



KOL HAMEVASER

The Jewish Thought Magazine
of the Yeshiva University Student Body

Derekh Halimmud

Volume 1, Issue 3

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KOL HAMEVASER IS A MAGAZINE OF JEWISH THOUGHT DEDICATED TO SPARKING THE DISCUSSION OF JEWISH ISSUES ON THE YESHIVA UNIVERSITY CAMPUS. IT WILL SERVE AS A FORUM FOR THE INTRODUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF NEW IDEAS. THE MAJOR CONTRIBUTORS TO KOL HAMEVASER WILL BE THE UNDERGRADUATE POPULATION, ALONG WITH REGULAR INPUT FROM RIETS ROSHEI YESHIVA, YU PROFESSORS, EDUCATORS FROM YESHIVOT AND SEMINARIES IN ISRAEL, AND OUTSIDE EXPERTS. IN ADDITION TO THE REGULAR EDITIONS, KOL HAMEVASER WILL BE SPONSORING IN-DEPTH SPECIAL ISSUES, SPEAKERS, DISCUSSION GROUPS, SHABBATONIM, AND REGULAR WEB ACTIVITY. WE HOPE TO FACILITATE THE RELIGIOUS AND INTELLECTUAL GROWTH OF YESHIVA UNIVERSITY AND THE LARGER JEWISH COMMUNITY.

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COMING SOON: JEW AND GENTILE, TORAH UMADDA IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

Continuing the Discussion

Isha Yefat Torah?

BY BEN GREENFIELD

What does American culture have in common with Sarah Imeinu's devastating good looks? Reading last month's Kol HaMevaser provides a clear answer: both are only noteworthy for the religious attributes contained within. Fitting for a publication about pop culture, it fell into a trap of contemporary pop-Hashkafa, namely: "spiritual beauty."

Imagine, an entire edition dedicated to the virtues and drawbacks of culture, wrought from the palette of YU voices, and not a single mention of our society's most redeeming trait: beauty. Western culture a la 2007 overwhelms us with a cornucopia of aesthetic experience unprecedented (quantitatively, at least) in human history. Those to the Right are right—we face a flood of secular culture, with billboards and browsers aimed straight for our souls. But the Right is also wrong, for they ignore just how beautiful culture's arrows are: the New York skyline on a moonless night; the songs she turns on when it's late and it's lonely; the comics section on a lazy Sunday morning. I speak not of labs or libraries, of high art and Aristotle - it's the basest, most popular cultural creations that provide that un-touchable yet ubiquitous, mysterious yet inspiring tease we call beauty. Dear Kol HaMevaser contributors, have you never felt

the damned frustration of gazing at the credits, realizing that it's a full 167 hours before the next episode? Have you never marveled at how that trashy dance track makes an impromptu pillow fight really rather appropriate? Have you never invested your heart in five men, one ball, and .2 seconds until redemption? I ask you, YU student intelligentsia, have you never lived?

Your defense of culture speaks of ethics, but not aesthetics. You argue that pop culture, or very select portions thereof, sharpens one's moral sensitivities. You claim it grants depth to the religious personality. You reason that it provides a well-needed water-break from the spiritual marathon that is the Jewish life. But is nothing valid if not religious?! Is beauty qua beauty outside the four cubits of hashkafa? I claim that the pleasure of the beauty-encounter is good in and of itself, whether or not my lips burst forth in *shevakh* and *hoda'a*. (Which, for the record, they occasionally do.) I add to the ever-discussed equation of Modern vs. Haredi the fact that Bnei Brak Ben Greenfield shall never hear Dave Matthews live.

So why is this opinion only that of the minority? Because the flirt with beauty may lead to religious promiscuity. The *derekh* to off-the-derekh occasionally contains a tricky fork: the restrictions of halakha to the left and an uninhibited quest for aesthetic sensations to the right. Unfortunately, many have made the wrong choice. But, afraid of that tragic right turn, we've ignored the road that runs directly ahead: the middle path. I say, if we can juggle secular and Torah knowledge, surely we can

manage the dialectic of physical beauty and Torah restrictions.

Until then, we'll guard against any literal use of the word beauty. Sarah will be "spiritually beautiful." Pharoah will "spiritually kidnap and make her his wife." The only moment a Kol HaMevaser contributor will use the term to defend culture (you can Google it too, if you like) she will describe music's "beautiful *mes-sage*." But in reading the educative into every instant of the seductive, we fashion a Judaism colorblind: eyes open to the outside world, but seeing only the dullest gray.

Ben Greenfield is a sophomore in YC

To the Editor:

In his article "Secularizing Jewish Music" Daniel Lowenstein presents a variety of viewpoints on the place of "secular Jewish music" in a Jew's life. After discussing the many different positions he has encountered, Lowenstein wraps up with his own take on the subject: "Light headed music comes from a light headed place and encourages light headedness [sic]." While he doesn't specify there what exactly light headed music consists of, earlier in the article he pointed out that "when Jewish music...focuses on leisure and entertainment at the expense of inspiring religious

sentiment and expressing religious experience, it becomes lightheaded and superficial," specifically, you get "pop culture Jewish music." Lowenstein seems to imply that any music that does not move us religiously, even Jewish music set to a "kosher" pop beat, encourages frivolity. To him, music is either Jewish or worthless.

While such a sentiment may seem rather inspiring, I find it a bit small-minded. If Lowenstein finds pop music and its beat shallow, great, so do I. However, there are others who find music such as pop, techno and even rap (gasp!) to be relaxing music that can lift them out of their lows and level their highs. Some can even find God in such music. I am not one of these people, clearly Lowenstein is not either, but unless he is willing to be so presumptuous as to dictate the types of music which people can and should relax to, I think all music - Jewish pop certainly included - can remain and should remain on a Jew's iPod. This position seems to be supported by Maimonides who states in his *Shemonah Perakim*, "If a person is overcome by melancholy, he should endeavor to purge himself by listening to song and music..." I hope we all strive to widen our perspectives and find God in all areas of life, from Torah to Mada, MBD to the Chevra, and Mozart to DJ Sammy.

Ezra Sutton,
YC, 09




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Unification

BY YOSEF BRONSTEIN

The division of the corpus of Talmudic literature into the categories of halakha and *aggadeta* is not only both natural and axiomatic, but is also well attested to in classical sources, starting with the Gemara itself.ⁱ Though a cursory skim through the *dappim* of any given *masechet* makes it evident that that the study of halakha seems to be the main objective of the Talmud Bavli, there are numerous comments of the Tannaim emphasizing the importance of studying *aggadeta* as well.ⁱⁱ However, the exact form that the relationship between these two studies should take is not precisely defined.

Generally, the accepted approach in *batei medrash* throughout the ages has been to separate the subjects into two distinct areas of study. An average day of swimming through *sugyos* of *kim lay bidrabah minay* and *chazakos* does not naturally give rise to discussions of the exact nature of *hashgachah* or ways to overcome the trait of anger. Consequently, these two disciplines remain distinct and discrete.

Nonetheless, there have been a respectable number of *talmiday chachamim* of the highest quality who either explicitly or implicitly advocated a fusion of sorts between the disciplines. Recently, the world of Torah scholars has seen two of its leaders, the Rav and Rav Kook, propose different models for this endeavor. In short, while the Rav advocated the extracting of hashkafa from the halakhos and *lomdus* of the topic,ⁱⁱⁱ Rav Kook saw halakha and hashkafa as two distinct and independent areas that after being fully developed should then be synthesized into a harmonious entity. I would like to examine and then demonstrate this unique feature of Rav Kook's *derekh halimmud*.

Though Rav Kook speaks of this idea in various places throughout his works, the most focused passage appears in *Orot HaKodesh*^{iv} in the midst of a series of chapters describing our obligation and innate desire to unify different aspects of our *avodas Hashem*. One manifestation of this sweeping idea is the unity of halakha and *aggadeta*, a venture that will not only bear fruits in one's learning and perception of Torah, but it will also positively reverberate in the world at large.^v

In his work *Ishim V'Shittos*, R. Shlomo Yosef Zevin records a cogent example of this approach that he personally heard from Rav Kook.^{vi} Rav Kook began his *sicha* by describing the essential difference between the states of war and peace; namely that the former is a temporary and fleeting state while the latter is eternal in nature. After elaborating on this distinction he flawlessly moves into the halakhic realm and points out that it can be used to resolve an anomaly about the *kohen mashoo'ach milchamah*. While there is normally a concept of *yerushah* for posts of stature (assuming that

the son is "fitting to fill the place of his father"), the Gemara^{vii} derives from a *pasuk* that this is not the case by the *kohen mashoo'ach*. Rav Kook explained that since *yerusha* represents an eternal and continuous chain, it would be incongruous to apply it to a position that oversees an impermanent phenomenon such as war.

Using this methodology we might gain a new dimension of understanding in some classic *chakiros*. Though generally a person is held accountable for his actions, there are certain circumstances where the halakha allows a person to leave the scene with impunity. Examples of these categories include sinning



under duress (*onnes*) or without being cognizant of one's activities (*misasek*). In each of these scenarios commentators raise queries about the level to which these *pturim* extend; does the mitigating factor simply allow the person to avoid punishment or might it penetrate deeper and undercut the definition of this action as a halakhic "*maaseh adam*." In classical sources various supports are raised, questions are asked and answered, and more nuanced suggestions are offered, but the fundamental analysis revolves around these issues.^{viii}

Based on the Rav Kook's approach we might be able to add another layer to the debate. It seems reasonable to suggest that the definition of a *ma'aseh adam* should depend on whether or not the performer is using the faculty that is essential to his humanity - his *tzelem elokim*. A true spread of the spectrum of interpretations offered for this term is beyond

the scope of this article, so we will be forced to suffice with two. The Rambam,^{ix} together with many others defines the *tzelem elokim* as human intellect. In contrast to R. Meir Simcha of Dvinsk^x posits that it is in man's free will that his similarity to God is manifest. Entering this information into the original formula of *tzelem elokim = maaseh adam* we may conclude that an action bereft of one's intellect or free choice may fall short of the requirements for *maaseh adam*. If we now return to analyze the exemptions of *onnes* and *misasek* we will realize that an action under duress is done with full cognizance of the situation but is lacking free-will, while the opposite is true for a case

might be traced back to our basic obligation of *Imitatio Dei*. This is not meant to imply that Rav Kook was naively unaware of the constant state of conflict in which religious individuals find themselves, but that despite his acute awareness of these internal clashes, which he attests to personally experiencing, he still felt that unity and harmony should be guiding ideals.

The one who said my soul is torn spoke well, of course it's torn. We can't envision someone who isn't torn. Only the inanimate is whole. But a human being has contradictory longings, a permanent war is waged within him and all his effort is to unify the antinomies in his soul by an encompassing idea, in whose greatness and sublimity all is gathered and brought together in utter harmony. Of course this is just an ideal towards which we can yearn, no mortal can reach it, but by our efforts we draw closer and closer to it and this is what the Kabbalists call "Unification."^{xi xii}

Yosef Bronstein is a Junior in YC

ⁱ Nedarim 35b, Yerushalmi Pe'ah 2:4

ⁱⁱ For example, Sifray Ekev Piska 12, that derives the obligation to study Aggadeta from *pesukim* and Piska 13 that advises this study for one who seeks to gain knowledge of God.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Halakhic Mind part 4 chapters 3-4.

^{iv} pg. 25. I must admit to never even attempting to systematically learn *Orot HaKodesh* as it is one of Rav Kook's more Kabbalistic works.

^v It is important to note that Rav Kook himself, at least in his written *teshuvos*, did not apply this methodology on a regular basis. I once heard Rabbi Magnus, the current Mashgiach of Yeshivat Merkaz HaRav, justify the "regular" study of Gemara that prevails in the hallowed halls of Rav Kook's own yeshiva by commenting that it is not our responsibility or right to establish new *darkei halimmud*. I am personally of the opinion that the approach of Rav Kook can be a potentially fruitful endeavor but should in no way supersede the intensive learning of Gemara *b'iyunn* in its most traditional sense.

^{vi} page 234. R. Zevin beautifully describes the aura of the se'udah shlishit in Rav Kook's home where the *sicha* was delivered.

^{vii} Yoma 72b

^{viii} In regard to *misasek* see *Shut R. Akiva Eiger Mahdura Kama siman 8*, Kovetz Shiurim 2:23., *Asvan De'oraissa siman 24*. In regard to *onnes* see Kovetz Shiurim Kesubos simanim 1-11.

^{ix} Yesoday Torah 4:8, Moreh Nevuchim 1:1

^x *Meshech Chochma Braishit* 1:26.

^{xi} *Ha-Machshavah Ha-Yisraelit* pg. 13. The translation is from Yehudah Mirsky's dissertation on Rav Kook's early life and thought.

^{xii} In general, I would like to echo the words of some of our Gedolay Achronim in asserting that "bati rak li-hai'ir" as the author is not an authority in Torah in general or Rav Kook in particular.

How We Learn, Why We Learn: The Poetic Aim in Talmud Torah

BY SHIRA SCHWARTZ

The Past Is the Present

If external action is effete
and rhyme is outmoded,
I shall revert to you,
Habakkuk, as when in a Bible class
the teacher was speaking of unrhymed verse.
He said - and I think I repeat his exact words -
"Hebrew poetry is prose
with a sort of heightened consciousness." Ecstasy affords
the occasion and expediency determines the form.

-Marianne Moore

Biblical poetry: the very juxtaposition of these two words seems to arouse a peculiar excitement in modern students of Judaism. It's artful and, well, biblical, so Torah Umaddasque, and it carries a certain ring. There are two ways to talk about biblical poetry, each offering its own insight into this intriguing concept. One may talk about poetry through the prism of the Bible, focusing on the commonality between it and the rest of the biblical narrative. Yet often, this approach skips basic steps that hinder and even distort our understanding of the text. Its uniqueness falls to the side, and we lose that certain niftiness that is sensed in its very name. In order to really talk about what **biblical** poetry is, we must first talk about what poetry is.

The process that the poet undergoes is similar in some respects to prophecy, and in that regard, fits well into the biblical framework. The poet experiences an all-encompassing need to write. This need seizes the poet, as the word of God seized Jeremiah, burning inside him. The poet Rainer Maria Rilke, puts it in the form of a question, "whether you would have to die if it were denied you to write."ⁱ Like a prophet, the poet grapples with the infinite, trying to reveal an inner message. The poetic effort is a struggle with the eternal, with the hope to humanize it, conquer it—write it. Like Jacob, the poet must wrestle with the angel all night, and only then, marred, may he or she emerge victorious. And like the prophet, the poet must choose how to render ecstasy into form, how to transform the divine message into the divine word. The loftier the message, the holier the writ, and some lofty enough have been canonized as bible-worthy. William Wordsworth's description of poetry bears semblance to the prophetic. He writes, "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility; the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the

mind. In this mood, successful composition generally begins."ⁱⁱ In his description, Wordsworth highlights the duality that poetry encompasses: it is immediate and transcendent, passionate and composed, natural and crafted. Poetry gives a voice to our deepest encounters with the real, and through the written word, gives life to our brushes with the infinite. It is inspired by urges and notions churning deep within the smithy of the human soul. And still, its execution comes through logic and precision, "recollected in tranquility" and then crafted into form. Language choice, form—these elements give the poet coherence. To write poetry is to create the proper skeleton upon which profound truths can be layered and thereby understood. It demands a transformation of the internal into external symbols, a translation of the subjective into something more objective.

This heightened form of language is recognized by the Bible as aesthetically superior,



reserved for heightened religious ideas and experiences. *Shirat haYam*, *Shirat Devorah*, *Shir haShirim*, *Tehillim*—all these, take hold of ecstatic moments and thoughts and render them, expediently, into meaningful form. When the biblical narrative intensifies, the characters turn to poetry as their medium of choice. The religious experiences of poetic biblical heroes are given their proper glory in the Jewish narrative.

The issue of methodology in *Talmud Torah*, *derekh halimmud*, is similar to that of historiography. In historiography, the question of how to study history is directly effected by the question of what sort of information one hopes to derive from the endeavor. More pointedly, our approach to studying history is determined by our conception of what history is and what sort of benefit studying it is meant to reap. Leopold Von Ranke's event-history,

highlights individual people and events in its analysis;ⁱⁱⁱ at its source lies the conviction that these particulars shape history, more significantly than other factors. In contrast, Fernand Braudel focuses on more general, deeply imbedded themes in human history, the *Long Duree*, demonstrating the belief that broader, more essential elements of human existence are worthy of our attention^{iv}. Each historical approach stems from a specific understanding of the global human experience, what it is coming to say and why that matters. The methodology employed in study merely supports the particular understanding propelling it. According to event-history, the human story is creative, ascribing power and meaning to particular events and people. Man has the ability to fashion history, to determine its direction, and therefore serves as its focal point. Braudel's vision however, portrays a more passive view of man, who is effected and directed by deeply embedded elements of nature; in a Braudelian world, man is not the subject, but rather, subject.

How and what we study reflects and reveals why we study. The human draw to the written word is natural. However, different sorts of texts are studied for different reasons; they pull people in through different incentives and foster different experiences.

When approaching biblical poetry, we must ask ourselves, how and why?

The composite origin of poetry produces the sort of text that succeeds in uniting two different types of learning experiences that, together, engender an experience altogether different from others. And still, for the purposes of elucidation, these two aspects can be separated and described, each in its own right. First and foremost, poetry is meant to be understood. The human being's inner world is complex, chaotic, and demands intelligibility. The poem attempts to translate a bit of that world, to offer a piece of the poet's soul to the eager, or not so eager, public. The poetic goal is one of knowledge and understanding arrived at through art. It is calculated, crafted, following rules of poetic form with a rhythmic logic.

The reader must follow the trail that the poet has left—the syntax, symbols and structure—and use them as portals through which to enter into the idea of the poem. Heightened experience demands heightened expression, and the

poetic form is tight and terse for that very reason. But there is an inner logic that if heeded will breed wisdom and will lend itself to comprehension.

However, the strength of poetry lies not only in its didactic capacity, but also in its ability to preserve an experience. Poetry does not exhaust its aim in intellectual comprehension alone. It grabs hold of one's senses, not only to learn, but to listen, and through aesthetics, it establishes validity and convinces. Good poetry washes over you and creates a sense, a resonance, a voice. Good poetry is not only comprehended but apprehended. The reader may not fully grasp the ideas in their detail, but if successfully crafted, if the voice remains authentic, the poem carries an authority that elicits an experience—the experience of the poet. The form is meant to hold an inner reality, to reflect an experience, and to bring the reader within close proximity to both. The full depth of an experience can only be spoken about, described, symbolized, captured in a voice and a poetic form; the inner world of a human being is much more sensed than systematically understood. But it *is* sensed. In order to connect one requires tools, to handle, to contain and to eternalize.

Marc Strand describes poetry in a similar light: "With good poems they have a lyric identity that goes beyond whatever their subject happens to be. They have a voice and the formation of that voice, the gathering up of imagined sound into utterance, may be the true occasion for their existence. A poem may be the residue of an inner urgency, one through which the self wishes to register itself, write itself into being, and, finally, to charm another self, the reader, into belief."^v Through poetry, we can successfully encounter the inner world of the other. And for this, we need only to listen. The syntax of *Shir haShirim* drips with sensitivity, passion and love. The words have an intimate ring, and their very sound ushers the listener into the lovesick relationship between the *Dod* and *Raayah*. Through listening, we grow to understand the emotional truth that the text is coming to convey; we connect, albeit incoherently, with the inner urge that inspired the poet to write. Similarly, the chapters in *Tehillim* are wellsprings of religious sentiment and resources that can be tapped into for generations to come, because they have been preserved in a poem. God refers to *Shirat haAzinu* as an eternal witness to his relationship with Israel. After he commands Moshe to write down the Torah in order to ensure that the people fear Him and keep His commandments, He turns to a poem, "*veatah kitvu lakhem et hashira hazot*."^{vi} "*Va-anokhi haster astir panai*,"^{vii} God hides in the text of the poem, and it in turn serves as a symbol, the "*ed*" between God and His *Ra'ayah*.

The Gra and Reb Chaim: Forgotten History

BY ISAAC LEBWOHL

At Yeshiva University we engage in comprehensive study of the Talmud on a daily basis in which the Brisker methodology is the most popular approach employed. It is important to analyze how this methodology works and in what historical context it emerged in comparison to other methodologies in use at the time. I will begin by discussing the Vilna Gaon (Gra), who innovated a unique *derekh halim-mud* soon before the Brisker methodology appeared.

The Vilna Gaon (1720-1797) was truly an extraordinary figure in Jewish history. The



sheer breadth of knowledge that he possessed is easily recognizable to anyone who has seen his commentaries on all different parts of Torah study, ranging from Tanakh to the *Shulkhan Arukh* and to the *Zohar*. It was the Gra who was directly responsible for the strong attack against the Hasidim and it was because of his encouragement that Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin opened up the first Yeshiva as we know it today.

The Gra's incomparable memory allowed him to develop an overriding vision of Torah that saw all literature attributed to *Chazal* on equal footing. Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin claimed that his master was able to resolve every situation where the revealed Torah seem-

ingly contradicted the Kabbalah.ⁱ The Gra frequently used textual criticism to better understand variant readings in different statements from *Chazal*, and as we see in our *Gemarat*, the Gra slightly modifies the text every so often. The Gra's comments on the *Shulkhan Arukh* seem to be a way of clarifying whether the *psak* in the *Shulkhan Arukh* is compatible with the various literatures from *Chazal*, and what the Gra thought was its correct interpretation. For the Gra, it is of the utmost importance to see unity in the various sources in order to present a clear *psak*, and in his own words, "the name of God *Havaya* is one and all the letters of the Torah are one."ⁱⁱ Additionally, the Gra acted in a manner normally

Gemara and the *Rishonim* and conceptually organizes that data in an eloquent way. The Brisker method generally ignores how and why the original source came to its conclusions. Rabbi Moshe Lichtenstein summarized the Brisker method as asking the "what" question on each source. A Brisker asks "what is the Halakha and its ramifications?" But this method ignores the "why" question of the source's motivation.^v The Brisker method also assumes that the *Rishonim* are now sacrosanct and arguing with a *Rishon* is inappropriate. Reb Chaim saw the Rambam's *Mishnah Torah* as a perfect, self contained book without contradictions. In comparison to the Gra's methodology, it seems that Brisk uses the primary sources to glean data for analysis, while the goal and focus of the Gra was to deeply establish an understanding of the primary sources within the context of other Rabbinic literature.

An example of this type of analysis is Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik's leniency for shaving during the mourning period of *Sefirah Haomer*. Rabbi Soloveitchik noted that the laws of mourning during *Sefirah* correspond to the halakhos of the twelve month mourning period for a parent, in that both include prohibitions regarding marriage and haircutting. Rabbi Soloveitchik therefore assumed that the laws of *Sefirah* are modeled after this mourning period across the board. In other words, Rabbi Soloveitchik saw the "whats" of the laws of mourning for *Sefirah* - that marriage and haircutting are prohibited - and conceptually fit them with the "whats" of the laws of mourning for a parent. He then derived a leniency from the laws of mourning for one's parent to the laws of *Sefirah*. During the twelve month period, there is a special leniency for haircutting if one's friend would scold him for having long, unattractive hair. Nowadays, since people shave every day, after a day or two of not shaving one would fall into the category of having a friend who would rebuke him for being unkempt. Therefore, it would now be permissible to shave during *Sefirah* as well.^{vi} Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Har Etzion and one of the leading practitioners of the Brisker methodology today, goes even further and rules that it is obligatory to shave on Friday because of *Kavod Shabbat*.^{vii} What Rabbi Soloveitchik and Rabbi Lichtenstein do not consider in this analysis is the reason why the laws of mourning for a parent must be identical to the laws of mourning during *Sefirah*.

The *Shulkhan Arukh* OC 492:1 rules that the custom is not to wed during *Sefirah* until the thirty-fourth day of the Omer because dur-

The above-cited verse, simply understood within its narrative context, refers to *Shirat haAzinu*, the *shira* that follows the verse. However, in the Talmud, Rabah uses it to extrapolate the mandate incumbent upon each individual to write a *sefer Torah*.^{viii} In this light, the *shira* that God tells Moshe to write down refers to the entire Torah. In other words, through his halakhic derivation, Rabah rescues the level of subtext that describes the whole Torah as a poem. Bearing this in mind, the poetic aim then colors our entire approach to Talmud Torah.^{ix} Like a poem, there are two aspects to Torah study: the intellectual and the experiential. And like a poem, the entire Torah is one great translation of the infinite into the finite, of the divine message into the divine word. God is at the source of the poetic struggle, of man's creative gesture; what is muse if not something of the divine?

The Torah is the quintessential poem because it is a translation of the eternal in the most direct sense. The text not only teaches us about God through morals and laws, but it brings us in direct contact with His voice. Like poetry, the experience brings us close, perhaps more than the content, which is refracted through human language. In the end, we are forced to relinquish our cognitive abilities before the commanding prowess of an elusive God, who we cannot quantify and codify, but perhaps, by listening to His voice, we can sense. And that incoherent sense is, on a certain level, more real, connected and honest in its resonance than the translated dictum we are presented with. Poetically, God uses text to write Himself into being, charming all who study and listen into belief.

Shira Schwartz is a staff writer for Kol Hamevaser

ⁱ Rilke, Rainer Maria. *Letters to a Young Poet*. W. W. Norton and Company, Inc.: New York, pg. 16.

ⁱⁱ Wordsworth, William. Preface to the Second Edition of *Lyrical Ballads*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Von Ranke, Leopold. *The Theory and Practice of History*. Ed: Georg Iggers and Konrad von Moltke

^{iv} Braudel, Fernand. *On History*. University of Chicago Press: 1982.

^v Strand, Mark. *On Becoming a Poet*. The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms, Ed. Mark Strand and Eavan Boland. W. W. Norton and Company: New York. pg. xxiv.

^{vi} Deuteronomy, 21:19

^{vii} Deuteronomy, 21:18

^{viii} B, Sanhedrin 21b

^{ix} See Olat Ra'ayah, by Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, Inyanei Tefilah, pg. 11 for a similar understanding of Talmud Torah.

ing this period the students of Rabbi Akiva died. The Gra sources this ruling from tractate *Yevamot* 62b which explains that the students of Rabbi Akiva died between *Pesach* and *Shavuot* because they did not offer proper respect to one another. In OC 492:2, the Gra comments on the *Shulchan Aruch's* ruling that one is allowed to get a haircut after the thirty-third of the *Omer*, namely on the thirty-fourth, and quotes a Midrash which states that the students of Rabbi Akiva died until sixteen days before *Shavuot*, which is the thirty-fourth of the *Omer*. The Gra then proves the ruling of the Rama that one can get a haircut on the day of the thirty-third itself, based on the concept from YD 395:1 of *mikzat hayom k'kulo*, that mourning for part of the day is considered as if one had mourned the whole day. Here, the Gra uses the Midrash to tell us when exactly during the *Sefira* the students of Rabbi Akiva died in order to clarify the Gemara in *Yevamot* that simply stated that they died between *Pesach* and *Shavuot*. Interestingly, the concept of *mikzat hayom k'kulo* mentioned in YD 395:1, is used in reference to the laws of the mourning periods of *shiva* and *shloshim* and YD 395:3 explicitly states that *mikzat hayom k'kulo* is not employed at the end of the twelve month period of mourning. Additionally, the Rama states in OC 492:2 that if the thirty-third day falls out on a Sunday, one may get a haircut on Friday in honor of Shabbat and the Gra bases the Rama's ruling on the Gemara *Moed Katan* 17b which also deals with the mourning periods of *shiva* and *shloshim* and not the twelve month mourning period. It seems that the Gra did not view the mourning during the *Sefirah* as analogous to the twelve month mourning period for a parent, nor does it appear that the Vilna Gaon found a need to classify these *Sefirah* signs of mourning into any of the three categories of mourning for a relative as Rabbi Soloveitchik did. The Gra views the *minhag* of mourning during *Sefirah* in its own light, based on a synthesis of different statements from *Chazal*.

As students at Yeshiva University, we have primarily been exposed to Brisker methodology because of the tremendous influence Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik had on our Yeshiva. The Rav's hashkafa has colored our lives (whether we know it or not) and has given Modern Orthodox Jews a *godol* to look up to. The Rav's grandfather, Rabbi Chaim, taught in the Volozhin Yeshiva and acted as a co-Rosh Yeshiva with the Neziv. He broke away from the methodology espoused by the Yeshiva's spiritual grandfather, the Gra, and I think it is important for us to recognize that we, as well, do not need to feel bound by the Brisker methodology. There were intellectual giants, like the Gra, who lived before Rabbi Chaim and had entirely different methods of analyzing *Chazal*. An almost exclusive adherence to the Brisker *Derekh* causes many students to spend more time discussing the various halakhic implica-

tions of a Gemara or a *Rishon* and neglect understanding the motivation and inner workings of the text itself. It is important for us, as students in Yeshiva, to open our eyes to the vast history of Talmudic methodology and to be cognizant of the varied approaches we can apply on a daily basis.

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ⁱ Rabbi Chaim Volozhon's Introduction to the Gra's commentary to *Sefer Dezenuta*

ⁱⁱ The Gra's commentary to *Sefer Yetzira* 3a

ⁱⁱⁱ *Shulchan Arukh* YD 179:8

^{iv} See The Introduction by the Vilna Gaon's children to Beurei HaGra on the *Shulchan Arukh*

^v The Torah u-Mada Journal (9/2000) *What Hath Brisk Wrought: the Brisker Derekh Revisited*

^{vi} *Nefesh Harav* p. 191 There, Rabbi Soloveitchik also derives a similar leniency for shaving during the period between the 17th of Tammuz and Rosh Chodesh Av. Rabbi Soloveitchik organized the laws of mourning between the 17th of *Tamuz* and the day of *Tisha Ba'av* into three categories corresponding to the three time periods of mourning required for a parent. For both the time between the 17th of *Tamuz* and *Rosh Chodesh Av* and the twelve month mourning period for a parent, festive gatherings, marriage and haircutting are prohibited. *Rosh Chodesh Av* until *Tisha B'Av* is modeled after the *shloshim* when bathing and laundering are prohibited. The day of *Tisha B'Av* itself is structured based on the prohibitions of the *Shiva* when marital relations, anointing, wearing leather shoes etc. are forbidden. Just as the leniency of "until his friends scold him" transfers from the 12 month period to *Sefirah*, it also transfers to the period between the 17th of Tammuz and Rosh Chodesh Av.

^{vii} <http://www.vbm-torah.org/shavuot/20shavin.htm>

Torah is Not Just a Collection of *Dinim*

An Interview with Rav Herschel Schachter

BY ARI LAMM

What is the ideal way in which one should learn a sugya?

I think the approach should vary depending on whether or not it is the first time that one is learning that particular *sugya*. The first time, it doesn't make sense to study every *Tosafos*. There's a little *sefer* written by the Steipler Gaon, called *Hayei Olam*, in which he has essays on various topics. One is on the study of Gemara. He says that there are many times when you will see a *Tosafos* that spends a lot of time on a historical, or chronological issue. Other times, you will see *Tosafos* knock their brains out over a Gemara that contradicts another Gemara, and then after long discussion

will go out and buy twenty *rishonim* on the Gemara. Rabbi Soloveitchik didn't use all the *rishonim*, not because they were unavailable, but because he just wasn't interested. He said that if he could go through the Gemara, Rashi, *Tosafos*, and the RambaM, he would be happy. Once in a while he would cover a *Rashba*, or a famous *Rosh*, or a famous *Ran*. He would skip the historical *Tosafos*, as well as the *Tosafos* that suggest an alternative *peshat*, only to reject it. Rabbi Soloveitchik would only learn the major *Tosafos* on a given *daf*.

Understanding the background of a *sugya* is crucial. For this, it won't help to get the twenty *rishonim*, even if you read all of them. When Rabbi Soloveitchik would discuss a Gemara, he would note that the entire Talmud is full of *mahlakes*. He would say that whenever the *tannaim*, or Rav and Shmuel, or Abaye and Rava argue a point, we may infer



that they agree on ninety-nine other points, which must be discussed in order to put the *mahlakes* into its proper perspective. Rabbi Soloveitchik would always look for definitions – something he possibly got from his university training – and would, for instance, begin studying *Gittin* by asking for the definition of "get." A student would raise his hand and offer a definition that would contain the word, "shetar." Then, Rabbi Soloveitchik would ask for the definition of a "shetar," which, he would explain, is actually a

The style nowadays is that when the yeshiva learns a particular *masekhta*, the boys

mahlokes in *Hoshen Mishpat*. Is it “*edus biksav mida’as hamishayev*,” or “*raayah biksav mida’as hamishayev*?” These definitions would help establish the larger principle or formula, underlying the *mahlokes*. He would say that in physics, the physicist looks around in the world, and sees a number of phenomena. The physicist’s job is to figure out the formula that will explain them. Similarly, in *halakha*, there are thousands of *dinim*. It’s like a jungle full of *dinim*. The proper *derekh* is to try and figure out the underlying rule.

When I took chemistry with Dr. Shmuel Soloveitchik, we learned about the history of chemistry. He once said that when human beings explored outer space, it became absolutely *pashut* that the earth revolves around the sun, and not the other way around. But, he said, the truth of the matter is that those who want to insist that the sun goes around the earth can figure out a way to get around this, and come up with a formula to explain everything. But the formula will be impossibly long and complicated, whereas the heliocentric approach will be short, and simple. So a general scientific rule is that whenever there is a choice between a short formula, and a complicated one, we always assume that the simple formula is correct. This was how Rabbi Soloveitchik learned Torah.

Rabbi Soloveitchik was a *Misnaged*, and would often tell jokes about *Hassidim*. Once, he told a joke about a *Hassidische* Rebbe who got up to speak on Shabbos of *parashas Lekh Lekha*, and asked the following question: why is “*Lekh Lekha*” spelled with two big letter *hets*? There was a skeptical *Misnaged* in the crowd, and he protested that, first of all, it is spelled with two letter *kafs*, and second of all, the letters are not larger than the other letters. So the Rebbe says, “that’s one good *teretz*, but I have a better *teretz*...”

He would joke about this in class. He would ask a question concerning why, in one place, the Gemara says something is *mutar*, but elsewhere says it is *assur*? A student would raise his hand and give a long, complicated answer. He would respond by saying that the answer doesn’t have to be that complicated; after all, the simplest answer is usually the correct one.

How important is Bekius? How much time should one devote to amassing Bekius?

Rabbi Soloveitchik would say that one who has great *bekius*, but lacks the skills to learn Gemara *beiyun*, does not understand anything. Conversely, if one concentrates solely on Gemara *beiyun* – he spends four weeks on a couple of lines on *daf beis*, *amud aleph* – his learning is useless, because the whole point of *lomdus* is to explain the interrelationship of various *halakhos* across *Shas*.

Rabbi Soloveitchik was not a towering *baki*. He couldn’t tell you on which *daf* one would find a particular *din*. He couldn’t even tell you what *amud*; rather, he would remember the progression of topics in the order in which they appear in the Gemara. People would be surprised. How could he not even remember if

it’s *amud aleph* or *amud beis*? The truth is that he didn’t have that kind of *bekius*. He would often introduce a *shiur* by quoting a completely different Gemara in order to expose its underlying principle, which would then shed light on the Gemara at hand. The *shiur* would thus have a *bekius* background in order to set the stage for further inquiry.

Every year, on the 3rd of *Shevat*, Rabbi Soloveitchik would give the *Yahrzeit Shiur* in memory of his father. He would begin with about five questions. One would think that Moshe Rabbeinu couldn’t answer these questions. Not even the *Ribbono Shel Olam* could answer these questions. And then he would quote a very, very simple Gemara, which would provide a general principle that, kept in mind, would make the answers to the questions quite obvious. He would use one Gemara to answer a question on another Gemara, which would answer a question on another Gemara, and so on. He wouldn’t answer a question by only focusing on one line, in one Gemara, thereby isolating it from everything else. *Bekius* is absolutely necessary in order to properly understand the Gemara. One must accumulate as much data as possible, and try to discern a pattern.

Earlier, Rav Schachter spoke about Tosafos that deal with history. Is it important to incorporate a sense of history into a proper derekh halimmud?

History is fascinating. Rabbi Soloveitchik once delivered a lecture during which he mentioned that someone from the Jewish Theological Seminary had published a book suggesting that during the time of the *tannaim*, there must have been a scarcity of wood. The *tannaim*, therefore, had to come up with all sorts of *kulos* regarding construction of a *sukkah*, in order to ensure that there would be enough wood to go around. Someone said that this was *apikorsus*. Rabbi Soloveitchik disagreed, asserting that perhaps this was the motivation for the *tannaim* to sit down and come up with the various *dinim*. He continued, however, that this only explained the history of the *halakha*. It could not explain the mathematical formula for figuring out how the various *dinim* work. History might explain why the *tannaim* would initiate a process whereby the laws of *mehitzos* on Shabbos could be applied to the laws of *sukkah*, but it would not explain the underlying rules governing this process. This is the whole theme of the *Ish hahalakha*. Just like the scientist must try to discover the formula of nature, the *talmid hakham* must figure out the formula for what makes the *halakha* tick. As far as *girsaos* are concerned, *girsaos* are always important. It’s very important to know whether a particular statement was made by Rava, or Rabbah. And it is certainly important to clean up the *lashon* of a *sugya*. This is what the *rishonim* worked on.

What exactly constitutes the obligation of talmud Torah? If given a choice, are there specific works, or sefarim, upon which one should concentrate?

The laws of *talmud Torah* were completely revamped by the first Lubavitcher Rebbe, in the *Shulhan Arukh Harav*. He has a lot of fascinating and original ideas. He establishes the notion, based on statements by the *tannaim*, that every Jewish man has the obligation to learn *kol hatorah kulah*. How could this be possible? The Gemara in the second Perek in *Eruvin* quotes the verse that describes the Torah as “*arukha meeret midah rehova min ha-yam*.” The Torah is unbelievably vast! Just go to the Gottesman Library. How is it possible to master *kol hatorah kulah*?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that the actual text of *kol hatorah kulah*, consists of the twenty-four *Sifrei Hatanakh*, the Mishnah, the Tosefta, the Bavli, the Yerushalmi, *Sifra*, *Sifrei*, the Rambam, and the *Shulhan Arukh*. This is not that much – it can all fit in one tiny bookcase. An English major has to read more books than that.

In the *yeshivos* in Europe, *shiurim* were only given on *Nashim* and *Nezikin*. But there were no televisions, or movies, or any diversions, so whatever wasn’t covered in *shiur* would be studied on the students’ own time. Now, the problem is that there are so many diversions, and whatever we don’t teach the students, they won’t know. For this reason, I often try to introduce other elements into my *shiurim*. I introduce a little bit of history, a little bit of *hashkafa*, a little bit of *Tanakh*, etc. I want to teach more than just *iyun*, *iyun*, and more *iyun*.

How should one incorporate the study of aggadah into one’s derekh halimmud?

Aggadah is problematic, because we don’t have a tradition concerning how to understand *aggadah*. Some commentators feel that *aggadah* was written in such an esoteric manner because *Hazal* did not intend for it to be understood by everyone. Rav Yisroel Salanter did not agree. Rav Salanter said that at the time *Chazal* delivered these *derashos*, everyone understood what they meant. Modern readers, living many centuries later, often don’t understand these *aggados*, and many of them sound ridiculous.

Rav Yisroel Salanter used a *mashal* to explain this. He said that when he was in Paris, the contemporary newspaper headlines talked about a war that had just broken out. The war had been officially initiated with the signing, using an ink pen, of a declaration of war. In the first week of the war, about 10,000 people died. The subsequent headline read, “10,000 People Die in a Drop of Ink.” Anyone reading a newspaper at the time would understand the headline’s intended meaning. Similarly, says Rav Yisroel Salanter, at the time that the *aggados* were authored, everyone understood what they meant.

Rabbi Soloveitchik used to work very hard on the *aggados*, in preparation for the Tuesday night *shiur* for the *baalei batim* at the Moriah synagogue in Manhattan. Whenever he got to an *aggadah* in the Gemara, he would spend a tremendous amount of time explaining

it, because he felt that it was important that the *ba’alei batim* not walk away and laugh at the Gemara. As a matter of policy, he felt that if they didn’t understand a *halakha*, they would simply reason that the *halakha* is too deep for them to comprehend. But if they didn’t understand an *aggadah*, they would laugh at the Gemara.

In order to explain the various *aggados*, Rabbi Soloveitchik would use the Maharsha – he never looked in the Maharal miPrague – and would either agree, or disagree. Then, he would move on to the *Moreh Nevukhim*, and the *Kuzari*, and so on. Rabbi Soloveitchik had a lot to say on these subjects, and other *hashkafic* material. In fact, the two volumes on the *derashos* of the Rav published by Rabbi Abraham Besdin are excellent. I think they should be taught in high schools, because they are written so clearly, and can even be understood by students at a high school level.

What is the relationship between secular knowledge, and a proper derekh halimmud?

The Vilna Gaon is quoted as saying that to the extent one is lacking in secular knowledge of the sciences, and so on, one is lacking a hundred times more in Torah. There are certain areas where secular knowledge is essential. A good example would be in the area of *kashrus*. In order to *paskin* the laws of *kashrus*, one must have an understanding of food chemistry.

Rabbi Soloveitchik once spoke at an RCA convention, and dealt with the issue of shuls that permitted the use of a microphone on Shabbos. He said that, with regard to those who permitted the use of a microphone, he wondered whether they understood the *Halakha* well enough to permit this; with regard to those who prohibited the use of a microphone, he wondered whether they understood physics well enough to prohibit this.

In that sense, if you don’t have precise secular knowledge, how can you even open your mouth? You won’t know what you’re talking about! One of the *rabbanim* from the yeshiva tells me that his wife works in a nursing clinic for cancer patients. Apparently, one of the women there is clearly going to die because her husband asked his *Rosh Yeshiva* what should be done about her cancer, and the *Rosh Yeshiva* insisted against listening to the doctor, who had called for an operation. This woman is absolutely going to die. How could this *Rosh Yeshiva* open his mouth? He doesn’t even know the first thing about the disease! There is certainly what to ask about when it comes to medical issues, but to think that a rabbi should *paskin* without knowing anything about the disease is absolutely ridiculous.

This is only as far as *pesak* is concerned. Aside from this, Rabbi Soloveitchik had enormous intellectual depth, and was interested in everything under the sun. Rabbi Soloveitchik used to say that we never have to be worried about the conflict between science and religion. We believe in one God, and this God gave us the Torah, and created the rules of physics, chemistry, biology, mathematics, as-

tronomy, and so on; therefore, there can't possibly be any contradictions. Some *rabbanim* are afraid to be exposed to secular knowledge because they're afraid that it's going to contradict the Torah. How could it contradict the Torah if it's all from *Hashem ehad*?

It is clear that the hours spent studying in the college will take away from time spent learning Torah, but, on the other hand, such study will give a student much more breadth, and a better *hekeif* of the whole world in general. In a certain sense he may lose out, because he'll have less time for learning Torah, but secular studies grant a student a greater depth. Torah is not just a collection of *dinim*. When a person learns Torah, it should put the entire world in context. If a person has a real understanding of secular knowledge, then that, together with the Torah, will give him a better perspective on life.

What should be the place of Tanakh in one's Derekh halimmud? Is there a place for non-traditional scholarship in the study of Tanakh?

Surprisingly enough, *Tanakh* is also included in the *mitzvah* of *talmud Torah*! *Tanakh* is the basis of all our *hashkofos*, and undoubtedly must be taught. I remember when I was in college I took courses in *Tanakh*, with Rabbi Siev, and others. A person has to balance his learning. He should dedicate an hour, or two per week to learning *Tanakh*. At the very least, he should be *ma'avir sedra* every week with Rashi. That goes without saying, but he should try to do more. The *Hatam Sofer*, in his ethical will to his descendants, says that one should learn *Tanakh* with Rashi, and *Chumash* with Ramban. This is very important.

Is there room for non-traditional scholarship? A lot of the non-traditional commentary works on *peirush ha-milot*, and on *peshuto shel mikra*, which is very important. We're not sure about the meaning of a great deal of Biblical words, and we follow the principle, "*kabel es haemes mimi sheomro*." If someone has a suggestion, we would be happy to listen – and some of the suggestions of the non-traditional scholars are *gevaldig*! But as far as the overall picture of *Tanakh* is concerned, *Chazal* had their own tradition of interpretation. Why should we assume that someone living centuries later is going to have a better interpretation?

But there is certainly room for this. For instance, archaeology is discovering practices that existed years ago in the days of the *Tanakh*, and based on these findings, we can understand problematic verses in *Tanakh*. It is certainly a *mitzvah* to understand the *peshuto shel mikra*, and to know what the verse is talking about.

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Pilpul and Lomdut: Similarities and Differences

BY EPHRAIM METH

I. Introduction

There are multiple similarities between *pilpul*, the pre-20th century *derekh halimmud* (lit. path of study), and *lomdut*. These manifest themselves in many areas, such as hermeneutics, curriculum, pedagogy, and intellectual culture. The parallels between *pilpul* and *lomdut* are significant for understanding the timeless tensions inherent in Jewish education, the different ways that communities attempted to resolve these tensions, the degrees of success that met each attempt, and the factors that contributed to each attempt's success or failure.

There are also many differences between *pilpul* and *lomdut*. These sometimes strikingly resemble the differences between medievalism and modernity. The transition from *pilpul* to *lomdut* may have been facilitated by the onset of modernity; however, it may have resulted from factors internal to *derekh halimmud's* development. The differences between *pilpul* and

and analysis of their significance, is beyond the scope of this essay.

II. Tradition vs. Innovation

Critics of both *pilpul* and *lomdut* dwell on the excesses of innovation employed by each methodology's advocates. R. David Ganz (1541-1613) viewed R. Yaakov Pollack's *pilpul* as an innovation, foreign to the spirit of traditional Torah study. Similarly, R. David Willovsky (1845-1913) castigated R. Hayyim Soloveichik's *lomdut* as a foreign approach to Torah, as deviating from tradition. These scholars implicitly assert that methodological innovation itself is foreign to Torah tradition, regardless of what form it takes.ⁱ In *lomdut's* defense, R. Moshe Avigdor Amiel argued that innovation, even methodological innovation, is central to Torah tradition. Hence, the first similarity between *pilpul* and *lomdut*: both believe that the Torah tradition is essentially innovative, and under proper circumstances it is receptive to new forms of analysis.

Despite endorsing innovation, both

these two methodologies had some precedent in the Talmud. The foundational text of *pilpul*, R. Yitzchak Kampanton's *Darkhei haGemara*, adduces Talmudic precedent for all *pilpulic* inferences. Similarly, R. Moshe Avigdor Amiel's magnum opus, *Hamiddot Leheiker Hahalakha*, is entirely devoted to tracing the Talmudic roots of *lomdut's* methodology. Hence, a third similarity: the rootedness of both *pilpul* and *lomdut* in Talmudic text, which indicates a powerful fealty to tradition.

Pilpul and *lomdut* have been broadsided both for their endorsement of innovation and for the negative consequences of that endorsement. Critics asserted that *pilpul* and *lomdut* trainees, more than others, must be wary of character flaws such as incivility, causticity, and excessive pride.ⁱⁱ *Pilpul* and *lomdut* valued innovation over mastery of tradition, and brilliance over diligence. By stressing innovation, teachers made their students vulnerable to egocentrism; the innovator is honored for his personal ideas, while the master of tradition is honored for others' ideas. Hence, a fourth similarity: students of both *pilpul* and *lomdut* must pay careful attention to developing and maintaining proper character traits.

III. Breadth vs. Depth

The tension of breadth vs. depth is strongly linked to that of tradition vs. innovation. A tradition-oriented school encourages mastery, which requires diligence in reading and memorizing a broad range of material. In contrast, an innovation-oriented school encourages brilliance, which often requires hours of pondering a single passage for the purpose of advancing a novel interpretation. Hence, students of both *pilpul* and *lomdut* often swapped breadth for depth, leading to incomplete knowledge of Talmudic tradition. Concerned observers and critics were not slow to warn both *pilpulists* and *lamdanim* against this deficiency.ⁱⁱⁱ

The focus on depth manifested by *pilpul* and *lomdut* led not only to lack of time for mastering the breadth of Talmud. It also took time from the study of practical *halakha*. As noted above, *pilpul* and *lomdut* both acknowledge that the traditional understanding of Talmudic passages is far weightier in matters of *pesak* than in abstract interpretation. By encouraging depth-study, *pilpulists* and *lamdanim* subtly discouraged their students from studying practical *halakha*.

Pilpulists and *lamdanim* offered similar excuses for their de-emphasis of *bekiut* and of *pesak*. Since the 15th century, books of Jewish law and of rabbinic tradition became increasingly available. The role of teachers, argued *pilpulists* and *lamdanim*, is no longer to pass along substantive knowledge. Rather, their new role is to pass along methodology, the



lomdut are significant because they reflect the malleability and elasticity of *derekh halimmud* to conform with or confront a changing world. Differences also reflect on the *pilpulists'* responsiveness to constructive criticism, on their self-confidence, on their ideals, and on their level of commitment to their own methodology.

In this article, I will explore some curricular and pedagogical similarities between *pilpul* and *lomdut*. The discussion will revolve around three primary tensions - tradition vs. innovation, text vs. non-text, and breadth vs. depth - which were grappled with by *pilpulists* and *lamdanim* and by opponents of the two alike. Discussion of hermeneutical similarities and differences between the methodologies,

pilpulists and *lamdanim* were aware that their right to innovate was limited. *Pilpulists* acknowledged the divide between *pilpul* and *pesak*; most *pilpulists* were unwilling to issue practical *halakhic* rulings based on their *pilpul*. Similarly, R. Hayyim Soloveitchik, the paradigmatic *lamdan*, was reluctant to issue practical rulings. Hence, a second similarity between *pilpul* and *lomdut*: awareness that practical *halakha* does not follow cutting-edge interpretations arrived at via relatively young methodologies.

Moreover, both *pilpulists* and *lamdanim* rooted their discussions in the Talmud. Independent study and lectures always revolved around the Talmud. Furthermore, all hermeneutical and analytic tools utilized by

skills necessary to navigate, build upon, and apply readily readable knowledge. Students will have their entire lives to amass breadth of knowledge. However, they need to acquire proper analytical skills before accelerating their pace of information gathering.^{iv} This argument radically shifted the *sine qua non* of Jewish education from material to skills, from breadth to depth. Hence, we encounter another similarity between *pilpul* and *lomdut*: a focus on depth rather than breadth, on a proper methodology rather than on an extensive database.

IV. Text vs. Non-Text



The tension between text and non-text is connected to that of breadth vs. depth. The breadth-oriented student has little time for non-textual luxuries; once he understands the immediate passage, he must hurry onwards to master the following passage. In contrast, the depth-oriented student has time to move away from the passage in front of him, to ponder its relationship with other passages, to reformulate it in other terms, and to develop its unfinished arguments. In this sense, *pilpul* and *lomdut* both wean their students away from the immediate text.^v

In another sense, however, both *pilpul* and *lomdut* are super-textual. Their focus on depth makes students eager to discern every nuance of the text, whereas breadth-oriented students would only notice nuances crucial to the passage's flow. Moreover, the slow pace of *pilpul* and *lomdut* gives students time to notice these nuances and ponder their meanings. This imbues them with super-sensitivity, or perhaps oversensitivity, to textual nuances.

Furthermore, both *pilpul* and *lomdut* incorporate later texts into the canon. For *pilpul*, this trend began with the commentaries of Rashi, Tosafot, and Ramban, and continued with R. Edels' *Hiddushei Halakhot*.^{vi} For *lomdut*, the writings of R. Hayyim Soloveitchik are analyzed as thoroughly as any Talmudic passage. One scandalized observer reported that "the protocol of some *habburot* in *Kodashim* revolves around the *shiurim* recorded in the *Hiddushei haGriz* rather than on the sugyot!"^{vii}

ⁱⁱ This trend of expanding the corpus highlights the fealty of *pilpulists* and *lamdanim* to texts that they deem important; at the same time, it dilutes the primacy and centrality of that most important text: the Talmud.

V. Conclusion

Our generation of *lomdim*, trained in R. Chaim Soloveichik's analytic methodology, has nearly forgotten the form and meaning of *pilpul*. We fail to appreciate both *lomdus'* debt to *pilpul* and the startling resemblance between our own style and that of the *pilpulists*. The gap between *pilpul* and *lomdut* must be acknowledged, but its magnitude should not be exaggerated.

Aside from substantial hermeneutical similarities, *lomdut* and *pilpul* share emphases on innovation, depth, and on looking beyond the Talmudic text. In a sense, *lomdut* is the modern manifestation of an age-old, uninterrupted *mesorah*.

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ⁱ *haMiddot leHeker haHalakha*, pp. 15-22 (2:5-12)

ⁱⁱ For *pilpul*, see Dov Rappel, *haVikuach al haPilpul*, pp. 18-20, 28-29. For *lomdut*, see R. Doniel Schreiber, "The Brisker Derekh Today: Are we Pursuing the 'Path' Envisioned by Reb Hayyim," in *Wisdom from all my Teachers*, pp. 243-245.

ⁱⁱⁱ For *pilpul*, see *Orchot Tzaddikim*, Sha'ar haTorah (ch. 26). For *lomdut*, see R. Aharon Lichtenstein, "The Conceptual Approach to Torah Learning," in *Lomdut*, pp. 25-28.

^{iv} For *pilpul*, see Rappel, p. 22, and R. Avraham Bornstein's (1839-1910) introduction to *Eglei Tal*. For *lomdut*, see R. Alter Leibowitz' introduction to *Tiferet David*.

^v For *pilpul*, see Norman Solomon, *The Analytic Movement*, p. 94, and Mark Steiner, "Rabbi Israel Salanter as a Jewish Philosopher," in the *Torah uMadda Journal* 9, p. 96. For *lomdut*, see R. Lichtenstein, *ibid.*, pp. 6-10.

^{vi} For an early critique of this trend, see *She'ailot uTeshuvot Mahari Weil*, §164. For a later critique, see R. Hayyim of Volozhin's *She'ailot uTeshuvot Hut haMeshulash*, §8.

^{vii} R. Michael Rosensweig, "Reflections on the Conceptual Approach to Talmud Torah," in *Lomdut*, p. 219

Torat Hayim: A Modern Derekh of Tanakh Study

BY JAIMIE FOGEL

When asked to think of today's giants of Tanakh study, the names that come to mind, by virtue of my limited exposure and the large influence of the seminary culture on my world of Torah learning, are Menachem Leibtag and Shani Taragin. These two dynamic figures have had a dramatic effect on the learning style of many young North American students today, through their multiple teaching positions in post high school yeshiva programs, and the popularity of Rabbi Leibtag's online Tanakh Study Center.ⁱ

If forced to characterize their methodology in a few words, I would use descriptions such as "thematic" and "literary." While each of these terms deserves to be individually elaborated on in a complete article, I will explain them briefly for the purpose of this article. The term "thematic" connotes the ability to locate repeated motifs and ideas throughout individual units, *sefarim* or Tanakh as a whole. The term "literary" refers to the emphasis placed on the style of writing with which episodes and ideas are recorded in Tanakh. For example, if a single prophet is credited with the authorship of two books of Tanakh, it is useful to take note of the similar-



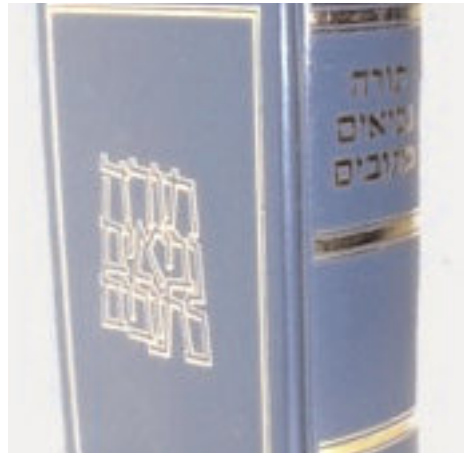
ities and/or differences between the presentations of the two. Then one may ask questions about the purpose of presenting different topics using different literary styles. One example that illustrates both the "thematic" and "literary" nature of this approach can be found in the discussion of the commonalities between the story of Yosef's sale and *Megilat Esther*.ⁱⁱ An astute reader of Tanakh would notice the numerous thematic and linguistic similarities between the two accounts. From the literary similarities observed, the reader can draw conclusions about both stories utilizing observations from one text to shed light on the other. These two fundamental textual skills enable the reader to critically analyze sections and stories individually as well as facilitate comparison between them.

Another example of how this methodology uses thematic and close text analysis is illustrated in a *shiur* on *parshat Chaye Sarah* found on Rabbi Leibtag's website. The topic he discusses is Avraham's seemingly peculiar demand that Yitzhak marry someone specifically from the family of his brother Naḥor. The focus of the *shiur* is on the (often neglected) genealogy lists in *Bereshit* and how each "toldot" list symbolizes God's decision to reject one line of descent and instead choose those whose genealogy is recorded. Rabbi Leibtag uses a *peshat* based analysis and comparison of these lists, supplemented by the explanations of the commentators, to eventually arrive at a thematic idea about the nature of becoming a "chosen" family in *Bereshit*. Naḥor's household is labeled as "chosen" since he was a descendent of the "chosen" genealogy of Teraḥ. Avraham wanted to compliment his "chosen" family by selecting a daughter-in-law from another "chosen" family. In summary, Rabbi Leibtag begins with a sharp analysis of the text, uses commentators as explanatory aids (thereby demonstrating that his vast knowledge of the classic commentaries is a strong foundation for his own innovative explanations) and arrives at a relevant, text-based, thematic idea to ex-

plain the initial quandary. While the notion of thematic explanations is not new to the world of Tanakh study, the emphasis on the text itself and the coherent way in which he both physically and metaphorically maps out the text, is what contributes to his success with the modern reader.

The traditional medium sized Koren Tanakh, first printed in the early 1960s, seen on the desks of almost every student of these teachers has become a symbol of this thematic and literary style. This Israeli edition of the Tanakh, as well as other similar editions, easily allows the reader to flip through the text and compare different sections, while also having the words themselves clear and readily available for close analysis. In my personal learning, I find that the layout of this edition gives

me a panoramic view of the text. For instance, in *parshat Va-era* the story of *Akedat Yitshak* begins with the words, “*achar ha-divarim ha-eleh*” - loosely translated as “after these matters” - which many medieval commentators explain as a text clue signaling one to look at the preceding story or storiesⁱⁱⁱ. In a classic edition of the Chumash, one would have to flip back many pages to gain an overview of the previous events, but the advantage of a Tanakh without the commentators on the bottom of the page and the layout of the Koren edition, is that



one need not turn more than a single page to glimpse at the previous stories. The text is easily accessible and visible for both close and thematic analysis. The often seen Koren Tanakh, scribbled with pencil marks, color pencil schemas and copious notes in its margin, is not another example of “*shtick*”, another accoutrement that yeshiva students have added to their lives, but a genuine reflection of Tanakh well-studied.

However, it is easy to forget that the modern face of Tanakh study and analysis did not begin with Rabbi Leibtag and Shani Taragin. The original pronouncement of a new age of Tanakh study was made by teachers affiliated with Machon Herzog like Rav Mordechai Breuer and Rav Yoel Ben Nun. Machon Herzog, Yeshivat Har Etzion’s affiliate teacher’s college, which dedicates most of its energies to advancing Tanakh study, publishes a well-known Hebrew journal called *Megadim*. “The title of the journal *Megadim* is from a verse in *Shir haShirim*: ‘When the plants are blooming and the lover anticipates taking his loved one.’

The Midrash interprets the verse as referring to the time of the Messiah when the scholars and Rabbis engage in new textual study in order to accept upon themselves the kingdom of God. These verses and the Midrash are cited and highlighted on the front cover of the journal. There is a passion inspiring these writings, a belief that with the Jewish people’s return to the land of Israel we have begun a new era that ought to be reflected in Torah study.^{iv}”

This school of modern *Torani* scholars in many ways aims to reconcile challenging secular Biblical scholarship with the traditional view of a Divinely given Torah. The result has been a new age of dynamic and ingenious commentary on Tanakh, aided not the least by Mosad HaRav Kook’s *Daat Mikra* series. While each Torah scholar has his or her own distinct approach for handling the challenges

of modern scholarship (distinctions which at times causes tension between them), all cope with the struggle of preserving traditional interpretations while offering refreshing and resourceful new readings of the timeless chapters in Tanakh. These scholars have also utilized the fact that with the revival of the Hebrew language, the text itself is more accessible and inviting to a nuanced literary analysis. Beyond this, we live in a time when much of Tanakh has come to life; when we can walk on the trails of the *avot* detailed in *Breshit* and beyond; when the prophesy of Zechariya^v has come true and Yerushalayim is once again a city filled with young children playing in her streets, where the elderly can watch tenderly from the sidelines. The belief of these modern Tanakh scholars is that the Tanakh learning which echoes in the halls of today’s *batei midrash* must appropriately compliment the unique period of history in which we find ourselves.

Finally, I would like to share some personal reflections on the significance of this methodology. What I view as the most valuable contribution of this modern method of study is the palpable life it brings to Tanakh. The term *Torat Hayim* is often loosely thrown around in conversation, but this method, which has produced modern, text-sensitive original explanations of the Tanakh, has infused a new breath into Tanakh study. This past summer I had the privilege to study *Shir Hashirim* with Shani Taragin. Until that point in my life, I don’t think I had ever been so deeply engaged with a text. During those *shiurim*, I had a profound religious experience feeling that this story was my story, both on the *peshat* and *derash* levels. The focus on both the complexities of the difficult text and the timeless thematic ideas embedded in Shlomo’s words, enabled me to connect with a section of Tanakh in a way I had never before experienced. This new age of study that we are living in has revived the notion of a *Torat Hayim*. Students viscerally feel that the Tanakh breathes, weeps, laughs and rejoices along with them, and in a period of history when the spoken language of Israel is sprinkled with Torah references, it is no wonder that this development of study has emerged from the place it all began.

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ⁱ <http://www.tanach.org/>

ⁱⁱ See the introduction of Amos Hakham to *Megillat Esther* in *Da-at Mikrah: Hamesh Megillot* page 12.

ⁱⁱⁱ For example see *Rashbam*’s comments on chapter 22 verse 1.

^{iv} R. Meir Ekstein. “Rabbi Mordechai Breuer and Modern Orthodox Biblical Commentary.” *Tradition* 33:3 (Spring 1999). p. 15.

^v Zechariya 8:4-5

On Preparing for the War of Torah: An Argument for More *Bekius*

BY ALEX OZAR

With whom will you find the war of Torah?
With he who has in hand bundles of Mishnah.
-*Sanhedrin*

I. Introduction

Modern Talmud study in *yeshivos* is commonly split into two categories: *iyun* and *bekius*. Generally speaking, *iyun* is characterized by focused, in-depth analysis of a small amount of material, with priority given to abstract conceptualization (as opposed to textual or historical analysis). The text serves as a frame from which the concepts are extracted, after which it becomes secondary to the concept, if not entirely irrelevant.ⁱ The goal is not mastery of any particular corpus of knowledge, but rather the development of the skills involved; the goal of *iyun* is the *iyun* process itself.

Bekius on the other hand is characterized by fast paced perusal of textual material, the primary goal being to amass knowledge. Analysis on the whole is somewhat limited, and tends more towards concrete textual issues than abstract conceptual ones.ⁱⁱ In *bekius*, the goal is to master maximal amounts of text, and to master the text as is, rather than its conceptual underpinnings and implications.

In today’s *yeshivos*, Gemara *b’iyun* is extolled as the optimal mode of learning, if not the only one of any value. *Bekius* on the other hand is frowned upon as the occupation of those of lesser intellectual ability, who are incapable of genuine learning. At most, *bekius*, as some sort of necessary evil, is begrudgingly allotted a fraction of the time and effort devoted to *iyun*. In the following paragraphs, I will argue, based both on the dicta of *Chazal* and on conventional wisdom, that at the very least, *bekius* should be given a considerably more prominent role in the Yeshiva curriculum than it currently enjoys.

II. Rabbinic Sourcesⁱⁱⁱ

It seems fairly clear that in *Chazal*’s view, broad textual learning, even rote memorization, is to be favored over focused analysis and dialectics; *bekius* over *iyun*. The Gemara in *Berachos* 64a and more fully in *Horiyos* 12a records a dispute as to what type of scholar is the ideal *rosh yeshiva*. Is it the *oker harim*, the sharp-witted master of casuistry, or the *Sinai*, the storehouse of encyclopedic knowledge? Though there are clearly two legitimate strains of thought on the issue, the Gemara does conclude that a scholar possessing encyclopedic knowledge is to be preferred over one who has superior dialectical prowess but inferior knowledge, succinctly “*Sinai adif*.” The reason provided is that “*hakol tzrichin Imari chiti*,” essentially, that knowledge is always

necessary, whereas one can often do without sophisticated dialectics, thus making the “*Sinai*” the wiser choice.

Now, even were we to concede that dialectical analysis is the ultimate form of learning, *Chazal* would still say that from a pedagogic perspective, textual learning should be given precedence. In *Avoda Zara* 19a and *Brachos* 63b we find “*l’olam yishne adam v’achar kach yehge*,” and its Aramaic parallel in *Shabbos* 31a “*l’olam yigris adam v’achar kach yisbor*,” which translates to “one should always acquire textual knowledge (*shinun/girsa*) first, and only then engage in analysis (*higayon/svara*). Here *higayon/svara* is clearly the ultimate goal of learning, but on a practical level, textual learning must be given chronological precedence in one’s educational program. *Girsa*, textual learning, is a necessary precondition for the ideal of dialectical analysis. So convinced was Rava of *Girsa*’s indispensability, he said “one should always engage in *Girsa*, even though he forgets and even though he does not understand what it means.”^{iv}

Of course, we must give at least minimal mention to the Maharal’s vigorous campaign against the educational maladies of his day.^v According to the Maharal, people in his day would begin their children’s education with Talmud, and proceed as soon as possible to *Tosfos*, without any significant attention given at any point to *mikra* or *mishna*. This he compares to building a wall without a foundation, and says that the student will only gain “what a fly extracts from marble” from his learning. The Maharal enthusiastically recommended a revival of *Chazal*’s educational program^{vi} in which the basic building blocks of textual learning are mastered before progressing to more sophisticated study. It is by this method only that the student might “build a tower with its apex in heaven.”^{vii}

In 1955, several centuries after the Maharal, though quite reminiscent of his campaign, Rav Soloveitchik wrote a letter to Dr. Belkin, then president of Yeshiva University. In the letter, the *Rav* addressed a number of flaws in the *yeshiva/semicha* program and made several suggestions for improvement. Prominent among his comments is his biting critique of the tendency towards overemphasis on *iyun* and consequent sacrifice of sufficient *bekius*.

Here are a few of his words: “...it is imperative to establish the proper balance between quality and quantity and to eliminate extravagance and irresponsibility. To spend a full school-year on the study of fifteen pages of text, sacrificing thus an entire *masekhta* for the sake of ingenious scholastic debates, borders, mildly speaking, on the ridiculous. In a word, we should try to unlock for the average student the halakhic world - a world teeming with life, beauty and grandeur - instead of

burying his soul in the sands of sterile argumentative casuistry. The training must not depend upon mere chance or arbitrariness but should follow a well-integrated program which should serve the purpose of providing the student with the quintessence of certain *halakhic* disciplines which are indispensable for his intellectual advancement.^{viii} The Rav's words, I believe, speak for themselves.

III. Why should *bekius* be given precedence?

Now that we have an adequate textual foundation underfoot, we can continue with an abstract logical analysis of the issue itself. The question is, why should *bekius* be preferred over *iyun*? More pointedly, what gains does a student obtain from *bekius* that *iyun* lacks?^{ix}

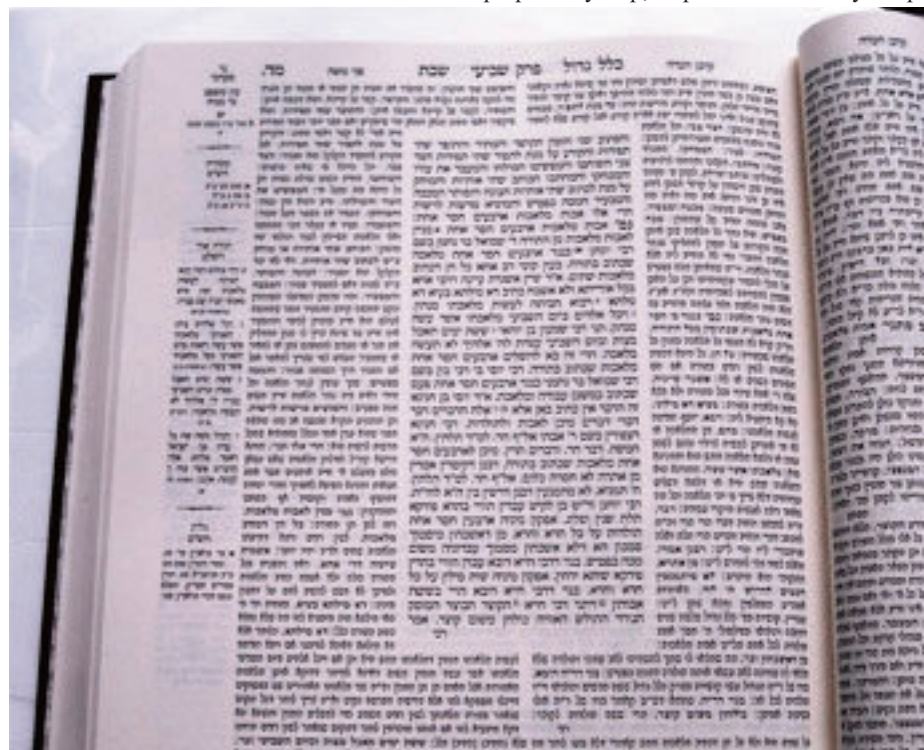
Aside from simply amassing knowledge, page after page, learning *bekius* also improves one's capacity for further learning, whether *bekius* or *b'iyun*. On a basic level, it improves one's vocabulary, both in terms of language and concepts, and develops one's basic competence in reading the Talmudic text, or "making a *layning*." First, Aramaic is a difficult language for the English speaker, and the more one is exposed to and acquainted with it the better. Further, the Gemara possesses a unique discursive didactical style that is foreign and obscure to the average student. As a vital precondition for efficient learning, the logical forms and patterns of argumentation unique to Talmudic discussion must be deeply engraved on the student's soul. Through learning *bekius* one develops and nurtures an intuitive feel for these patterns, immeasurably ameliorating the learning process. Ultimately, the Gemara begins to seem more like a friendly companion than the formidable, intimidating monster it once was.

Aside from philological concerns, a copious vocabulary of Talmudic concepts is vital to learning any Gemara. One can hardly navigate any *perek* in *Shas* without knowledge of the basic concepts of *Zeraim*, *Kodshim*, and *Taharos*. Knowledge of concepts like *beraira*, *migu*, or *davar sheaino miskavain* is ubiquitously presupposed throughout *Shas*. Further, much of *Shas* is interconnected; one can't fully understand *Bava Kamma* without first understanding *Shevuos*, and vice versa. The more Gemara one knows, the greater the quality of any further learning will be. As Rashi puts it, "v'od: l'achar sheshana harbei hu misyashev b'dato u'mitaretz l'atzmo davar hakashe."^x Certainly, building high towers of dialectical analysis in absence of an appropriate foundation of relevant textual knowledge is a futile endeavor.

Most importantly, learning *bekius* develops a certain set of cognitive and intellectual skills that are invaluable in the study of Gemara. Whereas *iyun* focuses on the "whys" behind the text, often at the expense of the text itself, *bekius* focuses on the "what," the text itself. In learning *bekius* one employs a specific cognitive mode with a specific set of intellectual skills to critically engage a text on a denotative and connotative level, to draw

inferences, to interpret difficulties, and to memorize and retain textual information (*girsra*). Aside from making one's *bekius* more efficient and productive, developing these skills will also improve one's *iyun*. First, it is obvious that a better understanding of the "what" will allow for a more fruitful search for the "why." Furthermore, depth of textual understanding adds a dimension to *iyun* which is often lacking in pure conceptual analysis. Understanding a concept's textual roots and the process by which it is extracted from those roots will lead to a fuller understanding of the concept itself.^{xi}

Due to its tedious and otherwise difficult



nature, learning *bekius* (well, of course) will improve one's focus and intellectual discipline.

As opposed to the high-flying dynamic creativity of *iyun*, *bekius* demands careful, painstaking rigor, which promotes healthy intellectual habits, valuable regardless of one's mode of study.

Pragmatically speaking, a *bekius* oriented program allows for clearly defined goals, a boon for one's motivation and enthusiasm. Learning *bekius* has distinct landmarks; the student looks forward to finishing the next *daf*, then the next *perek*, followed by the next *mesechta*, and is greeted with the satisfaction of achievement at every step. With a goal in sight, every moment of learning is infused with a clear sense of purpose, which obviously leads to more and better learning. Also, *bekius* knowledge and skills are readily testable, which can provide added motivation and a ready means for gauging progress.

Finally, whatever value we concede to *iyun* in its ideal form, we must seriously question whether the *iyun* of the *yeshivos* meaningfully approximates this ideal. Many *talmidim* can read a Rav Chaim, but how many can be Rav Chaim? Are following a set of *marei mekomos*, listening to a well structured *shiur* and reading a *Kehilos Yaakov* really the ideal of *lomdus*, or a mere illusion provided by vague, vicarious participation in the real thing?

IV. Responding to Objections

There are those who will object on the ground that on a spiritual-experiential plane, learning *bekius* simply can't compare to learning *iyun*. Sorting out a difficult *shakla v'taria* lacks the total mental immersion and communion with the *dvar Hashem* one achieves when conceptualizing a dispute between the Rambam and Raavad. This objection is shortsighted. First, as mentioned earlier, we readily concede that *iyun* is the ultimate form of learning, maintaining only that *bekius* is a necessary preparatory step; its precedence is only tempo-

which no longer exist. We cannot go on teaching halakha along these lines and at the same time hope for success....^{xii} If the Lithuanian yeshiva program we inherited no longer makes sense, we are obligated to create one that do

V. Conclusion

In the end, *iyun* is certainly a valuable exercise, even during the early stages of a student's development, and may very well be the ultimate goal of that development. I am thus not recommending that it be forfeited entirely; my goal is not to create mere sacks of books. I suggest merely that *bekius* should be given a considerably larger place than it currently occupies in the yeshiva curriculum. Unfortunately, aside from the scattered remarks I made throughout the paper, I have yet to formulate the precise form and method of *bekius* to be recommended. Fortunately, this is a problem that can be solved, if only it be given the attention it deserves.

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ⁱ See David Weiss Halivni's discussion of *pilpul* in his *Peshat and Derash*. According to Professor Halivni, "*pilpul* does not read into the text. Nor does it add to the text. It merely 'expresses' the hidden logic that underlies the text."

ⁱⁱ This should not be taken to mean that *bekius* lacks conceptual analysis entirely. Simple clarification of the text's basic meaning often involves sophisticated conceptualization, as the text often directly expresses sophisticated concepts. What *bekius* does characteristically lack is analysis of conceptual issues not expressed directly by the text.

ⁱⁱⁱ For a considerably more thorough and thoughtful discussion of a number of these sources and others, including those in opposition to my thesis, see Rabbi Jeremy Weider's article entitled "The role of Lomdus in Jewish education," found in *Lomdus: The Conceptual Approach to Jewish Learning*. Also, see *Torah Study* by Yehuda Levi.

^{iv} *Avoda Zara* 19a

^v See *Gur Aryeh, Va'eschanan, s.v. v'shinantem l'vanecha*

^{vi} Found in *Pirkei Avos* 5:21

^{vii} It should be noted that the Maharal spoke specifically of early developmental education and dealing appropriately with developing intellectual sophistication, whereas our discussion is focused on those who are already intellectually mature. However, the Maharal's words no doubt retain their relevance. Regardless of one's intellectual sophistication, the tower of Talmudic dialectics cannot stand without an adequate foundation of textual knowledge.

^{viii} Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, ed. Nathaniel Helfgot, *Community, Covenant, and Commitment: Selected Letters and Communications*. Ktav Publishing House 2005, p. 95

^{ix} Due to already strained space limitations, I chose to focus specifically on the advantages of *bekius*, without due attention to *iyun* itself.

^x *Avoda Zara* 19a

^{xi} Rav Moshe Lichtenstein discusses the potential value of increased textual analysis and focus on the *shakla v'tarya* for classical Brisker *lomdus* in an article entitled "What hath Brisk wrought?," found in *The Conceptual Approach to Jewish Learning*.

^{xii} Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, ed. Nathaniel Helfgot, *Community, Covenant, and Commitment: Selected Letters and Communications*. Ktav Publishing House 2005 p. 97

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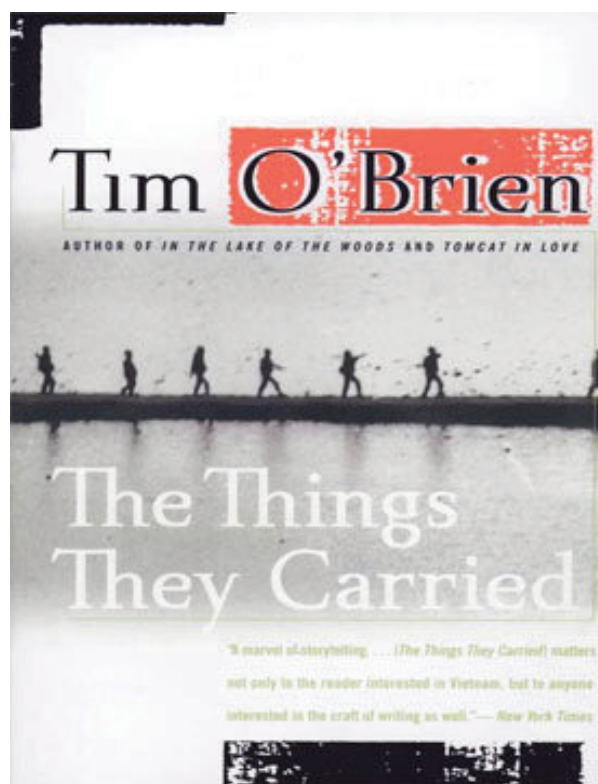
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Grasping the Truth

BY CHAVA CHAITOVSKY

Looking back at my high school years, I recall how a single conversation with a teacher profoundly impacted my *derekh halimmud*. I am sure others can make the same statement. But how many will go on to say that the conversation was with their English teacher and even directly focused on an English assignment? I can honestly say that Ms. Molly Pollak and Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* have significantly impacted my *limmud* Torah since eleventh grade.

As many undergraduate students know, Tim O'Brien's novel *The Things They Carried* addresses the theme of truth, especially as it relates to story-telling. A character named Tim O'Brien (purposely named to be confused with the author) narrates the loosely-related stories



within the book from his perspective as a middle-aged Vietnam veteran whose writing career focuses on the war period. With lines such as “That’s a true story that never happened”ⁱ and “A true war story...makes the stomach believe,”ⁱⁱ the real and fictional O’Briens show the reader that the quality of “truth” in a story has nothing to do with historicity. Rather, it has everything to do with aesthetics, humanity, and communicating something that factually true words cannot communicate. After mentioning one character’s tendency to exaggerate when telling a story to his comrades in Vietnam, O’Brien writes, “It wasn’t a question of deceit. Just the opposite: he wanted to heat up the truth, to make it burn so hot that you would feel exactly what he felt.”ⁱⁱⁱ It was in reaction to this line that my teacher made a profoundly

simple comment: “Isn’t that the purpose of Midrash?” With that statement, I could almost feel the “click” as a passage from Rambam, the words of my Tanakh teachers, and a subconsciously absorbed attitude that had all been floating around in my head suddenly fell into place.

Growing up in the Orthodox world, children are rarely taught to distinguish between information about biblical characters that is written in Tanakh and that which is added by Chazal in the form of *aggadeta* or Midrash. Therefore, dogmatic belief in the truth of Torah as expressed by the phrase, “*Moshe emet ve-torato emet*,”^{iv} expands to include the top five hundred Midrashim most commonly taught to children under the age of ten. Unfortunately, no one bothers to correct this simplistic conflation of *pasuk* and Midrash even once the “children” are old enough to understand the difference. The two statements, “Maybe Nimrod never threw Avram into a furnace” and “Maybe Hashem never split the *Yam Suf*” are seen as equally heretical despite the fact that the former is rooted in Midrash and the latter in the *pesukim*.

In his *Perush Ha-mishnayot*,^v Rambam outlines three approaches to the issue of *aggadeta* and Midrash; the foolish, the irreverent, and the wise. The first approach takes every statement of Chazal and interprets it literally, despite the fact that it may contradict rational thought. The rationalists who take the second approach berate Chazal and the Midrashic tradition for defying rational thought in favor of fanciful stories, which, as far as they have heard from the first group, Chazal meant quite literally. Hence, Rambam not only berates the first group for being foolish, but blames them for the sacrilegious views of those who take the second approach. Rambam himself is one of the few who take the third approach, which he deems the proper one. This approach asserts that not every *aggadeta* was meant to present historical fact. Rather, the majority of *aggadeta* was written cryptically and therefore must be decoded in order to reveal their intended meaning.

From the time I first heard that “Midrashim didn’t all actually happen” until that fateful day in eleventh grade, I struggled to find the correct approach to *divrei Chazal*. Ms. Pollak and Tim O’Brien taught me that there is a profound difference between taking Midrashim literally and taking Midrashim seriously. This approach to Midrash is not new. Ramban makes this same point in his discussion of the character of Nimrod, described by

the *pasuk* as “*gibor tsayid lifnei Hashem*.”^{vi} Rashi quotes the Gemara’s Midrashic interpretation, namely that “[Nimrod] captured the minds of the people with his mouth and led them astray to rebel against God.”^{vii} As Rashi does not elucidate the words of this *Gemara*, this comment does not shed light on his approach to Midrashim in general. Ibn Ezra ignores the Midrash and describes Nimrod’s actions as positive ones: he captured animals and sacrificed them to God. Ramban rejects Ibn Ezra’s interpretation because the Gemara’s comment evidences the Rabbinic tradition that Nimrod was a negative character; that was the message of that Midrash. Still, Ramban does not feel a need to accept the Midrashic interpretation and chooses to explain the *pasuk* as stating that Nimrod forced his way into kingship. In many other instances as well, Ramban quotes a Midrash and reinterprets it to form a more rational, logical, or text-based explanation of a *pasuk*. This enables him to walk the tightrope of assigning the proper *kavod* to *divrei Chazal* while not interpreting them simplistically.

Simplistic interpretations and symbolic interpretations of Midrash are often at odds with one another. For example, longer passages of *aggadeta* often make use of certain symbols in the names, numbers, or objects that they employ. Stated differently, those details each contain a message. But one who claims that the *agedata* is historically true will obscure the message in those details because he or she will claim that the details just describe the factual situation as it occurred. This example demonstrates clearly that “*tafasta merubah lo tafasta*,”^{viii} relinquishing the claim of factual truth enables the reader of Midrash to grasp the deeper truth contained within it, the kind of literary truth that “makes the stomach believe.”^{ix}

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Why I Learn: A Woman’s Perspective

BY SHOSHANA SAMUELS

For me, there’s something very special about learning. Digging deeper and deeper into a *sugya*, struggling for hours with a *chavrusa* over a *rishon* or honestly searching for the definition of a concept or the meaning of a *pasuk*, is irreplaceable. In my experience, the actual learning is just the beginning. The search continues: it may come up in conversation with a friend or simply occupy my thoughts while I wait for the subway or cut a salad. Theoretical discussion studied in the Bet Midrash often comes to life later in the day when similar halakhot arise in the living of Torah. Those moments are so special. Still, perhaps most precious for me is when I encounter a parallel argument or approach in a seemingly irrelevant topic. The topic may be another area of halakha or something unrelated to learning at all, like a new insight on language, history or even relationships.

Learning enriches my Judaism. I can’t imagine living a Torah lifestyle and keeping halakha, without an understanding of the long and complex development of halakha which leads to our current practice. That’s not to say that my actual practice is contingent upon my learning the background of that particular halakha; I would still say that most, if not all, of my practice of Jewish law is based on the actions of my parents. Rather, my knowledge that this practice is the summation of a halakhic dialogue spanning millennia adds an invaluable new dimension to the lifestyle ingrained in me over the past twenty-one years. But how do I attain that knowledge? To *know* the halakhic process isn’t to memorize the first *mishna* in *Pirkei Avot* and continue to construct a list of *mefarshei haTorah*, the great sages in our *mesora* until I come to contemporary *poskim*. It can’t be. This approach may lead to knowledge of the factual truth of *mesora*, but to add this inspiring new dimension of understanding where our practice comes from, that demands something more. To *know* the halakhic development is to understand what it means, to experience it first hand, to internalize it.

Does this sound familiar? Does any of this sound like a woman’s perspective? Not really. Actually, it has little to do with women in particular. It’s intrinsic to an informed and involved Jewish lifestyle, especially that of an intellectual person living in the 21st century.

The truth is that I struggle with that assertion. Does learning Torah need to be a central part of each and every Jew’s life? What I described above is my personal experience and while I definitely don’t think it’s a universal one, I’m not convinced it needs to be. It is very possible to practice, keep and really experience Jewish law without knowing the process leading to our reality. Yet, to me it doesn’t seem quite as exciting and dynamic. Then again, ex-

ⁱ O’Brien, Tim. *The Things They Carried*. New York: Broadway Books, 1998, p. 84

ⁱⁱ Ibid, p. 73

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, p. 89

^{iv} *Midrash Tanhuma, Korah, Siman 11*

^v *Sanhedrin*, 10:1 (Introduction to *Perek Helek*)

^{vi} “He was a mighty hunter before God,” *Bereshit* 10:9

^{vii} b. *Eiruvim* 53a

^{viii} b. *Yoma* 80a

citability and dynamism are possibly not indispensable to an observant Jew's life. I believe that people who are less inclined to learning are practicing equally as authentic a Judaism as I am. It is impossible for me to accept that "a simple Jew" a couple of hundred years ago, who lived and breathed a Jewish lifestyle, was less involved in his Judaism than I am because I have greater understanding of its sacred texts. He was involved, he was authentic.

More recently the question arose as to whether or not a lifestyle built on a mysterious sacred *mesora* is not just dynamic and exciting, but *appealing*. This is exactly when the study of Torah, Gemara and the development of halakha becomes indispensable. As Jewish autonomy was systematically dismantled in the early Modern period a Jew no longer needed his community for survival and so being a part of the community became much more voluntary. Once associating with the Jewish community was practically voluntary, it was essential that it be appealing. It was thus necessary for one's Jewish identity to be informed and armed with the background of our most rigorous texts.



Naturally, the subject of women's learning was contested as it overturned previous practice and law. Legally, men are obligated in *talmud* Torah and women are at the very least exempt from learning and at most prohibited from it. Ironically, I don't want to get into a halakhic discussion on the matter; suffice it to say that Judaism was losing its appeal to the young Jewish women in Europe who were broadening their cultural horizons by studying in secular universities. Many of these women were quickly slipping away from their traditions; they were assimilating and marrying non-Jews, because they had no anchor. It became clear that to be a Jew in the modern world demands a certain amount of self-confidence and intellectual honesty neither of which are provided by a mere cursory exposure to the texts upon which the tradition is based. For a woman with learning experience, tradition was (finally) encountered not just by imitation but by acceptance of the tradition with great appreciation for its rational, dynamic and divine nature. Hence, Sara Schenirer and her Beis Yaakov movement, which eventually led to the establishment of a yeshiva day school system for girls and even SCW.

Independent of the dangers of intermarriage, the image of a woman very involved and

active in the secular world—as a university student, a lawyer, even an avid reader—while bereft of any background in the area most important to her, her religious grounding, seems preposterous to me. It's not only the threat of women leaving Judaism that should have worried the community; it's that there was nothing compelling women to stay! Despite her formal exemption from *talmud* Torah, I cannot understand how she could be so well-accomplished in one area of G-d's world and so ignorant about her Judaism, G-d's path for her in this world! There is, I believe, intrinsic value in her education.

Thank G-d the opportunity is now available for women to learn. Now that it is, I think it is incumbent upon those who think their *avodat Hashem* would be strengthened by *talmud* Torah to capitalize on this amazing prospect. How would a student discover that part of herself without ever being exposed to learning? Perhaps, courses including *talmud* Torah should be a requirement in day schools to allow for that exposure and encouragement, in very much the same way her science and history classes are compulsory. I personally am very thankful for having had the study of Tanakh, Gemara, and halakha as a major focus in my elementary school and high school education. I am indebted to SCW for honing those skills and deeply grateful for the opportunity provided by the Graduate Program for Women in Advanced Talmudic Studies (GPATS) to dedicate myself to learning full-time.

An important question that comes up in creating curricula for Gemara and halakha education is if the material covered should specifically be "practical *sugyot*" or just on any given topic in *Shas*. I have often heard this question with regard to women's learning and rarely as directed to learning in general. At least the way I experience learning, its influence does not vary depending on which field of learning is explored, rather its the tapping into the world of learning, to the basis of our legal system which enriches my service of G-d so much.

While I enjoy the support of many friends and family members in terms of my decision to learn in GPATS, it is sometimes hard to swallow the less than enthusiastic response from others in my life. All the while I know that there are tremendous amounts of great Jews that don't relate to my connection to learning. Truthfully, the confusion on the part of those outside my immediate community doesn't bother me that much. Those same people wouldn't relate to other elements of my modern Orthodox American lifestyle either: my college degree, for example, may seem similarly extraneous to them. But discussing this topic within the Yeshiva University community and being met with a general skepticism of women's learning, is very painful. All I can say is that it's not an agenda, not a political statement; it's just a will to know and serve my Creator.

Shoshana Samuels is a recent graduate of SCW

Aggada and Aharonim

BY RABBI YITZCHAK BLAU

Some students of *Aggada* mistakenly think that our tradition contains a paucity of good commentary on their subject. In a variety of forums that include my teaching at Yeshivat Hamivtar and two years of written *shiurim* for the Yeshivat Har Etzion VBM, I have tried to show that our rabbinic tradition contains a good deal of insightful commentary on *aggadic* material. I hope that my forthcoming book entitled *Fresh Fruit and Vintage Wine: Aggadic Readings* will help enable the reading public to judge the veracity of my claim. In what follows, I attempt to highlight a neglected source of *aggadic* commentary.

Most yeshiva students know about the classic works of *aggada* interpretation including Maharsha, Maharal and the commentators found in the *Ein Yaakov*. These well-known *aggadic* commentaries do not need my advertising. Good interpretation harder to locate appears in works that are not page-by-page Talmudic commentaries as in the writings of R. Zadok haKohen of Lublin, R. Yizhak Hutner, R. Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, R. Yehiel Yaakov Weinberg and R. Meir Simha haKohen from Dvinsk. Of course, finding this material



provides a greater challenge, as students have no ready way of knowing where these rabbinic writers address particular *Aggadat*.

A third source of fine commentary is easily accessible yet often overlooked. The page-by-page Talmudic commentaries of the last few hundred years address *aggadot* much more frequently than their medieval counterparts do.

Giants of halakhic discourse, such as Tosafot and the *Hakhmei Sefarad* focused almost all of their interpretative energies on the Talmud's legal section, rarely commenting on a story or ethical maxim. However, the case differs considerably when we turn our attention to the *aharonim*. Great works from this period including *Keren Ora*, *Sefat Emet*, *Hatam Sofer* and *Gevurat Ari* (or *Turei Even*) contribute to *aggadic*, as well as halakhic, analysis. As many yeshivot skip *aggadic* sections altogether, and as some yeshivot utilize the *ris-honim* far more than the *aharonim*, students remain unaware of the gems available in these works.

In a recently published article,¹ Chaim Eisen argues that the sixteenth and early seventeenth century brought an explosion in *aggadic* interpretation. The previous half-millennium saw almost no comprehensive treatment of *aggadot* but only some general programmatic statements and treatment of isolated *aggadot* scattered through philosophic and homiletical works. Between 1516 and 1631, R. Shmuel Edels (Maharsha), R. Yehuda Leow (Maharal) and R. Yaakov Ibn Habib (Ein Yaakov) all attempted to further the interpretative process for the majority of Talmudic non-legal material. Eisen makes some interesting

suggestions as to why this historical period produced such literature. If my argument is correct, the increased focus on *aggada* continued into modernity as the later authorities wrote Talmudic commentaries equally focused on *aggadic* and halakhic sections.

Though the question of which historical factors influenced the turn to *aggada* deserves

treatment, I would like to focus on the basic fact that the *aharonim* are more likely to confront *aggadot*. Realization of this fact alone can provide significant help for the learning community. Three Talmudic sections will help buttress my claim. Though the sample I use certainly does not qualify as a scientific study, I believe that my examples still prove quite striking. Furthermore, many years of *aggadic* study lead me to conclude that my examples are representative.

The third chapter of *Ta'anit* incorporates many important *aggadot*. In particular, a number of famous stories appear in between pages 19b and 23a. These stories include a miracle occurring that enables Nakdimon ben Gurion to pay back the water he borrowed for the *olei regalim*, R. Elazar insulting an ugly fellow he meets on the road, Ilfa and R. Yohanan deciding whether or not economic distress should motivate them to abandon the study hall, Nahum Ish Gam Zo's responding to travails with equanimity, Eliyahu haNavi showing R. Broka which people in the market are destined for the world to come, and Honi haMe'agel standing in a circle and demanding rain. These stories are classics of rabbinic literature.

If we were studying the halakhic issues in *Ta'anit* such as the recital of prayers for rain or the liturgy on a public fast day, we would no doubt utilize Tosafot and Ritva as the pillars of our analysis. What happens when we look for help with these stories? Ritva does not comment on a single one of these tales. Tosafot make two very brief comments – one on the etymology of Nakdimon and the other identifying the ugly fellow with Eliyahu haNavi. I think it fair to say that these giants of Talmudic thought channeled their efforts elsewhere.

Let us contrast the above with the commentaries of R. Yizhak from Karlin (*Keren Ora*) and R. Aryeh Leib Gunzburg (*Gevurat Ari*). The latter makes several comments on these stories, two of particular significance. In the Honi story, Shimon ben Shetah says that he had considered excommunicating Honi. What aspect of Honi's behavior might have merited such a response? The Gemara states that had the drought continued, Honi would have violated his oath and this would constitute a desecration of the Divine name. Rashi suggests that Honi exhibits an arrogant posture towards God when Honi responds to the initial rain by saying "this was not what I asked for." *Gevurat Ari* points out these two possible explanations and attempts to reconcile them.

A number of the stories raise issues with regard to relying on miracles. Ilfa and R. Yohanan sit beneath a ruinous wall. Nahum brings dirt to the king instead of precious stones. In both instances, *Gevurat Ari* insists that these scholars did not rely upon miracles. He asserts that Ilfa and R. Yohanan did not realize the nature of the wall they sat under. He also says that Nahum did not discover the fact that thieves had switched his stones for dirt until in the king's presence.ⁱⁱ

Keren Ora's contributions are even more dramatic. In the Nakdimon story, the lender claims that the rains fell after sundown when the time for returning the water had passed;

therefore, Nakdimon owes him money. When making this claim, he states "I know that God has only shaken up the world for you." At first glance, it seems that he concedes Nakdimon's righteousness even as he tries to claim the cash. *Keren Ora* suggests that this wealthy lender taunts Nakdimon. If the rains came a mere few moments too late for Nakdimon to repay his debt, then God must truly want to torment Nakdimon. His reading fits in beautifully with the fact that Nakdimon then prays to God to show that "You have those You love in the world." In other words, the rain could indicate God's like or dislike for Nakdimon, but only the sun's return to the sky that enables rain to cancel the debt reveals that God truly loves Nakdimon.

His reading of R. Elazar's encounter with the ugly person also shows ingenuity and insight. The story certainly revolves around the dangers of arrogance and how we talk to others. *Keren Ora* views this story as a metaphor for the meeting between Torah and the broader world. Those engaged in Torah study can depict the broader world as undifferentiated ugliness not worth relating to beyond the occasional insult. Conversely, they can understand that the broader world is a complicated place and that the ideal Torah would inspire those engaged in it to attempt an ennobling of the broader world. According to R. Yizhak from Karlin, this story instructs the Talmudic scholar to do more than see ugliness upon leaving the walls of the study hall.ⁱⁱⁱ

The second chapter of *Shabbat* also has wonderful *aggadot*, including some famous material between pages 30a and 31a. In these pages, we encounter the story of King David's death, the contradictions in *Sefer Kohelet*, the bettor who attempts to anger Hillel and the three prospective converts who approach both Shammai and Hillel. Tosafot's only comment on all of the above refers to a halakhic discussion about gambling. Ramban, Rashba and Ritva do not comment at all on these *aggadot*.

How different the situation is when we open up *Sefat Emet* and *Hatam Sofer*! The former makes a profound point about why David learned Torah each second of Shabbat once David discovered that he would pass away on Shabbat. Rashi explains that David studied in order to forestall death. *Sefat Emet* suggests that David was not trying to achieve some form of special protection. Rather, the thought that he had few moments left to live made it imperative that David use those moments in the best possible way. Therefore, he studied each moment.

Sefat Emet also wonders why Hillel responds to a foolish question in the wager story when the Gemara counsels against responding to silly questions regarding worldly matters. He answers that the person who asks, "why do the Babylonians have round heads" intends to ask an inane question about something insignificant. Hillel responds that attempting to understand the variation in God's created order is a worthwhile field of study.

Hatam Sofer adds quite a few meaningful comments. He offers a fresh perspective on

why one potential convert wanted to become the high priest. The simple interpretation views this convert as interested in the glory and finery of fancy garments. *Hatam Sofer* explains that this non-Jew felt guilty about his previous misdeeds and saw the priestly garments as his quick route to atonement. This convert later hears that David himself could not achieve atonement though the priestly garb and comes to a deeper understanding of atonement. He also has an innovative reading of the prospective convert who wants to receive the entire Torah while standing on one foot. *Hatam Sofer* explains that this gentile wants religion to be either about harmonious society or about communion with God. He wants the Torah to revolve around a singular principle. Hillel's response states a principle that combines both *bein adam lamakom* and *bein adam lehavero*.

In my final example, an *aharon* intentionally attempts to compensate for the absence of a *rishon*. In his *Be'er Sheva*, R. Yisasher Beer Eilenburg adds commentary for sections of Talmud that lacks Tosafot. This work includes a running commentary on the last chapter of *Sanhedrin* as that chapter is fully *aggadic* and Tosafot remain silent throughout the chapter. Note also that Rabbenu Nissim's *Hiddushei haRan* on *Sanhedrin* skips from 99a to 110b while R. Yaakov Etlinger's *Arukh leNer* comments on almost every page in the chapter.^{iv}

Space limitations preclude more examples but I suggest that you will find similar attention to *aggada* in several other modern commentators. Excellent material that can be located easily exists for those interested in *aggada*. Open the *aharonim* and enjoy their wisdom.

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All of them are Right: Your Postmodern Derekh Halimmud

BY BEN GREENFIELD

I am warning you of an intellectual development whose tenets shake the very assumption of human understanding. Followers are known for not only adopting its radical beliefs about knowledge, but for abandoning traditional morals, ethics, and beliefs. Already a calling card of the scholarly elite, even the most innocent student lives in its imprint, and - when seeking to impress or fit in - will consciously employ its radical tools.

Subscribers to this philosophy implicitly deny objective paths to knowledge. They claim that as much as one might attempt honest research or open-minded discussion, their subsequent opinions are less the fruits of a clearheaded investigation than the predictable afterbirth of a preset, subjective perspective. In other words, we gaze at the world through a distorting lens and, thus, our every observation can be traced back to those silly glasses. Similarly, adherents of this viewpoint reject such

p	q	$p \wedge \neg q$
T	T	t F f
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labels as "True," "False," "Right," "Wrong," "Makes Sense," or "Inconsistent" - all standpoints are possible. Thus, they invest no time in discerning the "right" opinion on any issue, in fact, scorning those who do. For after all, how does one decipher Truth, what presumptuous tools can one possibly use? Does such a thing even exist? Put yourself in anyone else's perspective and, trust me, you would agree with them too.

These axioms also include a revolutionary approach to texts, namely, that anything can be read any way. Texts shift according to their reader and his or her particular traditions, context, agenda, sexuality, etc. The *Communist Manifesto* for you might be the direct opposite of the *Communist Manifesto* for me, or better yet, the *Communist Manifesto* of you a year from now- and all of those reads are equally truthful. Thus, two conclusions: first, the impossibility of discerning the author's original intent and more importantly, the disregard for it. After all, texts are but catalysts for meaning- a meaning far deeper and more complex than any individual author.

But forget about texts - this is the nature of reality itself. We live in a world of insuffi-

ⁱ Maharal's Be'er ha-Golah and His Revolution in Aggadic Scholarship" *Hakirah* 4 Winter 2007

ⁱⁱ The latter assumption requires some textual emendation as some versions of the Talmudic text have Nahum seeing the dirt and saying "Gam zo le'ova" before he reaches the palace.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Keren Ora* also adds some interesting comments on the Honi story.

^{iv} However, R. Meir haLevi Abulafia's *Yad Ramah* does comment on the last chapter in *Sanhedrin*. Clearly, my claim is about general trends and not that no *rishon* comments on *aggada* or that every *aharon* does so.

cient information. The precious few lines of data we succeed in acquiring explode into an infinite cacophony of divergent and contradictory explanations, none of which can ever be proven with perfect veracity. Such is human knowledge. And such are a few central motifs of this emerging intellectual phenomenon.

To what rising, modern, revolutionary credo do I refer? What method of intellectual inquiry backs such dicta? **Lomdus, of course.** If it sounded more like Postmodernism, why - thank you - that's my very point: *Lomdus* is Postmodern.

I can pinpoint four dominant themes in *Lomdus*.ⁱ I used them to write the above paragraphs, which to their credit, also describe strong trends in Postmodernism. Tell me, isn't this eerie?

1. The assumption that a particular shita stems from pre-supposed, conceptual models. The Ran's opinion on, say, *yibum* is not the product of the two textual proofs he records or the three *kashas* that he quotes, but a pre-supposed conceptual conviction. Likewise, although he is discussing a specific and localized case, *lomdus* will assume his stance is part of a broader conceptual bias. You hear it best in the prevalent terminology: "we can explain the *Makhloket* like this, the Ramban sees *Yibum* as an extension of the previous marriage, whereas the Ran sees it as a new union" - apparently this particular halakhic debate is actually the effect of pre-supposed, pre-existing outlooks on a massive Torah topic. And apparently, even though neither the Ramban or Ran mention these concepts, we are able to detect the real motivation behind their *shita*.

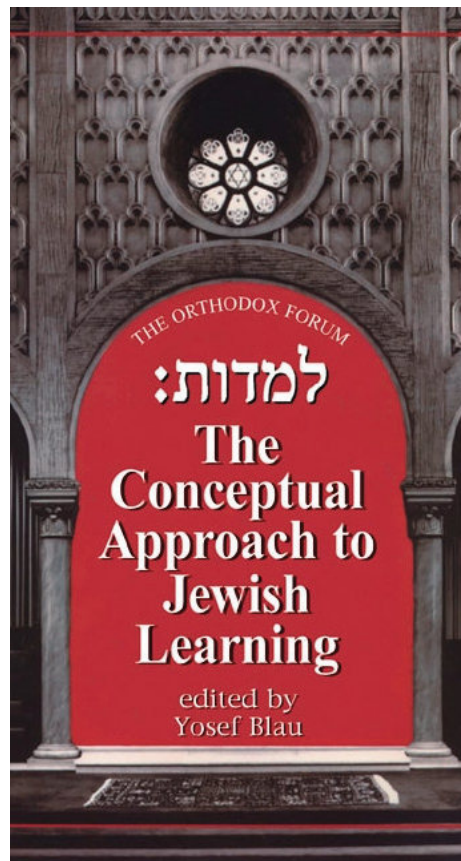
2. The assumption that each conceptual model is equally valid. After establishing the Ran's and Ramban's abstract models, would a *Magid Shiur* dare take the next step and ask which opinion actually makes more sense? No! - who even has the *hava amina* that there exists a single Truth! Is the *Magid Shiur* concerned with why the Ramban chose that alternate approach? No! Treat it as a given, unchangeable, instinctive decision! Might he present a dialectic of proofs and counterproofs, so typical of the pre-Brisk Torah world? No! I promise you, nestled within each *Rishon's* respective point of view, anything can be answered up. After all, asking who's actually right is so *baalebatish*.

3. An indifference towards textual analysis. There are those that hang on every word of a *Tosfot*, pin-pointing the exact thrust of a particular phraseology. There are those that contrast divergent *Rashis* in the hope of uncovering the *Kunteros's* subtle commentary. Not so with *lomdus*. A *lamdan* simply isn't concerned, for a combination of two reasons: firstly, he doubts the success and integrity of such a method. (He would be the first to tell you that his "objective" interpretation of a *Rishon* always manages to produce a *lomdishe hakira* and in the few cases where it failed him he would respond with the ubiquitous "nu- nu.") Secondly, the *Tosfot's* original intent is

not actually significant: texts are the written springboard for conceptual meanings - a meaning far deeper and more complex than any individual commentator.

4. An attitudinal embrace of Talmudic ambiguity. *Lomdus* works because the Gemara doesn't. How so? The Talmud presents us with tiny scraps of information which explode into a cacophony of alternative explanations. (Ok, say *migo* works. As a *hanhaga*? As a *beirur*? *L'furei m'shvua*? With *ha'aza*? Without *hazaka*? On a *taanat shema*? The list goes on.) The Gemara teases us by drawing a single dot on the Talmudic X-Y graph - and of course, only an infinite amount of equations fit the description. An innocent observer might find this news disenchanting, but in it *lamdanim* rejoice.

They construct a philosophy of Talmud Torah upon the foundation of multiple truths. Some claim Truth constitutes a wide



range of contradicting options while others prefer to imagine a single Truth, but give up any hope of arriving at it, ostensibly eliminating Truth from their intellectual experience. Some even ride the wave of not-knowing to shores not necessary to being a *lamdan*. For one, the method of R. Aharon Lichtenstion, our generation's most prominent *lamdan*, claims that identical terms can refer to non-identical concepts. ("*migo*" over here refers to one conceptual model, whereas "*migo*" a few lines later refers to another.)ⁱⁱ In the end nothing can be assumed as Talmudic Truth, and ultimately, we can never know anything with perfect veracity. For if we could, it might be worthwhile to understand *rishonim* on their own terms, to weigh the benefits of each independent idea, and to employ textual analysis to arrive there.

It is not this essay's aim to link the historical developments of Postmodernism and *Lomdus*.ⁱⁱⁱ Likewise, it is not this essay's ambition

to weigh the merits of one movement because of its similarities to another. (In other words, I'm not saying *Lomdus* is bad!) Rather, assuming that proposed similarities exist, I contemplate their repercussions on the intellectual life of the YU student.

The popular fallacy of a monolithic, all-answering Judaism demands revision. So often I hear YU students talk of "the Torah perspective" on an issue or ask for "what Judaism has to say" regarding this or that topic. These discussions disregard the complex and contradictory nature of Jewish texts. Unfortunately, the "Torah answer" is all too often a big, fat question mark - the type that haunts the Truth seeker's memories and lurks in the shadows of his brief successes. Jewish history attests to this fact: no generation practices the Judaism of its predecessors, for every time and place struggles to piece together its own consistent, meaningful, and unique religious formula. *Lomdus* teaches us to accept these facts when we practice Jewish learning, its high time we remember them when we approach Jewish life decisions.

Ben Greenfield is a Sophomore in YC

ⁱ This article discusses the only *Lomdus* I am familiar with, namely that practiced by R. Aharon Lichtenstein and continued/expanded upon by his students. Nonetheless, many points I make apply to earlier or more conservative versions thereof. Likewise, I don't claim ownership of this definition of *Lomdus*, I merely describe that which I have experienced. If this style of *Lomdus* has a completely different meaning to the reader, I would be surprised, but nonetheless have little with which to reply.

ⁱⁱ I am not attacking the integrity of such a maneuver, which in my insignificant Talmudic opinion, fits wonderfully with the text and opens up valuable windows of interpretation. Rather, I claim it fits the *Lomdishe* preference for ambiguity in place of clarity.

ⁱⁱⁱ I hope to address Postmodernism's effects on quasi-traditional Orthodox Hashkafot in a forthcoming article.

A Hebrew Beyond Hebrew

BY TIKVA HECHT

A couple of semesters ago, I took a class entitled *Philosophy of Talmudic Perspectives and Values*. Though the Talmud is not part of formal Western philosophy, the class examined to what extent it is possible to gain philosophic insights from Gemara texts. The question raised was one of methodology. How can we, if at all, validly extract or abstract from a whirlwind of legal contemplation and legend-like *agadeta* substantial, conceptual approaches to the major questions of meaning in our lives? This puzzle resonated with me, and still does almost every time I open a Gemara.

The Bible may be the Holy Book, but the Talmud is *our* book. Halakha is the guide and the footprint of the Jewish people. By balancing self-governing rules of interpretation and precedence with organic growth and adaptation, the halakhic system has guided Judaism through space and time. The core of this remarkable achievement is the Talmud. The Talmud provides the personality of our whole legal system and by extension our national identity. It is the culmination of everything that came before it; everything that comes after is commentary.

It is no wonder then that the Talmud, with its metaphysical descriptions, ethical anecdotes, and intriguing logic is prized as a hashkafic, as well as halakhic, source. From Rambam to the Rav, the Talmud's presence inhabits the great works of Jewish thought. Still, the interplay between Gemara and hashkafa is far rockier than the interplay between Gemara and halakha. Our methodology for studying Gemara as a segue into halakha is well established and systematic. The same cannot be said for hashkafa. Jewish philosophy may continuously cross-reference the Talmud, but this often means citing specific, often difficult to understand, out-of-context passages to support already well-articulated ideas. Organized talmudic study for its own sake is rarely done with a philosophic end in mind. For this reason, the average reader has no resources other than trust or cynicism to rely on when contemplating which came first: the chicken or the egg, or, in this case, the interpretation or the conclusion?

And so, I find myself asking the original question even more emphatically: is it possible to develop a method of talmudic study through which the text's own hashkafic voice can emerge? The inaccessibility of the Talmud in this area is daunting, and I think in modern times made even more challenging by, ironically enough, the study of philosophy itself. Thus far, I have been using the terms hashkafa and Jewish philosophy interchangeably. This is a misnomer. Philosophy is the discipline invented by the Greeks to further man's search for truth, not to mention the Truth, through his natural cognitive resources, specifically his

ability to think rationally. Hashkafa is the Jew's attempt to articulate a world-view; a broad picture of existence both physically and meta-physically derived from the wisdom of Torah. Both emerge from the natural need to understand the world and our place in it, but philosophy is about what man envisions; hashkafa about God's vision.

It is very difficult, however, to totally separate philosophy from hashkafa, as the latter also requires a great deal of man's rational input to draw conclusions. When faced with a difficult passage of Gemara, there is a thin line between uncovering the hashkafa, and philosophizing a good enough fit. Furthermore, it seems impossible to be fully aware of how much our outlook is formed by the philosophic traditions which mold the society we live in. Any system of thought establishes axioms, rules of conduct, and poles against which new material can be measured. The Talmud seems neither ignorant nor uninterested in the aspects of life we normally associate with philosophic questioning. However, its method for broaching such subjects, its framework for understanding them and its very language for expressing them is radically different from the philosophic approaches we have come to take for granted. This intellectual mismatch has me concerned; will any methodical approach to revealing talmudic hashkafa quickly slip into fancy analytic and literary acrobatics in order to read philosophy into the Talmud? This may further personal intellectual pursuits, but cannot seriously contribute to a substantial understanding of the text.

The twentieth century French philosopher Emanuel Levinas suggests a solution which uses philosophy to solve this very problem which philosophy created. His approach can be found in *Nine Talmudic Readings*, a collection of transcribed lectures originally delivered by Levinas at the annual Talmudic Colloquia of Jewish Intellectuals in Paris between the years 1963 and 1975. The essays all share the same format: Levinas quotes a section of Gemara, then analyses it piece by piece in light of political, social and, of course, philosophic themes of his day. It is this format that makes *Nine Talmudic Readings* rather distinct. Levinas is not cross-referencing Gemara in a philosophic discussion; The Gemara is presented as the foundation of the discussion. Sensitive to the vast divide between the texts before his eyes, the thoughts in his head, and his strong desire to reconcile them, he admits to strong philosophic influences on his writing and considers his work a translation from "Hebrew" to "Greek".ⁱ

Many will argue that Levinas's Gemara study is all smoke and mirrors; that *Nine Talmudic Readings* is exactly the type of mismatch feared. Levinas was first and foremost a Philosopher in the secular tradition. Furthermore, the Colloquia were intellectual, not religious, gatherings. The very decision to translate from Hebrew to Greek implies greater familiarity and comfort with the second language over the first. It is very easy to be skeptical of Levinas's efforts and argue that his outlook is integrally biased towards philoso-

phy; the Talmud never really had a chance. It is possible to still benefit from Levinas's conclusions while arguing that the method he uses to reach these conclusions has little, almost nothing, to do with learning Gemara. Perhaps the best proof of this position is that the *Nine Talmudic Readings* uncovers a remarkable correspondence between the deeper lessons of the Talmud and the body of work of Emmanuel Levinas.

If Levinas had described his work as talmudic interpretation, rather than translation, I too would be convinced that the Talmud was merely his token cultural frill of choice in primarily philosophic exercises. His careful choice of the word "translation," though, garners greater consideration. Interpretation implies a one step process of clarifying what is already there in the same language. When one is seeped in a certain way of thinking, this way of thinking is *always* what is already there. Translating, on the other hand, is a two-step



process. It requires a) deciphering the meaning of a foreign text and b) determining which words from the language one is translating into best capture this meaning. Both languages are active partners in transmitting meaning. In the process of comparison the limits and lengths of both languages become illuminated. Annette Aronowicz, in her translator's introduction to *Nine Talmudic Readings*, describes Levinas's translation as "simultaneously an attempt at letting the Jewish texts shed light on the problems facing us today and an attempt at letting modern problems shed light on the texts."ⁱⁱ This methodology suggests that philosophy can be made into a *chavrusa*, literally an *ezer knegdo*, to Gemara and that this will result in "violence done to words to tear from them the secret that time and conventions have covered over."ⁱⁱⁱ We are forced to challenge preconceived assumptions about Gemara and philosophy, but through a method of talmudic learning.

To demonstrate how this method works, and also how it does not, I'd like to bring an example from the Levinas's essay "Temptation of Temptation."^{iv} Levinas's text is a slew of *agadeta* about *Mattan Torah* which he considers in light of a philosophic problem with

which he often struggled. He felt modern society suffered from "the temptation of temptation"^v – an idealization of knowledge that encourages even knowledge of sin. On the other hand, Levinas sees no benefit in the common philosophic alternative—child-like innocence—which is only able to offer protection through ignorance. He was in search of a third approach, one that would allow for wisdom but not at the expense of morality. The problem of the temptation of temptation is a real problem for Levinas, one that must be confronted whenever the transmission of knowledge assumes a prominent role in society. Since *Mattan Torah* is the ultimate occurrence of this, the events of *Mattan Torah* must either overcome, or be tarnished, by the temptation of temptation. Through the *agadeta* discussed, Levinas demonstrates how the Jews accepted the Torah neither for the sake of knowledge nor through ignorant-innocence, but from "an original fidelity to an indissoluble alliance"^{vi} – basically,

responsibility^{vii}. Levinas deciphers, to the best of his ability, what the Talmud is conveying about the occurrences at *Mattan Torah*. Simultaneously, he considers the philosophic possibilities for receiving knowledge. He compares and contrasts the Talmud and the philosophy until they correspond. Hence: translation.

But has this method really solved the problem of reading philosophy into Gemara? The conclusion drawn about *Mattan Torah* just so happens to correspond with Levinas's own philosophic answer! It is impossible not to smile at this symmetry. Giving Levinas the benefit of the doubt and assuming his intention was truly to clarify the Gemara, this symmetry demonstrates a degree of faith. *Mattan Torah* – God's revelation to man and man's acceptance of God's word – is an event we strongly need to believe was not conducted haphazardly. If, previously, Levinas rationally concluded that responsibility is the moral mode through which ideas should be transmitted, then of course he is going to trust that *Mattan Torah* was conducted in this most moral way and will read the Gemara accordingly. We can still say his intention was to elucidate a piece of Talmud as much as share a philosophic idea, but the conclusions are pre-drawn. If translat-

ing only observes the text, but does not interrogate it, we are right back where we started. We need to understand how translating can move beyond transposing ideas from one disciple to the next, before we can even start to overcome the danger of reading pre-formulated conceptions into text.

To do this, consider the hypothetical (if not historical) possibility that Levinas did not consider his final answer before studying the relevant Gemara. Suppose he had applied his method knowing only philosophic possibilities that were bothersome to him, in this case the idealization of knowledge or innocence. What would have happened? The translation would have failed—there would have been no philosophic concept for *Mattan Torah*, no appropriate word in the Greek dictionary that corresponded to the Hebrew. When one language lacks a word, you borrow from a language that does not lack it. In other words, the final satisfactory answer would have been born from the Gemara.

Translating Hebrew into Greek can contribute to forming a systematic method for studying Talmud towards a hashkafic end, but only as an initial step. It disturbs the rhythm of common talmudic learning allowing the text to push past its accepted, but ultimately artificial, limit. Greek moves us beyond Hebrew, as Levinas might have said. If, however, translating into Greek only produces more Greek, we have hardly progressed. Our real goal is reached by discovering where the translation fails. To get beyond Hebrew and beyond Greek, to get to what Levinas might have called a Hebrew beyond Hebrew, would be to discover a mode of thought other than the philosophic and/or talmudic one we habitually know. I don't know what it would be, but I'm immensely curious to find out.

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ⁱ Aronowicz, Annette. Introduction. *Nine Talmudic Readings*. By Emmanuel Levinas. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994.

p. ix

ⁱⁱ *ibid.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid.* p. 47

^{iv} *ibid.* p. 30-50

^v *ibid.* p. 34

^{vi} *ibid.* p. 49

^{vii} My brief summary of "Temptation of Temptation" serves the purpose of this paper, but hardly does justice to Levinas's ideas. I highly recommend reading *Nine Talmudic Readings* to fully grasp his concepts.



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