word, why was Torah not given to the entire world? God's response in the *midrash* is a bit enigmatic but it basically affirms the notion that the covenant is particular to the Jewish people, and of course, anyone who joins that people and its destiny.

At this point it might be productive to direct discussion towards analyzing the early history of mankind as presented in the Torah. One might raise the question: what is the purpose of the first 11 chapters in *Bereishit*. It is possible to read the first section of the Torah as God's attempt to set up a world in which the divine covenant with man was to be established with all of mankind. God first entered into a relationship with Adam and his descendants, directing them to observe a few basic ground rules and giving them dominion over the created world. In addition, according to tradition, mankind received a detailed code of laws and behaviors, the Noahide code. This attempt unfortunately failed as man corrupted the earth with murder and vice and the breakdown of boundaries leading to the reversal of creation.

God subsequently attempted to reconstruct the world and once again set up a covenant with all of mankind. Unfortunately, in the aftermath of the flood, His will and authority were once again challenged. Thus the broad universal attempt is put on hold. While God retains a relationship with the entire world and demands adherence to a basic code from all mankind, he decides to establish a different mechanism for ushering in *malkhut shaddai* on this earth. God enters into a covenant with one specific nation, demanding from them allegiance to a detailed and comprehensive way of life. In the history and actions of this people, God's name and message will be manifest and brought to the attention of mankind. This is a longer, more circuitous route that seeks to redeem mankind in the long range of history rather than the immediate here and now. In that long range of history, *Am Yisrael*, as a representative of the divine message in the rough and tumble reality of

the "real world", must continue to exist and bear witness while at the same time live up to the demands of the creator to be a *mamlekhet kohanim ve-goy kadosh*.

The famous *midrash* that speaks of God going to the various nations and offering the Torah fits into this model as well. On the ultimate level Torah is and should be the patrimony of the entire world. Indeed the language of that *midrash* speaks of God requesting the nations "to accept the Torah". It is not imposed, but rather must be accepted. For various historical and philosophical reasons, however, the nations of the world were not ready, willing or able to adopt and accept it as their standard. It is the Jewish people, who are ready to accept and take upon themselves the task. They are the only people ready to say *na'aseh ve-nishma*, to make the faith commitment to God and his demands.

#### Didactic Note:

*This discussion is important because it defines the concept of chosenness as synonymous with mission and fulfillment of mitzvot. It does not speak of inherent worth or superiority in some more racial sense. Am Yisrael is unique in its willingness to take upon itself the burden of fulfillment of covenantal responsibilities. Am Segulah is a term that reflects demands made by God rather than His grace. This is what engenders the close relationship between God and the Jewish people. In the words of the prayer: asher kiddeshanu be-mitzvotav; the chosenness is expressed in the obligation to perform mitzvot.*

The second argument of Abraham in the *midrash* relates to the actual practice of *mitzvot*, represented here most intensely by circumcision. The practice of a unique code of behavior separates the Jew from the rest of the world and creates an unbridgeable gap.

Observing the totality of Halakhah is a barrier to the full integration of the Jew into general society. Moreover, one might read the argument as stating that the mission of the Jew is paradoxically hindered by his "uniqueness" and otherness. People do not come to share with him and thus they cannot benefit from his message.

#### Didactic Note:

*In these arguments students will hear more than an echo of the debates and struggles surrounding Jewish uniqueness in antiquity, but especially in the*

*modern era. This is a wonderful opportunity to invite the Jewish history teacher to come and discuss, for example, Napoleon's proposal of emancipation to the Jews of France. Students might read some of the early literature of the Reform movement in Germany or the more extreme writings of the assimilationists in Europe of the mid-1800's. The students would explore the belief amongst many in the early nineteenth century that the more Jews assimilated into general society the less anti-Semitism they would face. Students could analyze the arguments and the various factions and judge them in light of subsequent Jewish and world history. The questions can also turn to the thorny issue of inter-group dialogue and whether one should or may downplay the particularistic aspect of one's tradition in order to participate fully in the world whether as a citizen or in relating to other faith communities. Students might read excerpts from R. Soloveitchik's essay "Confrontation," as well as articles by R. Samson Raphael Hirsch or Dr. Michael Wyschograd who touch on some of these issues.*

#### Unit 2- Shemot 2 Prelude

The second chapter of the book of *Shemot* describes a number of scenes from the birth, youth and young adulthood in the life of Moses. In the middle of the chapter the Torah recounts a series of incidents that occurred after he grew into manhood and sought his brothers out. We will focus here on the first episode that appears in this series:

And Moses grew into adulthood and he went out to his brothers and saw their suffering. And he saw an Egyptian striking (*makkeh*) a Hebrew, from his brothers. And (Moses) looked to and fro and saw that there was no man around, and he struck (*va-yakh*) the Egyptian and buried him in the sand.

(2: 11-12)

In this episode, Moses for the first time fully understands and empathizes with the extent of the suffering that is the lot of his fellow Jews. He sees first-hand the exploitation and distress that is the life of the slave "and he saw their suffering". The next verse in the Torah tells us that after witnessing this general suffering, Moses encounters an Egyptian striking a Jew. Moses, checking that there are no witnesses, immediately intercedes and slays the Egyptian thereby saving the Jew from his oppressor. This passage highlights the sensitivity of Moses to

the plight of his brethren and his willingness to personally step into the fray and take action. Moreover, on the literary level it foreshadows the fact that through his efforts, the Egyptians will be "smitten" (the phrases *makkeh* and *va-yakh* clearly echo the subsequent chapters in which the Egyptians experience the *makkot*) and the Jewish people as a whole will be saved from their oppressors.

**DIDACTIC NOTE:**

*This might be a good opportunity for the students to use a concordance. Students could be asked to check how many times words based on the root NUN, KAF, HEIH such as makkeh and va-yakh appear in the first 12 chapters of Exodus.*

**Personalizing the Anonymous**

In this context it is interesting to note that there are a number of striking *midrashim* that deal with the identity and acts of the Egyptian taskmaster and the behavior of Moses. These *midrashim* go far beyond the plain sense of the text and once again raise questions as to what message is being developed in the reading of the episode beyond the plane of *peshat*. Let us look carefully at some of these passages from *Midrash Rabbah* to this section in the Torah:

Once an Egyptian taskmaster went to the house of one of the Israelite guards (guards who were the overseers of the slaves themselves, N.H.) and he was attracted to the wife of the Israelite who was beautiful, without blemish... Later the Egyptian returned and came upon this woman... Once the taskmaster realized that the Israelite man knew what had occurred, he put the Israelite back into slave labor and began to beat him till the point of death, and Moses gazed upon him; and through the holy spirit he saw what the taskmaster had done in the house and what he was about to do to the Israelite in the field. Moses said: "This person is certainly liable for the death penalty as it states 'And one who slays another man shall die' (Lev. 24:21)." Moreover he came upon the wife of Danan (the Israelite) and for this he is liable for death as it states: "The adulterer and adulteress shall surely die," and this is what it states: "and he looked to and fro;" he saw what the Egyptian had done to him in the house and what he did to him in the field.

"And he saw that there was no *man*"- for he (the Egyptian) was liable for death... the Rabbis say he saw that there were no righteous offspring that would emerge from this man till the end of all time. Once Moses saw this he turned to the angels and asked: "Is this person liable for death?" They responded to him: "Yes". This is the intent of what is written: "and he saw that there was no man;" there was no one (in the heavenly court) who would find any merit on his behalf (no one could offer any defense for him).

"And he smote the Egyptian;" With what did he kill him? Rav Evyatar says he struck him with a fist... the Rabbis say he pronounced the name of God upon him and killed him as it says "Do you intend to kill me (*halehargeni atah omer*) as you slew the Egyptian?" (Ex. 2:14)

(SHEMOT RABBAH 1:28-9)

**DIDACTIC NOTE:**

*The students can be asked to highlight those words in the two verses which the various opinions have read out of their original context.*

*They might come up with a chart like this:*

Verse 11: a. "striking"- ready to kill him

Verse 12: a. "saw"- through the divine spirit into the past and into the future

b. "to and fro"- looked to what occurred in the house and in the field

c. "saw"- in the divine spheres

d. "is no man"-referring to the Egyptian, he was a dead man.

e. "is no man"- no worthy offspring would come from him

f. "is no man"- no angel ready to speak on his behalf

g. "and he smote"- he spoke the divine name

*This gives students a clear picture that these verses have been read in an intense midrashic fashion with many of the elements being taken out of their "plain sense" meaning. In addition the first midrashic passage gives us an entire biography and history to the anonymous "Israelite" and "Egyptian". These elements are entirely absent from the biblical text and there is nary a hint of them in any subsequent verses. On one level, of course, this is part of the general midrashic attempt to give background and "color" to anonymous characters who appear in the biblical narrative. In addition this background helps us better understand the motivation of why the Egyptian decided to strike the Jew. This last point of course is a bit strained for one*

could argue that it is common that slaves are beaten everyday, and yet the Bible chooses to focus on the fact that on this particular day Moses saw the oppression and chose to respond. Be that as it may we clearly are standing before a series of exquisitely creative midrashim on a seemingly straightforward text.

At this point one might leave the midrashim and return to the text with the question what would the students have done in Moses' place. Would they have reacted as he did? Would they have been afraid or would they have hesitated? What factors would have gone through their minds before they took action? What would they have to know?

The discussion will probably give rise to various opinions as to whether Moses reacted properly or not? Lest the suggestion that Moses erred here be taken as out of bounds, it is important to highlight a number of points. First, we here are dealing with Moses at the very outset of his career, before he has even spoken to the Almighty for the first time. The Rabbis themselves speak of him in Chapter 3 as a "fresh recruit (tiron)" in describing his fear of speaking with God. Moreover, we know that the Torah does not hide the mistakes committed by even the greatest of prophets and later in his career speaks openly of the sins he committed that prevented him from entering into the promised land. Finally, and most telling in our context, we have an explicit statement in the Midrash that takes Moses to task for his actions. In the Midrash *Petrirat Moshe Rabbeinu*<sup>6</sup>, which recounts traditions relating to his last days, it is reported that Moses pleaded before the Almighty that he should continue to live. After a long dialogue in which Moses attempts to show that he was greater than the Avot and thus should merit immortality, God turns to Moses and says:

"Did I in any way tell you to kill the Egyptian?" Said Moses to him:

"You slew all the first-born of Egypt, and I shall die on account of one Egyptian?!" Said the Holy One Blessed Be He to him: "Can you compare yourself to me who causes death but can revive the dead?

Can you in any way bring someone to life as I can?!"

This passage contains a direct indictment of Moses' action, even to the point that it is presented as the ultimate reason that Moses is not allowed to remain on this earth.

#### Criticizing Moses

It is interesting to note, however, that this sense is entirely absent from the biblical text. The Torah does not in any way criticize Moses'

swift reaction. In fact, if read in the context of the other stories in the passage, the Torah seems to see this episode as one of the stories that highlight Moses' fitness for leadership.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, it is interesting to note that the Bible uses the same language in presenting Moses' action as that of the Egyptian. The Egyptian is *makkeh*, which literally means "was striking", but not necessarily a death blow. Moses acts and is described by the verb *va-yakh* (another form of the word *makkeh*), which here means "he killed him". The Torah chooses to present Moses' action as symmetrical—*Haka'ah* for *Haka'ah*—implying that it was the appropriate and commensurate reaction to this act. The Torah, in this scene, does not describe his act with the common Hebrew verb *va-yaharog*. At this point that is not the focus and the use of such language might raise the issue of Moses' disproportionate reaction to the act he witnesses. It is only later, in the episode of the two Jews who are fighting, that this term is used. The Jew who takes exception to Moses' intervention says to him: "Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian" *halehargeini atah omer ka'asher haragta et haMitzri* (verse 14). At the moment when the story actually occurs in the narrative the Torah chooses not to use that term and that is very significant.<sup>8</sup> (Parenthetically this method of comparison is a wonderful methodological tool that can be used in many chapters of the Torah. Students can see these points on their own by writing down how the Torah—as objective narrator—tells a story; e.g. what verbs and adjectives it uses; and compare it with how that same story is recounted by one of the characters in the same story.<sup>9</sup>)

One issue then that will immediately arise from the study of the biblical narrative and these sources is the evaluation of Moses' act. In line with the thrust of the plain sense of the text, the *midrashim* from *Midrash Rabbah* take a totally different tack than the source quoted above. In these sources, the students will note, Moses is not presented as a young hot-head who simply strikes without thinking. In the various passages cited before, we are informed both of the wickedness of the Egyptian taskmaster and the deliberative nature of Moses' thinking. The taskmaster has raped the Israelite's wife (a capital offense) and is an instant away from killing the Israelite slave. Moses is aware of all this and still, in one version, looks for divine sanction to kill this oppressor. The Egyptian is liable according to the laws of the Torah but Moses requests that he be judged in the heavenly court as well. No one

can find any defense on his behalf, and Moses, with divine assistance, sees that no one righteous will come from this evil man. There is, in short, no redeeming element that can save him from his fate, and it is then and only then that Moses strikes the Egyptian, again with divine intervention. These *midrashim* clearly reflect a strong tradition to defend Moses' course of action in this very difficult episode. Moses, in this reading took the difficult but morally appropriate action to save a Jew from death.

#### DIDACTIC NOTE:

*Taking this approach to the lesson the discussion would focus on the morality of Moses' act and possibly enter into a discussion concerning the evaluation of biblical figures in general. This is a wide-ranging and important topic that comes up frequently in any serious high school classroom. This is not the place for a full blown discussion of the basic issues and the interested reader is directed to the sources cited in the notes below.<sup>10</sup> As a general comment, I would just say that it is crucial that we strive for balance. We should be forceful in teaching our students that we are dealing with gedolei olam, spiritual and moral giants who shape and direct the contours of our life. At the same time, in line with the Torah's and Hazal's own teachings, these were figures who remained human and were not free of error or flaw. We should not, as Mori v'Rabi Rav Aharon Lichtenstein once put it so well, turn the Avot into "ossified figures of petrified tzidkut" having no relation to the world in which we and our students live.*

#### A Critique of Violence

There is a second avenue to pursue in the teaching of these sources which connects to general issues regarding the use of violence, especially by individuals or small groups, in fighting oppression or achieving other social or political aims. A cursory reading of the biblical story easily leads one to the conclusion that immediate violent reaction to injustice is the proper course of action. Now it is true that sometimes violence is unavoidable and the only course open to achieve the moral goal. However, there are often many situations when the issues are far from clear. The use of violence is often a tricky and problematic ap-

proach both morally and tactically. On the moral plane, the question is often whether the violence employed is justified in stopping the injustice taking place. To take an extreme example, shooting someone for taking your parking space would be viewed by all as inexcusable murder. Secondly, are all the victims of violence which is perpetrated against the oppressor guilty, or are some innocent bystanders caught in the crossfire? Thirdly, and related to these questions, are the effects that the violence has on one's own moral fiber and continued ethical core. Entry into the world of violence is often unavoidable, but it often comes at the price of dulling religious and ethical sensitivities and carries with it the potential for overlooking the divine image that resides in each human being.

Finally, beyond the purely moral issue there is of course the tactical issue of the effectiveness and long-range results of such a policy. Let us take for example the case of the Soviet Jewry movement in the late 1960's. There were many discussions as to what was the best course of action for individuals and groups to take in putting pressure on the Soviet government. The mainstream groups used all the tactics of the political process including private diplomacy, political advocacy, public demonstrations and economic pressure. A few individuals took it upon themselves to bomb certain sites owned and operated by the Soviet government. One such bombing led to the death of an innocent Jewish secretary. The bombers aimed for Soviet officials or sympathizers and murdered a young woman instead. Moreover, some of the moral high ground that had won the Soviet Jewry movement widespread public support was to some extent lost by this act of violence. The bombing did not visibly affect Soviet policy one wit, and may have even hardened some positions as well.

It is in this light that one may possibly approach teaching the sources on Moses' slaying of the Egyptian. The reader of the Torah could easily come away with the impression that seeing injustice before one's eyes, one must step in violently without a moment's thought or consideration. The action of Moses, the greatest of all prophets, is at first blush an extremely powerful precedent for future generations of Jews who would find themselves under oppression. The temptation under similar circumstances is to take the law into one's own hands and lash out. One might argue that the Rabbis in their statements here are

attempting to limit the scope and applicability of the story for future generations. In the Rabbinical reading, we are speaking of a criminal who was on the verge of killing the Jew and who had already committed a heinous crime. Moses, in his unique position of access to the divine realm sees that no good will ever come from this person. Moreover, Moses receives divine permission to execute this man after he has been tried and found guilty. These midrashic passages turn the impulsive, emotional act into a rational, deliberative act that meets out proper justice to this criminal. In effect, we have now neutralized the potential for precedent inherent in the story and put it into its proper context. Only when one confronts an irredeemable criminal with no potential for righteous progeny can one have recourse to violence. Only one who has received divine sanction and can use the divine name at will to execute another. For the rest of us the better course is one of discretion and fighting through other, less problematic, means. Unless we have prophecy and can be sure that we ourselves are committing no evil in our use of violence, the story of Moses cannot serve us as a basis for our actions. Of course this is not the only passage in the Bible that deals with individual acts of violence (as opposed to the area of war carried out by the nation as a whole which requires its own discussion) in response to injustice. The stories of the rape of Dinah and the massacre of Shekhem, and Pinhas's zealotry, to name just two, also can be analyzed in the context of such a discussion. However this is beyond the scope of this unit.

#### DIDACTIC NOTE:

*Beyond the very significant lesson about the caution we need to take in the use of violence to solve problems, we also are communicating a very critical message about how we learn values. In traditional learning we cannot derive our values and attitudes from a Tanakh-exclusive perspective. As committed Jews, we read the Torah through multiple-layered colored glasses; not only peshat but peshat as well as derash. While this is clear to all in the study of legal sections of the Torah, it sometimes is abandoned in the more narrative parts. We read the Torah on numerous levels and these various dimensions taken together shape our world-view and the messages we take with us from the text. While it is critical, of course, that students develop*

*skills in the study of peshat with its literary, grammatical and historical element, we cannot abandon the secondary and tertiary readings that are at the heart of the Rabbinical tradition.*

#### Endnotes

1. This article is an adaptation of a more lengthy curricular project prepared under the aegis of the Jerusalem Fellows during 1995-6 when I had the great privilege and good fortune to spend a sabbatical year learning and living in Jerusalem.
2. For background on this entire section see Yonah Frankel, *Darkei haAggadah u'Midrash* (Jerusalem, 1991) pp. 504-525; Uriel Simon, *ha-Mikra va'anahnu* (Tel-Aviv, 1979) pp. 28-41.
3. See, for example, the treatment of the last mishnah in Yoma in the last section of his magisterial essay *Sacred and Profane* in *Gesher* Vol. 1 (1966).
4. *Harvard Educational Review* 57:1 (1987), 12-13.
5. A useful tool in the preparation of these types of sources is the 10 volume vocalized edition of *Midrash Rabbah* with commentary by Moshe Merkin (Tel-Aviv, 1986).
6. A late midrash of unknown origins, quite popular in the middle ages and cited authoritatively in various midrashic collections such as *Yalkut Shim'oni* and even in "Peshat" commentaries such as Rashbam cf. his comments to Numbers 12:1 (Rozin ed., printed in *Torat Hayyim* edition of *Mikraot Gedolot*.)
7. This was first pointed out to me by my good friend and colleague Rabbi David Silber.
8. See, further, in Nehama Leibowitz, *New Studies in Shemot* (Jerusalem, 1993), 39-41.
9. See the excellent discussion in Nehama Leibowitz, *New Studies in Bereishit* (Jerusalem, 1993), 239 ff.
10. See the articles by: David Berger: "On the Morality of the Patriarchs in Jewish Polemics and Exegesis," *Modern Scholarship in the Study of Torah* ed. Shalom Carmy (Northvale, 1996), 131-146; Avishai David: "Perspectives on the Avot and Immahot," *Ten Da'at* 5:2 (Spring, 1991), 24-26; Zvi Grumet: "Another Perspective on Avot and Immahot," *Ten Da'at* 6:1 (Spring, 1992), 25-27; Yitzhak Twersky: "Baderekh Hazev Asber Anokhi Holekh," *Rinnat Yitzhak*, ed. Natahniel Helfgot (New York, 1989), 69-81.

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## WOMEN'S PRAYER GROUPS: A Case Study in Feminism and Modern Orthodoxy

A front page article in the June 1997 issue of the *Women's Tefillah Network Newsletter* hails the arrival of Columbia University's daily women's tefillah (prayer service).

"We come from all over North America and Israel to Barnard, Columbia, the Jewish Theological Seminary, and greater Manhattan. We are Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, unaffiliated, or unlabeled... It may seem as though we are so diverse that we could never be involved in the same activity. However, this year, we have become one cohesive group, the Columbia University Women's Tefillah... The issues have certainly arisen with regard to the halakhic aspects of such a group and the potential of our Women's Tefillah to divide the community. We have been very careful to follow the guideline of halakhah in every manner... For those of us who do participate, women's tefillah has provided us with the chance to lead *davening*, to read from the Torah, and to create beautiful melodies together."

The delight of the article's author can be juxtaposed against the anger and disappointment expressed by Rabbi Charles Sheer, Columbia University's Jewish chaplain, in his letter to the *Jewish Week* (reprinted in the same newsletter) in response to the decision of the Va'ad Ha-Rabbanim of Queens (Rabbinical Board) to forbid women's prayer groups. In this letter, he quotes passionately from the supportive response of Rabbi Yehiel Yaakov Weinberg to a query about Bat Mitzvah



celebrations (re: *Hukkot Ha-Goyyim* and *Mahloket*) and then implores the rabbinical group in Queens to reconsider their verdict.

Eliezer Berkovitz, in *Jewish Women in Time and Torah* (KTAV, 1990; p. 8), also cites the responsum of Rabbi Weinberg, concluding that, "all this also applies to the introduction of women's prayer services in our time. Their absence in the past does not mean that this should remain so for all time to come. It was in conformity with the prevailing conditions. The new practice does not offend what there was, for what there was is no more." Rabbi Avi Weiss (*Women at Prayer*, KTAV, 1990; p. 56) suggests that, "...women's tefillah groups are not an innovation, and not a new *minhag* (custom), because women's prayer services have been in existence for years... women's tefillah groups follow the same format as the women's yeshiva prayer groups - with one exception: the reading of the Torah from the Torah scroll." Weiss goes on to suggest that the women's prayer group has often been mislabeled as a women's *minyan*, thus confusing the very essence of the discussion of women's tefillah.

The controversy surrounding women's prayer groups reached a critical point in 1985 when five Talmudic scholars at Yeshiva University issued a responsum in which they concluded that women's prayer groups are forbidden according to Jewish law. This was quickly followed by two articles, appearing in the journal *Sh'ma*, highly critical of their position, and a stinging critique of the criticizers by Rabbi Kenneth Auman who made reference to Moshe Meiselman's *Jewish Women in Jewish Law*, which quotes Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik "as being opposed to women's prayer groups."

While the number of women's prayer groups in 1985 was objectively quite insignificant, today these groups meet throughout the U.S. and in Canada, Israel, Australia and England. At the S.A.R. Academy in Riverdale, N.Y., approximately 53% of the young women attaining the age of Bat Mitzvah in this current academic year have marked this event at a women's prayer service.

What is the role of the yeshiva day school, its administration and staff, in guiding its students and parents in the celebration of this rite of passage? Where is the intersection of halakhic permissibility and socio-cultural traditions and considerations? What is the nature of the link between feminism, modern Orthodoxy and women's prayer groups?

In an attempt to gain some insight into the attitudes of Jewish female college students toward women's prayer groups, an anonymous questionnaire was distributed to approximately 175 students at Yeshiva University's Stern College for Women. An analysis of the data indicates that while the level of individual prayer is strikingly high (86% of respondents pray daily), and the awareness of the issues surrounding women's prayer groups is significant, there appears to be a sense of ambivalence, confusion and rejection of women's prayer groups.

The level of participation in women's tefillah is minimal (77% had never attended such a group), and approximately 80% of those who have not attended would either not attend in the future or were doubtful about attending. Of those who have attended, only 17% said that they would attend again. Only 21% of the respondents felt that such groups are important and only 24% said they should exist. The overwhelming majority of those who pray in an Orthodox synagogue are content with their role in the service, and only 12% of those who had attended a women's prayer group felt more spiritually elevated than in a traditional service. Those who graduated a yeshiva high school were less likely to have attended as compared to those who only had an elementary school education, and those who attended a co-ed institution were more likely to have attended, than those who went to an all-female school. Clearly, the more closely one's educational experiences approximate a traditional Jewish orientation, the less likely is the person to have encountered a non-traditional venue for communal prayer.

While the perception of halakhic permissibility is slightly higher for those who have participated in the prayer group experience as compared to those who have not, the relationship between perceived halakhic permissibility and those variables that would affirm women's tefillah (attendance, importance, etc.) is absent. In fact, the data suggests that attendance or non-attendance, rejection or support, is not a function of perceived halakhic permissibility but rather of other socio-cultural, political and spiritual interests and considerations.

Confusion, ambivalence and apparent disapproval rule the day in the discussions surrounding women's prayer groups. 38% of those who have attended do not know if it is halakhically permissible as compared with 43% of those who have not attended. It is interesting to note that

while 35% of respondents said that a women's prayer group is halakhically permissible, only 25% said they should exist while the remaining 75% said they should not exist or were not sure. 34% of those who said they would attend again did not affirm that the group is halakhically permissible.

The advocates of women's prayer groups may be encouraged by what may be seen as a fluidity in attitudes that can be developed into support through appropriate channels of education and coherent ideology. The detractors of women's prayer groups may see in this data a sense of disenchantment and rejection with non-traditional venues for prayer. The issue, some may say, is not grounded in halakhic considerations, but is rather an expression of modern orthodoxy that rejects the feminism of contemporary culture in the arena of prayer.

#### Highlights of Major Findings

1. When asked about the frequency of prayer, 86% reported that they pray daily as compared to 7.5% on Shabbat only, 3.5% on High Holidays only, and 2.9% Not At All. The overwhelming majority of respondents are involved in daily prayer.
2. When questioned about their familiarity with the concept of women's prayer groups, 89% said Yes, 5.2% said No, and 5.8% were Not Sure.
3. The level of awareness can be contrasted with actual participation in a women's prayer group. 76.9% of respondents had never attended such a group while 23.1% had attended.
4. When those who had not attended a women's prayer group were asked if they would, 47.4% answered No, 13.3% Yes and 32.9% were Not Sure. Clearly the majority of students are expressing sentiments that reveal a rejection of, or ambivalence toward women's prayer groups.
5. When frequency of attendance is evaluated, a total of four (4) respondents, or 2.3% of the sample population, have attended more than five times.
6. Of those who *have* attended a women's prayer group, 57% have attended only once, 33% have attended two to five times, and 10% have attended more than five times.

7. Of those who have attended a women's prayer group, only 17% said that they would attend again as compared with 40% who said No, and 43% who were Not Sure. The rejection and/or ambivalence that was expressed by those who had *not* attended is also evident in the sentiment of those who *have* attended.
8. When questioned about the motivational factors for their attendance at a women's prayer group, 70% identified a Bat Mitzvah celebration or social circumstance, 14% attended because of curiosity, while 16% said they were guided by ideological or spiritual reasons.
9. When those who had attended a women's prayer group were asked if they felt more spiritually elevated than in a traditional synagogue service, 70% answered No, 12% said Yes, and 18% Don't Know.
10. When questioned about whether their attitudes toward these groups changed after their participation, 56% said No, 30% said "Yes," in a positive way, while 14% said "Yes," in a negative way.
11. The rejection and/or ambivalence toward women's prayer groups is amplified by the fact that 41% felt that these groups are Not Important, 35.8% were Not Sure, and 21% answered that they were Important.
12. Indeed, 38% said that women's prayer groups Should Not Exist, 36% were Not Sure, and 24% said they Should Exist.
13. The level of awareness regarding women's prayer groups is quite extensive, as evidenced by the fact that 75% of respondents indicated that they have discussed the halakhic (legal) issues surrounding this matter.
14. When asked whether they think that women's prayer groups are halakhically permissible, 41.6% said they Don't Know, 35% said Yes and 21% said No.
15. When asked whether they believe the issue of women's prayer groups creates unnecessary conflict, 53% said Yes, 25% said No, and 21% said they Don't Know.
16. 87% of those who pray in an Orthodox synagogue feel content with their role in the service, as compared with 13% who do not.
17. When asked whether the current status of women in Orthodox Judaism necessitates a need for change, 68% said No, 20% said Yes and 12% said they Don't Know.

18. It is interesting to note that 43% of those who only attended a Jewish elementary school had attended a women's prayer group, as compared to the attendance figure of 22% for those who had also attended a Yeshiva high school.
19. While the total number of respondents who identified themselves as Reform Jews was quite small, 60% of those individuals had attended a prayer group as compared with a figure of 22% for Orthodox respondents.
20. 31% of respondents who had attended a co-ed Yeshiva high school had attended a women's prayer group, as compared with 17% of those who had attended an all-female institution.
21. 30% of those who *had* attended a women's prayer group thought that such groups were important, as compared to 19% of those who had *not* attended.
22. As might be expected, 52% of respondents who *have* attended a women's prayer group believe they are halakhically permissible, as compared to a figure of 30% of those who have *not* attended.
23. 43% of those who said they would *not* attend a women's prayer group a second time believe the group to be permissible, as compared to 66% of those who said they *would* attend again.
24. 26% of upperclassmen see a need for change in the current status of women in Orthodox Judaism, as compared to an 11% figure for younger females (underclassmen).

The author would like to thank Mrs. Lisi Lasko Wolfson for her assistance in data collection and analysis.

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## THE HALAKHAH CORNER: Addressing a Teacher by Name

In times gone by there was a palpable distance between teacher and student. Convention dictated that the relationship be formal. In such a relationship it was self-evident that a student's reverence for a teacher would preclude any consideration of addressing the teacher by name. In recent times the teacher-student relationship has become far less formal. Indeed, development of a certain degree of camaraderie is regarded in many circles as pedagogically desirable. In some universities, particularly at the graduate level, students are encouraged to interact with their professors on a first name basis. Halakhah, on the other hand, is certainly not supportive of such conduct vis-à-vis a teacher of Torah.

The Gemara, *Kiddushin* 31b, records a prohibition against addressing or referring to one's father or Torah teacher by name. Referring to parents or teachers by name is prohibited after the death of those individuals as well as during their lifetimes. This aspect of the respect that must be accorded a parent or teacher is codified in *Shulhan Arukh*, *Yoreh De'ah* 240:2 and *Yoreh De'ah* 242:15.

Transgression of this stricture marks the violator not simply as an individual who is lax with regard to a particular commandment, but as a person who has rejected religious discipline. The Gemara, *Sanhedrin* 100a, declares that one who addresses a teacher by name is an *apikores*, i.e., a person who has freed himself from the restraint of divine law. R. Joshua adds the comment that Gehazi was punished (II Kings 8:5) because he had referred to his teacher, Elisha, by name.

Rashi, *ad locum*, s.v. *bi-shmo*, asserts that the prohibition against referring to one's teacher by name applies only when the reference does not include an appropriate title. Thus, according to Rashi, if one adds a title, i.e., "my master, Rabbi so and so," it is permitted to refer to a teacher by name. *Kesef Mishneh*, *Hilkhos Talmud Torah* 5:5, cites Num-

bers 11:28 in support of Rashi's position. Upon hearing Eldad and Medad prophesying within the camp, Joshua said to Moses, "Adoni Moshe kela'em-My Lord Moses, destroy them." Kesef Mishneh is troubled by the fact that Joshua addressed Moshe Rabbenu by name. That difficulty is dispelled in light of Rashi's comment indicating that it is permissible to call one's teacher by name provided that the name is linked with an appropriate title since Joshua addressed Moses as "Adoni Moshe-My Lord Moses," rather than simply as "Moshe."

Rema, *Yoreh De'ah* 242:15, similarly rules that the prohibition against addressing a teacher by name applies only when that name is used in a familiar manner. However, when accompanied by a prefatory honorific such as "rabbi mori ploni-my master, my teacher so and so," use of a teacher's name is permitted. *Shakh*, *Yoreh De'ah* 242:24, limits that leniency in declaring that Rema's ruling applies only in a situation in which the student refers to the teacher other than in the teacher's presence (*she-lo be-fanav*). In his presence (*be-fanav*), however, the teacher should be addressed simply as "Rabbi-my master." *Shakh* adds that such is the common practice.

*Shakh's* ruling is accepted by R. Ezekiel Landau, *Tselah on Berakhot* 4a; R. Ya'akov Ettlinger, *She'elot u-Teshuvot Binyan Zion*, no. 84; *Tiferet Yisra'el*, *Kiddushin* 1:54; and *Arukh ha-Shulhan*, *Yoreh De'ah* 242:37. However, R. Akiva Eger, in his glosses to the *Shulhan Arukh*, *ad locum*, citing the comments of *Pri Hadash*, maintains that when the name is coupled with a title, it is permitted to address a teacher by name even in his presence. In support of that permissive view, *Pri Hadash* cites the previously mentioned biblical account which records that Joshua addressed Moses by name. The use of the imperative "kela'em-destroy them" indicates that Joshua was addressing Moses in his presence. *Pithei Teshuvah* 242:10 notes that *Regel Yesharah* is in agreement with that position. This permissive view is also accepted by R. Chaim Joseph David Azulai in his *Birkei Yosef*, *Yoreh De'ah* 242:17 and in his *Shiyurei Berakhah*, *Yoreh De'ah* 242:9. This position is also espoused by *Mishneh le-Melekh* in his *Parashat Derakhim*, *Derush Derekh Anavim*, no. 15, p. 67, and of Rabbi Zevi Pesach Frank in a note appended to his *Har Zevi al ha-Torah*, *Parashat Va-Yeshev*.<sup>1</sup>

It might appear that, to all intents and purposes, the disagreement among the authorities with regard to this matter is academic since

*Shulhan Arukh*, *Yoreh De'ah* 242:30, rules that all the halakhic provisions concerning honoring one's teacher are limited to a "rav muvhak" who is defined as a person from whom one has acquired the major portion of one's wisdom. It would then follow that a teacher who is not a *rav muvhak* may be addressed by name. It is generally accepted that, in our era, in light of the ready availability of, and reliance upon, published works, a teacher who merely directs study and provides guidance in understanding those works is not regarded as a *rav muvhak*.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, since in our day a teacher does not enjoy the status of a *rav muvhak*, it is permissible to address a teacher by name even without an accompanying title.<sup>3</sup> However, at least according to one authority, *Tselah*, *Berakhot* 4a, such a conclusion is incorrect.

*Mishneh le-Melekh*, in his *Parashat Derakhim*, *Derekh Anavim*, no. 15 (p. 67), finds talmudic support for the principle that a teacher may be addressed by name provided that the name is coupled with an appropriate honorific. *Parashat Derakhim* cites the comments of the Gemara, *Berakhot* 4a, amplifying King David's plea, "Safeguard my life, for I am a *hasid*" (Psalms 86:2). The Gemara indicates that, in declaring himself to be a *hasid* (pious person), King David contrasted his comportment with that of the non-Jewish monarchs of his day. Those monarchs were wont to assemble themselves as a group in order to be accorded honor. But, declared King David, "I soil my hands with bloodstains in order to determine that a woman is permitted to engage in marital relations with her husband. Moreover, in everything that I do, I consult with Mephibosheth, my teacher, and I say to him, 'Mephibosheth, my teacher, did I rule correctly?'" In this statement, King David reports that he addressed Mephibosheth by name. Accordingly, *Parashat Derakhim* infers that the prohibition against addressing a teacher by name is limited to use of the teacher's name without a prefatory honorific.<sup>4</sup>

R. Ezekiel Landau, in his commentary on *Berakhot*, *Tselah*, *ad locum*, observes that *Parashat Derakhim's* explanation is not consistent with the earlier cited ruling of *Shakh*, *Yoreh De'ah* 242:24, to the effect that it is forbidden to address one's teacher by name in his presence even if he is also accorded a proper title. Hence, accordingly to *Shakh*, since King David was conversing with Mephibosheth, it would have been prohibited for King David to refer to him even as "Mephiboshet rabbi."

In resolving the problem posed by *Parashat Derakhim*, *Tselah* asserts that Mephibosheth was not King David's principal teacher. *Tselah* asserts that Irah the Jairite was King David's primary teacher or *rav muvhak*.<sup>5</sup> According to *Tselah*, King David's relationship with Mephibosheth was that of a *talmid haver*, i.e., a junior colleague who studies with a more accomplished scholar. *Tselah* argues that a *talmid haver* owes his mentor a duty of honor, albeit not as great as that owed to a *rav muvhak*: Unlike a student addressing a *rav muvhak*, a *talmid haver* may address his mentor by name provided that he accords him a proper title. It follows, a *fortiori*, that an ordinary student may not address a teacher who is not his *rav muvhak* by name unless he also employs an appropriate honorific. *Tselah's* position is somewhat problematic in that *Tselah* offers no further evidence in support of that view, nor is such a duty of honor reflected in any earlier halakhic source.<sup>6</sup> According to *Tselah*, it would follow that although most contemporary teachers do not have the status of a *rav muvhak*, they do enjoy a status at least equal to that of a senior colleague and therefore, according to *Tselah*, a student is permitted to address his teacher by name only if the name is accompanied by a proper title.<sup>7</sup>

A contemporary authority, Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, reaches the same conclusion for a different reason. Going beyond the normative views expressed in earlier sources, Rabbi Yosef observes that in the talmudic era, the term "Rabbi" was used solely to describe a personal relationship but not as a general honorific appellation. However, now that the term "Rabbi" is used as a title, Rabbi Yosef opines that a student should refer to his teacher, even though he is not a *rav muvhak*, by the title Rabbi, even when the teacher is not present. Rabbi Yosef adds that, although this practice may not be halakhically mandated, nevertheless, since the honor of Torah scholars is so often debased in our day, effort should be made to enhance the dignity of Torah by appending the title Rabbi to the name of a teacher of Torah.<sup>8</sup> With or without a source, Rabbi Yosef's recommendation reflects the courtesies, etiquette and common practice of our day.<sup>9</sup>

Although Rabbi Yosef does not base his comment upon any compelling halakhic principle, it appears to this writer that there does exist one source that provides support for Rabbi Yosef's position. *Sefer ha-Kovetz* on Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhhot Talmud Torah* 5:5, seeks to resolve

the problem posed by *Shakh* with regard to the position of the authorities who maintain that it is prohibited to refer to a teacher by name in his presence even if a title is added. As noted, the problem is that Joshua addressed Moses as "Adoni Moshe" in Moses' presence. *Sefer ha-Kovetz* notes that, in declaring that it is improper to call a teacher by name even with a title, *Shakh* adds the comment "and such is the custom (*ve-khen nohagin*)."<sup>10</sup> *Sefer ha-Kovetz* asserts that those words are intended to convey the notion that such an act might well be biblically permissible, but that later generations realized that proper honor was not being paid to the Torah and to Torah scholars and therefore adopted the more stringent practice in order to enhance the honor of their teachers. Thus, it is only by virtue of that custom that they refrain from addressing a *rav muvhak* by name in his presence even in a permitted fashion, i.e., even with an accompanying title.<sup>10</sup> It may be similarly argued that, in recent times, students have adopted the practice of not referring to any teacher by name without an accompanying title as a means of enhancing the prestige and honor of Torah scholars.

One further point: Although most authorities agree that, in our era, there is no *rav muvhak*, there are a number of authorities who maintain that teachers of students in their formative years do indeed have the status of a *rav muvhak*. *Ben Ish Hai, shanah bet, Parashat Ki Tetzei*, no. 11, observes that given the definition of a *rav muvhak* as the person from whom one has acquired the major portion of one's knowledge, a person who is relatively unlearned may have a *rav muvhak* to whom he owes appropriate respect, while a more proficient scholar may not have a *rav muvhak*. Thus, an individual who has achieved proficiency in the Written Law but not in Talmud must relate to the teacher who has instructed him in the material that he has mastered as a *rav muvhak* since the bulk of his limited knowledge has been derived from one person. Accordingly, it would follow that a young student who has not yet mastered advanced texts must regard the teacher from whom he has gained the major portion of his knowledge as his *rav muvhak*.

Another consideration is advanced by R. Malkiel Zevi Tennenbaum, *Teshuvot Divrei Malki'el*, II, no. 74, who argues that identification of a *rav muvhak* as the individual from whom one has acquired the bulk of one's knowledge applies only after an individual has completed his studies and no longer requires the tutelage of a mentor. However, argues

*Divrei Malki'el*, so long as a student is actually studying under a teacher, the fact that an individual is currently the student's teacher endows the instructor with the status of *rabbo muvhak*. *Divrei Malki'el* himself concedes that his opinion represents a *hiddush*, i.e., a novel halakhic determination.

### Conclusion

Although, according to most authorities, contemporary teachers do not have the halakhic status of a *rav muvhak* and, therefore, a student may address them by name, the minority opinion of *Tselah* is that even a teacher who is not a *rav muvhak* may be addressed by name only when coupled with a suitable title. As has been emphasized by R. Ovadiah Yosef, use of an honorific certainly serves to enhance the honor due the Torah. Hence, although addressing a teacher by name is not regarded by most authorities as an halakhic infraction, there are ample halakhic grounds for encouraging students to use an appropriate title in addressing or referring to a teacher.

### ENDNOTES

1. Cf. the comments of R. Shlomo Luria, *Yam shel Shlomoh*, *Kiddushin* 1:65. See also the lengthy discussion of this topic by R. Pesach Eliyahu Falk, *Am ha-Torah*, *Mahadura Telita'i*, no. 7 (5752), pp. 57-58 and Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, *Yabi'a Omer*, I, *Yoreh De'ah*, no. 18, secs. 9, 10 and 12.
2. See *Shevut Ya'akov*, II, no. 64 and *Hokhmat Adam* 104:1, who declare explicitly that in our day there is no *rav muvhak*. See also the comments of *Pithei Teshuvah*, *Yoreh De'ah* 242:3, as well as the remarks of Rabbi Falk, *Am ha-Torah*, *ibid.*, p. 65.
3. Cf., however, *Shulhan Arukh*, *Yoreh De'ah* 244:10. *Shulhan Arukh* rules that a scholar who is renowned for his wisdom must be regarded as a *rav muvhak* even by an individual who is not the person's student. Rema, *ad locum*, adds that a scholar who is acknowledged by the public at large as the *gadol ha-dor* has the status of a *rav muvhak*.
4. For a fuller discussion of this issue and alternative resolutions to the problem, see *Perashat Derakhim*, *ad locum*.
5. See *Targum*, 2 Samuel 20:26 and Rashi, *Eruvin* 63a. See also *Mo'ed Katan* 16b.
6. See also *Sedei Hemed*, *Ma'arekhet ha-Chaf*, klal 104, who also takes note of this problem. With regard to the status of a *talmid haver* for another matter of religious law see Rema, *Yoreh De'ah* 340: 8.

7. For a more extensive discussion of the position of *Tselah* see *Sedei Hemed*, *Ma'arekhet ha-Khaf*, klal 104; *Yabi'a Omer*, *Yoreh De'ah*, I, no. 18, secs. 9 and 10; as well as Rabbi Ya'akov Sher, *Sefer Birkat Ya'akov*, *Berakhot*, *ad locum*, who disagrees strongly with the view of *Tselah*.
8. See *Yabi'a Omer*, *Yoreh De'ah*, I, no. 18, sec. 11. This ruling is also recorded in *Hilkhot Kibbud Av va-Em*, *Kavod Rabbo*, *Talmid Hakham ve-Zaken: Pishei Rav Ovadiah Yosef* (Maaleh Adumim, 1989), pp. 61-62.
9. This ruling is endorsed by Rabbi Joel Schwartz in his useful compendium, *Hadar Zekeinim*, *Dinei Kevod Hakham ve-Zaken* (Jerusalem, 1986), p. 120.
10. See also *Shevet ha-Levi*, *Yoreh De'ah*, I, no. 183, *Shakh*, no. 24. *Sefer ha-Kovetz* adds that this stringency was adopted lest someone enter the room in the midst of a conversation and hear a person addressing the teacher by name but not hear the prefatory title. However, *Sefer ha-Kovetz* concedes that this concern is far-fetched.

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## A HESPEID FOR NEHAMA LEIBOWITZ

*The hespeid was delivered at a Yom Iyyun / memorial tribute  
on the Sheloshim of Professor Nehama Leibowitz's death,  
Wednesday, May 14, 1997.*

As you all know, thirty days ago a great person and a great teacher of Torah passed away. Hazal teach us: *hakham shemet hakol krovav*. When a great person dies, everybody should feel the loss as though the deceased had been a close relative. For that reason, and in order to draw inspiration from her remarkable life, we gathered here today to share some thoughts on an outstanding woman, Nehama Leibowitz.

It was reported in the Jerusalem Post that, according to her will, the simple inscription on her tombstone read *Nehama Leibowitz, Morah*. Nehama Leibowitz, a teacher. The simplicity of this description is a reflection of her sincere and unusual modesty. Nevertheless, the one simple word *morah* really does capture the essence of her remarkable contribution to the Jewish people. Perhaps one letter should have been added, an extra *hey*, *hamorah*, to offer testimony that she was not only a *morah*, she was *the morah*, the teacher par excellence. Let me suggest several criteria by which a teacher can be judged, and according to which Nehama Leibowitz was the outstanding teacher of Torah.

You have probably heard the expression: *Ayn Melekh B'lo Am*. One can't be a king without a nation. Similarly one can't be a teacher without students. In other words, having students is the first and foremost requirement for someone to be called a teacher. And very few people had as many students as Nehama Leibowitz. Almost thirty years ago, when I first began to teach *Humash*, I asked my father-in-law if he had

any good *sefarim* which might help me. He had a library with thousands of *sefarim*, and yet I recall that for a while, he couldn't think of anything in particular to recommend. Then, suddenly, he remembered that he had kept a file of *gilyonot*, lecture notes on *parshat hashavua*, that had been sent to him each week from Israel over several years, written by a woman named Nehama Leibowitz. That was my first introduction to her work, and for many years I felt that I possessed some private treasure which few people were aware of. When my family and I spent a sabbatical year in Israel in 1979, I found out that what was something of a secret in America was no secret in Israel. Nehama Leibowitz's *gilyonot* were studied on a weekly basis by thousands of Israelis, soldiers in the army, students, and people in every walk of life. She taught courses at the Hebrew University, which were packed, as well as many private classes in all sorts of locations. And she would go gladly wherever there were people who wanted to study Torah. At the time she was already in her 70's, and yet I recall her telling our class that next week she would be doing her "reserve duty". The Israeli army was sending a helicopter to fly her to one of the remote bases in the Negev, in order to lecture to the soldiers there. After living for a year in Jerusalem, we spent the last month of our sabbatical in Tel-Aviv, a city not known primarily as a center of Torah learning. Just before we returned to America, at the end of Elul, posters appeared around the city announcing an upcoming lecture by Nehama Leibowitz on *Akedat Yitzhak*, the Torah reading for Rosh Hashana. I wondered how many people would show up in Tel-Aviv on a summer night to study a *parshah* of *Humash*. To my surprise, the shul was mobbed by hundreds of people who had come, most of them carrying a *Tanakh* in hand, to learn with Nehama Leibowitz. But Prof. Leibowitz didn't need a large crowd to inspire her to teach. Last year, while visiting our daughter who was studying in Israel, we took her to meet Professor Leibowitz at her apartment. Toward the end of our visit, a young man stopped by. It turned out that he belonged to a non-religious kibbutz, but had become a *hozer b'tshuvha* through the influence of Prof. Leibowitz's work. There was no one on his kibbutz with whom he could study, and he was too far away from Yerushalayim to attend a *shiur* on a regular basis, but whenever he could take a day off from work, he would travel several hours each way to study privately with Nehama.

Prof. Leibowitz herself noted in one of her essays that teaching is not as simple as pouring from a full barrel into an empty one. It takes great talent to prepare a lesson that will engage the mind of the student and enable him or her to learn. Part of that talent is the ability to constantly challenge students, to raise the right questions, to point out the intriguing paradoxes. And nobody did that better than Nehama. At the end of her lectures notes, she almost always added additional questions to inspire further thinking and analysis. For dozens of years, suggested answers to these questions would arrive at her mailbox every week from all around Israel, and she would respond personally to each one of them. Another important requirement of any great teacher is the ability to identify the key point, the crux of the matter being discussed. This, in fact, is implied in the word *morah*, which is related to the Hebrew root *yud-reish-hey, yaroh*, to shoot or aim at a target. Like a good marksman, a teacher has to be able to locate the central point, and Nehama constantly shows how one key point or issue serves to unify or distinguish the ideas expressed by various commentators.

Even though Nehama Leibowitz's essays are based very much on classical and modern commentators, her own ideas and personality emerge from her writings as well. One very prominent feature of her work is her great love of Eretz Yisrael, and her appreciation of the special relationship between Eretz Yisrael and the Jewish people. In this area, her philosophy could be seen in the way she lived as well as in her teaching. About fifteen years ago, I called Nehama and invited her to come to America as the guest of Bat Torah Academy, and to honor us as a scholar-in-residence at any time convenient to her. I can still recall her exact response: *At hoshevet she'ani aazov et Haaretz! Has V'shalom! K'var alpayim shanah bagolah. Maspik!* (Do you think that I would leave Eretz Yisrael? G-d Forbid! We've been in the Golah for 2000 years. Enough!) On the other hand, Nehama could never turn down an opportunity to teach people who wanted to learn from her. So she added, *Tishlehi et habanot la'aretz va'ani alamed otan po.* (Send your students to Israel, and I'll teach them over here.)

Nehama was a very private person, and not much is known about her personal life. We do know, however, that she was never blessed with children. In one of her essays discussing our ancestress Rachel, she writes about the two roles which are given to women. One, implied in

the name *Havah*, is the woman's role as a mother. The other role, implied by the name *Ishah*, is the role that women perform as the partner of man in every other creative activity. Judged on a purely intellectual level, Nehama Leibowitz's works would have to be ranked among the most outstanding works of a generation. She certainly made a remarkable contribution to the intellectual life, to the culture, of her generation. She was a great *Ishah*. But like all great teachers of Torah, her accomplishments go way beyond that, for she had the ability to engage the hearts of her students as well. This ability to make an impact on a student is why *Hazal* tell us: "One who teaches Torah to his friend's child is viewed as though he had given birth to that child." So, in a very strong spiritual sense, she fulfilled the role of *Havah* as well. And for that, all of us who had the privilege of learning from her, all of her spiritual descendants, are eternally indebted to her. *Yehi zikhrach barukh.*



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## BOOK REVIEWS - JEWISH HISTORY

### **Understanding Jewish History:**

*Texts and Commentaries*, by Steven Bayme,  
(Ktav, Hoboken, New Jersey, 1997)

### **Modern Jewish History for Everyone:**

by David Bianco (*History for Everyone*,  
Los Angeles, California, 1997)

For years, Jewish History teachers have bemoaned the lack of choices of textbooks for their classes. Torn between Grayzel's voluminous *History of the Jews* and Artscroll's partisan presentation of Jewish History, many teachers resorted to "cut and paste" techniques to build a collection of materials they considered usable. Two recently published books significantly broaden the horizon in this underserved field of study.

Steven Bayme's *Understanding Jewish History: Texts and Commentaries* was not written as a high school textbook, rather, as a guide to adults and college students attending lectures on Jewish History. The language is generally suitable to upper high school grades (although it could use a glossary for some of the more obtuse words and foreign phrases that dot the volume), and the book is far more readable than some of the other texts currently in use. Each chapter concludes with an appropriate reading of primary source material and is accompanied by a broad bibliography for further research. The value of the book as a classroom text would be greatly enhanced if accompanied by a teacher's guide, as

well as by review questions at the end of each chapter. While not as comprehensive or fact-filled as other history texts, it is certainly more comprehensible. With access to a broad range of scholarship — biblical, rabbinic, historical, sociological and archaeological — Bayme presents a broad sweep of Jewish History "from the biblical covenant to contemporary relations between Israel and world Jewry."

This book represents a significant departure from the classical history text. Bayme is not as interested in names and dates as he is in interpreting events with a particular focus on the relevance of that interpretation to contemporary Jewish life. Virtually every chapter has a discussion of the events that will ring familiar notes in the ears of the reader, and the connection to contemporary society is often made. This feature sets the book apart, and is both the volume's greatest strength as well as its most significant weakness.

Clearly, understanding why one needs to learn Jewish History is one of the most significant hurdles faced in the classroom. By the time the reader has completed the first two or three chapters finding relevance is no longer a challenge, as the book abounds with relevance. Using this text, any competent teacher can build entire lessons in contemporary Judaism with the students researching the ancient origins of modern issues. For example, within the first fifty pages parallels are drawn between Avraham living in a pagan world and modern minorities surviving in democratic majorities, moral dilemmas posed by the displacement of the ancient Canaanites by Yehoshua and the displacement of Palestinians by the modern State of Israel, the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash and the Shoah, and the return to Zion in the days of Ezra and modern day Zionism.

As the reader progresses through the volume, the sense that "the contemporary Jewish condition comprises an outgrowth of the sum of its experience" emerges from the text, and it is abundantly clear that a significant goal of the book is to gain insight into contemporary Jewry based on an understanding of its history. Clearly twenty-five percent of the book focuses on the last two hundred years, and there seems to be a preoccupation with modernity. The modern condition, as defined by Bayme, relates to Jewish life in an era in which rabbinic and communal authority has collapsed and Jewish identity and practice are volitional in nature. In this context, the struggle between the Zedukim and

Perushim serves as an ancient precursor of modernity, as does the Karaite schism. Fascinatingly, Bayme sees in the Marranos early models of Jewish attempts to grapple with modernity, followed by Sabbetianism and Hasidut as further developments in the process eventually erupting with what he terms the "Old Orthodoxy" of the *Hatam Sofer*, the neo-Orthodoxy of Hirsch and the emergence of the German Reform.

With such a strong emphasis on analyzing history the volume skimps on facts and details, often assuming that the reader is already familiar with some of the core material. This helps make the book very readable, but sometimes leaves the reader wishing that the "missing pieces" would be filled in. As such, no teacher can rely on this being the students' sole textbook, and the book demands that the teacher do a significant amount of preparation beyond the text.

The thematic presentation of the book offers a number of other advantages and disadvantages. While the chapters basically follow a chronological order, there are times when thematic order prevails. This enhances thematic clarity and helps develop ideas, but can lead to chronological confusion. For example, the chapter titled "Destruction and Renewal" (of the second Bet Hamikdash) extends well into the second century CE, but precedes the chapter on the origins of Christianity.

Any presentation that is thematic in nature will necessarily be selective in which themes are developed, and the choice of themes will help determine one's view of the usability of the book in a particular setting. The first third of the book is devoted to understanding the unique contributions of Judaism to humanity and the things that set Judaism apart from the rest of the world - monotheism vs. paganism, rationalist vs. mystical and magical understandings of the world, a contrast of the world view of *Sefer Kohelet* to Greek philosophy, to name a few. Later chapters focus heavily on internal Jewish factionalism and sectarianism. Significantly, there are two chapters on messianism, two on sectarianism, five on Christianity and two on Islam - yet not a single chapter devoted to the Talmudic era.

Aside from the obvious themes, there are a number of threads that seem to run throughout the book, themes that may be appropriate for the book's primary audience — college students and adults attending a lecture series on Jewish History— but less so for the Orthodox day

school student. One almost senses that the book is meant as a training manual for the lay leadership of the American Jewish community. The book is heavy with models of Israeli-Diaspora cooperation (Chapter 4), how an ethnic minority is to behave while living within a majority culture (pp. 5, 51), tolerance and acceptance of diversity (pp. 18, 57, 142, 171), diplomacy and cooperation with the authorities (as opposed to rebellion, pp. 35, 54, 80, 92-96), universalism (p.26, Chap. 24, 25), affirmation of the Diaspora (pp. 41, 141-148, 177, 235), Christian-Jewish cooperation and tolerance (pp. 168-169, 226-228, 389), concern about intermarriage (pp. 42-43, 276), medieval precursors to UJA-Federation (p. 224) and even a defense of Roosevelt's actions vis a vis the Shoah (pp.389-390).

This is not to say that the author is insensitive to Orthodox or traditional sensitivities. While the book takes some liberties in interpreting the flexibility of halakha (pp. 64, 225-226) and questions the traditional authorship and historicity of the *megillot* (pp. 38, 42, 52, 361), there is no hostility to Rabbinic tradition or Orthodoxy. The book praises the leadership of the Perushim, quotes freely from rabbinic tradition, and presents contemporary Orthodoxy as a vibrant model to be emulated by other streams within Judaism. While some traditionalists may feel uncomfortable with certain aspects of the book, the presentation of contemporary conflicts within Judaism is honest, balanced and fair, highlighting the positions of each with their apparent strengths and weaknesses.

As noted earlier, the emphasis on themes is both the book's strength and weakness. At times it seems that this is not a book of Jewish History as much as it is a book on Jewish Philosophy with historical references. The chapters dealing with Covenant, Creation, Redemption (1), Origins of Christianity (9), The Church and the Jews (10), Jewry and Islam (11) and Medieval Jewish Philosophy and Islam (13) are almost exclusively philosophic in nature, as well as half of the chapters dealing with The Marrano Phenomenon (18), Hasidism (21), The Decline of the Medieval Kehilla (22), Reform Judaism (24), Neo-Orthodoxy (25) and Conservative Judaism and Reconstructionism (30). In pursuing repeating themes (what the author calls continuity), those elements which do not fit into the framework are omitted. There is almost no discussion of the Talmud, little attention to medieval figures, and while there is an

entire chapter on the decline of the medieval kehilla, almost no discussion of the kehilla itself.

As the author himself notes in the introduction, in a book of this nature and scope, omissions are expected and excusable if the book is to remain manageable in size. As its title suggests, it is an interpretation of Jewish History rather than a comprehensive presentation of facts. Often, the analysis is insightful and creative and often shines. For example, the chapters on modern anti-Semitism and the Shoah present a perceptive depth touching the core of the issues. The clarity of the philosophic discussions outlined above is especially good, as are the elucidations on the origins of Zionism and the Haskalah.

Any book that presents a particular interpretation of history has significant value. For those who agree with the analysis, that volume is their guide. For those who disagree with the analysis, the book serves as a vehicle for valuable discussion. While this book may not be the final analysis of Jewish History, it is a worthwhile vehicle for starting the discussion. Even more than the specific conclusions he reaches, the approach to Jewish History is refreshing. As such, Dr. Bayme has made a worthwhile contribution to the educational community.



Quite different is David Bianco's *Modern Jewish History for Everyone*. Essentially modeled in the style of traditional textbooks, this text uses a variety of didactic tools and aids to make it more functional, both for the student and the teacher. The novelty here is that a standard textbook approach is applied to Jewish History.

To be sure, this was written as a classroom-oriented textbook, and its content level is suitable for high school classes, although probably not for advanced level eleventh or twelfth grades. It is unquestionably user friendly, and this is clearly its strength. Starting with the late eighteenth century Europe, continuing through the Shoah and Zionism, and culminating with an overview of contemporary American Jewry, Bianco presents basic factual material that effectively introduces the student to each era. Each of the seven sections is subdivided into smaller, easy to read units. The subsections are between four and six pages long, and neither the writing style nor the vocabulary are complex. Each subsection is framed by questions in the beginning to guide

the reader and review questions at the end to enhance comprehension, some of which challenge the student to apply historical knowledge to contemporary issues. At the conclusion of each chapter there is also a review of terms (and names) to identify, as well as a suggested research project. Throughout each section are interesting sidebars — "Controversies in History," "Contemporary Jewish Issues," "Connections with World History," "In Their Own Words," and "Jewish Historical Profiles" — which, aside from their intrinsic value, make the page more graphically appealing and break up the reading. The text is accompanied by appropriate maps, charts, time lines, graphs and illustrations, again enhancing the book's readability.

While presentation was clearly a concern of the author and publisher, accounting for the many graphical enhancements to the page, there are some production quality issues which should be addressed in future editions. The text is occasionally fuzzy, and pictures are not clear. On a number of pages the margin was too close to the binding, so that words got swallowed in the binding.

Bianco scrupulously avoids being judgmental or taking sides on issues, letting the readers decide for themselves what conclusions to draw. In the process, however, many of the ideological arguments that have fueled the internal dynamic of the Jewish community seem pale and without passion, and are not likely to stir the passions of the reader. The book breaks no new ground in the areas of historical scholarship or interpretation and does not seem interested in challenging accepted notions. It is strong on breadth but its evenhanded approach denies it any element of analysis or interpretation of the events, and while the organization of the volume and layout of the page are designed to ease reading, the dryness of the text demands those accompaniments. Missing from the book is any sort of bibliography, so that students who wish to explore past the text or engage in any of the suggested projects need outside help to even begin the process.

In a sense Bianco's and Bayme's books are excellent companion volumes, at least for the modern era, as each one is strong precisely in the areas of weakness of the other. Insofar as Bayme skimps on background facts, Bianco fills those in; and while Bianco is missing an analysis of those facts, Bayme does that skillfully. Bianco's readings are short and manageable, whereas Bayme's require more time and thought.

Bianco is interested in presenting answers to "who," "what," "where" and "when," while Bayme explores the issue "why." Bayme contributes a bibliography and Bianco adds didactic tools. The combination of the two volumes provides the teacher with a reservoir of resources that could begin to change the way we teach and think about Jewish History.

Now if someone wanted to combine the strengths of both in a single work . . .

Moshe Sokolow

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## BOOK REVIEWS

**Dov Rappel:**

**Mehkarim Bemikra Ubehinukh**

**Mugashim Liprofessor**

**Moshe Ahrend**

*(Studies in Bible and Education Presented to Professor Moshe Ahrend)*

*Jerusalem: Touro College, 1996; 367 pp.*

Moshe Ahrend is an extraordinary educator who exemplifies the best of *lilmod ulelammed*. For over forty years he has shared his erudition and pedagogical sensitivity through his numerous articles and books (some of which I have reviewed in previous issues of TEN DA'AT—see the index which appears in this volume), and through his lectures at Bar-Ilan University, Seminar Lifshitz, and Touro College in Jerusalem. The volume under present consideration contains essays presented to him by colleagues and students in honor of his 70th birthday.

The list of contributors to this volume reads like a "Who's Who" of Prof. Ahrend's two fields of specialization: Tanakh, and Hinukh. In choosing which essays to review in detail I tried to focus on those with useful pedagogic applications, although I confess that I was influenced by personal preference, as well.

### Part One: The Bible and its Exegesis

Sixteen essays comprise this first half of the festschrift, including linguistic notes (Menahem Zvi Kedari, Moshe Sharon), poetic and

prophetic passages (Meir Weiss, Amos Hakham, Aharon Mirsky), and analyses of the contributions of medieval exegetes (Aharon Ahrend, Avraham Grossman, Elazar Touito, Uriel Simon, Amos Frish, Shalom Rosenberg, Shimon Stauber). Comparative studies are offered in piyyut (Shulamit Elitzur), Tefillah (Mordechai Breuer), liturgy (Yaakov Spiegel), and world literature (Harel Fish).

1. Mordechai Breuer describes how the six *berakhah* components of *Barukh she'Amar* are related to God's providence and omnipotence as exemplified in Creation, the Exodus, and the Revelation of the Law at Sinai.
2. Meir Weiss discusses the linguistic and literary analysis of Psalm 6 (*Tahanun*), including a table representing its structure.
3. Uriel Simon defines Ibn Ezra's loyalty to language and reason with illustrations from the Prologue to the commentary, and selected interpretations.
4. Amos Frisch gives a brief, introductory, survey of the commentaries of Rabbis Shemuel Laniado, Rephael Berdugo, and Samson Rephael Hirsch as part of a reevaluation of *parshanut* in the 16th-19th centuries.

#### Part Two: Education and Tuition

Another sixteen essays comprise this second half of the festschrift, including: Musar study (Yitzhak Aharon); The Academy of the Hebrew Language (Moshe Bar Asher); Bible in the Yeshivah (Mordechai Breuer); teaching Mishnah (Avraham Zalkin); Piyyut (Ephraim Hazan); Bible (Gavriel H. Cohen); the Geography of Israel (Yosef Shelhav); and bookstores (Dov Rappel).

I have, again, chosen four essays to describe in greater detail:

1. Moshe Bar Asher describes the history of the "Akademiyah" and correlates its functions (e.g., coining words, standardizing grammar) with the direction it tries to provide modern Hebrew.
2. Mordechai Breuer marshals an estimable array of sources on the role of Bible in the yeshiva curriculum from Spain and Provence in the Middle Ages, through Italy and Candia of the early modern period, and down to Lithuania of the 19-20th centuries.

3. Avraham Zalkin describes the educational consequences of utilizing different commentaries to Mishnah (Bertinoro, Rambam, Kehati), and provides a sample lesson— including structural charts— based upon the first *perek* of Makkot.
4. Gabi Cohen takes up the challenge of designing a Bible program for all Israeli schools, focusing on "*peshat*" but acknowledging the need to remain within the perimeters established by Hazal. He illustrates his theoretical guidelines with the study of the story of Cain and Abel.



### Moshe Ahrend, Avraham Zalkin: Religious Education and The Inclination to be Stringent (Hebrew)

Tel Aviv: Bar Ilan University Press, 1996,; 77 pp.,

In Spring, 1993, the Rabbi Dr. David Ochs Chair (in Teaching Jewish Studies) at Bar-Ilan University, organized a conference on the subject of: "Religious Education and the Inclination to be Stringent." The participants examined the question of the proper place of stringency in the framework of Jewish education which has, lately, stirred some consternation and provoked some tensions. During discussions, different perspectives were offered on the question, including halakhic, historical, sociological, and pedagogic.

The book under review represents a selection of the papers presented at the conference, including:

- Avraham Zalkin: An Introduction
- Rabbi Shimon Levy: Socio-Geographic Significance of the Inclinations towards Stringency
- Mordechai Breuer: Historical and Educational Perspective on the Inclination towards Stringency

- Yosef Achituv: Teaching Dinim and Educating for Mitzvah Observance in an Era of Extremism
- Moshe Ahrend: On the Inclination to be Stringent
- Avraham Zalkin: In Conclusion
- Aharon Ahrend: Selected Bibliography on Humrah and Kulah

Given the increasing interest (or: notoriety) which *humrah* has attracted lately (the talked-about essay by Haym Soloveitchik-published in "Tradition" magazine-being one of its more pronounced reflections), the sources and discussions provided in this booklet should be of great interest to all religious educators.

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