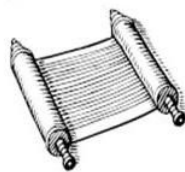


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"Taking Responsibility for Torah"

Mission “Vort”

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik of Blessed Memory taught the following syllogism:

· Humanity is created *b'tzelem Elokim*, in the image of G-d.

Therefore the purpose of man is *l'hidamot lo k'mah she'efshar* – to imitate G-d's ways.

· The Torah introduces G-d to humanity as the borei, the Creator.

Therefore the purpose of humanity is to be creative.

· But Jews were specifically instructed to center their lives around Torah!

Therefore the ultimate Jewish purpose is creativity within Torah, *chiddushei Torah*.

For those who spend much of their time laboring in the intellectual fields of Torah and who are privileged to experience the joy of *chiddush*, of Torah creativity, the Rav's focus is obviously attractive. But it seems by implication to cut the majority of the Jewish population off from the central Jewish religious act – not that many of us are capable, whether for reasons of economy, temperament, or ability, of making genuinely original contributions to the study of Torah.

Let me therefore offer the following extension of the argument.

· Most values are universal. People generally agree, for instance, that courage and generosity are good, cowardice and miserliness bad.

Therefore the uniqueness of Torah – and any other moral system – lies largely in the relative weight it assigns universal values, in the way it instructs us to choose when those values compete or conflict.

Therefore the content of a *chiddush* Torah is its rebalancing of values.

· R. Chananyah ben Akashya famously teaches that G-d gave us many commandments in order to increase our merit. Maimonides explains that this means that each of us can focus on the commandment or commandments that most resonate with our souls. In other words, every soul among us legitimately balances the values of Torah differently.

Therefore each of us, if we live a life genuinely devoted to Torah, simultaneously offers a creative interpretation of Torah, albeit not one consciously bound to a specific textual rereading. The Torah can be interpreted both through study and through practice. There is a Torah of thought, and a Torah of life.

But academic study with no real-world accountability leads to an impractical and/or unfeeling Torah; life with no textual accountability leads to an incoherent and/or self-indulgent Torah. Only when they go hand in hand – when the creative energy of one is checked and balanced by the inertia of the other, and vice versa – does Torah develop properly.

The Torah of Thought and the Torah of Life meet in the realm of *p'sak halakhah*, where intellectual Torah must be translated into practical rulings. A community's healthy relationship with *p'sak* – and its production of robust *p'sak* – are signs that it is effectively coordinating its Torahs. Anemic and mistrusted *p'sak* are danger signs.

I submit that in Modern Orthodoxy the Torah of Life and the Torah of Thought – both in the admirable process of creativity – have grown apart from one another. The academy and the community do not trust one another's religious and moral intuitions, and therefore each feels itself unaccountable to the other. This must change, and it can, and here's how.

We need to produce *talmidei chakhamim* - *poskim* – leaders - who share the positive moral vision of the Modern Orthodox community, including

- commitment to the full religious development of women,
- to the ultimate significance of every human being as a *tzelem Elokim*,
- to the religious significance of Jewish sovereignty in Eretz Yisroel,
- to unintimidated intellectual openness, and
- to profound cultural responsibility.

These poskim will test their halakhic rulings against that vision - but they must also be unafraid to subject the practices of the Modern Orthodox community to strict Torah scrutiny.

The Center for Modern Torah Leadership was founded to produce those leaders.

Unless otherwise noted, all pieces are by Rabbi Klapper and published on the CMTL website or blog.

Matan Torah and the Aseret Hadibrot

K'beyakhol, or: Did Anyone Ever Really Believe that G-d Has Eagle Wings?	5
Stairway to Sinai: Smoke and Synthesia	7
Sinai and Orthodox Authority	10
The Decalogue in Rabbinic Literature (by Dr. Malka Simkovich)	13
Can G-d Command Us to Believe in Him?	15
Art and Orthodoxy	16
Interpreting the Second Commandment (by Rabbi Jared Anstandig)	19
For Us or for G-d? (by Noam Weinreich)	21

Talmud Torah and Pedagogy

Talmud Torah as the Shared Spiritual Language of the Jewish People	23
Why Study Talmud?	26
Who Wrote the Torah? An Intellectual Defense of Unitary Authorship for High School Students	29
The Boundaries of Torah Study (by Morah Deborah Klapper)	47
Why “Why” Questions Belong in the Beit Midrash	50
How to Teach Halakhah: “Whether and “Why” Cases	54
Five Choices About Teaching Halakhah	57
Teaching Hashkofoh	60

Megillat Rut

Introduction to Rabbi Klapper’s Translation of the Book of Rut	63
The Book of Rut, a Translation	65
Who Judged the Judges? Reading Rut Rabbah as Reading Rut	74
Translation to Excerpts from Midrash Rut Rabbah	77
Taking Initiative: Rut’s Place Among the Mothers of Tanach (by Dina Kritz)	96

K'beyachol, or: Did Anyone Ever Really Believe that G-d Has Eagle Wings?

February 4, 2010

Did Rashi believe that G-d had a body? Rabbi Natan Slifkin and Rabbi Saul Zucker debated this question in the journal *Hakirah* some years ago.

The magical midrashic word *k'b'yakhol* (=“as if it were possible”) means that traditional Jewish thinkers are not obligated to make clear to others, and perhaps even themselves, whether statements about G-d are intended as metaphor or literally. Furthermore, Rambam’s definition of forbidden corporealism includes even the ascription of emotion to G-d. This ends up making all speech about G-d impossible, as Shlomo Pines pointed out. Any Maimonidean speaking about G-d therefore must be assumed to be speaking *k'b'yakhol*. As a result one can almost never demonstrate corporealism or incorporealism – at best one can demonstrate self-perception as corporealist or noncorporealist, and these self-perceptions are often not in accord with others’ definitions.

One battleground for this controversy is Rashi’s discussion of the metaphor “I carried you on the wings of eagles and I brought you to Me” (Shemot 19:6). The components of Rashi’s comment are:

- a) The event referred to is the miraculously rapid assembly of the Jews from all over Goshen to Rameses immediately prior to the Exodus
- b) a citation of Onkelos, whose translation is described as altering something about the verse for the Honor of Above.
- c) The metaphor “wings of eagles” refers to the eagle carrying its young above its body rather than below, because it has no fear of birds attacking from above it
- d) The eagle is instead being protective by interposing its body between human archers and its young
- e) The *nimshal* of d) is that G-d moved His angel and cloud between the Jewish and Egyptian camps on the night before the Splitting of the Sea
- f) a statement that Onkelos correctly translated the last phrase as “I brought them to My worship”.

Certain problems and questions are immediately apparent:

1. a) and e) refer to different events
2. Why is d) important? All other birds equally interpose their bodies against what they see as the greatest danger to their young
3. What is the *nimshal* of c)?
4. How does Onkelos’ alteration affect the Honor of above?
5. Is Rashi endorsing Onkelos, or is he rather explaining why Onkelos here should not be understood as a translation?

At least several of these issues likely depend on what it is that Onkelos is altering. There seem to be a variety of texts here, including *ונטלית*, *ונטלית*, and *ואטלית*, and Rashi understands this as a shift from *אשא* to *עשא*.

Everyone I’ve read focuses on the *binyan*, assuming that the shift is from “I carried you on wings” to “I caused you to be carried on wings”². But why would this shift be necessary for the Honor of Above? Perhaps the image of G-d carrying people is demeaning, but that image appears as well in *Devarim* 1:11,

¹ I don’t find helpful the attempt at zoological accuracy embodied in the alternate translation “on the wings of vultures” – regardless of the question of what bird a *neshet* was (BDB allows eagle), the metaphor is ruined by the associations “vulture” carries in English. On this, and on the scientific accuracy of the image of birds carrying their young generally, see Rabbi Slifkin at <http://zootorah.blogspot.com/2009/05/on-eagles-wings.html>

² It is not clear to me why, if this is the real point, Rashi says this is like *עשא* rather than *אשא*

where Onkelos translates it as carrying³ and in Devarim 32:11, where the image is also of an eagle carrying its young, and as best I can tell Onkelos has no issue⁴.

Rabbi Zucker connects this with the other place that Rashi cites Onkelos as altering for the Honor of Above, Shemot 33:22 -

“and I will make My hand a roof” – from here we learn that destroyers have permission to destroy. But Onkelos translated “I will protect with My word” – a paraphrase for the Honor of Above, that He does not need to roof over him with an actual hand”,

- and concludes that the change in both places is intended to prevent the implication that there are forces in the world that resist G-d. This is an interesting theory, although

- a) Rashi uses “for the Honor of Above” in non-Onkelos contexts where there are no such implications, and
- b) the issue of protection is not relevant if we see the travel on eagles’ wings as related to the assembly at Rameses, as Rashi first suggests, rather than to the night before the Splitting of the Sea, as he concludes.

I therefore suggest that Rashi interprets against the Targum’s change in both places, and uses the explanation ‘for the Honor of Above’ not to endorse the need for the change⁵, but rather to explain why Onkelos should not be understood as a translation. Thus in Shemot 33:22 he wishes to insist that Moshe actually was in danger absent G-d’s protection, albeit only because the Damagers are acting under His general mandate, and in Shemot 19:6 he wishes to emphasize that G-d (k’byakhol?) suffered on behalf of Israel by blocking the Egyptian weaponry⁶. Thus his primary interpretation here is the second midrash, a claim which is supported by his citing it exclusively in his commentary to Devarim 32:11.

In this light, perhaps the overall metaphor should be understood as follows:

Most ‘gods’ need to protect their nations from other gods. Hashem however, “flies above” all “other gods”, i.e. His people had no need to fear any Egyptian ‘divinities’. What they did have to fear was human beings, attackers from below rather than from above their Protector, and G-d protected us from them by placing Himself (k’b’yakhol?) in their way.

³ using the shoshon סוֹשׁוֹן, which, based on his using it only there and to Devarim 1:12 and 11:12, seems to refer specifically to human parents carrying their children

⁴ It is tempting to suggest, but there is no evidence, that Rashi was referring to Onkelos’ interjection of כדעל to make clear that the eagle’s wings are metaphorical rather than real.

⁵ Or to oppose it, and therefore this tells us nothing about his position on corporealism

⁶ Again, this is unrelated to any position on corporealism – for instance, the Torah explicitly says that it is an angel rather than G-d who moves to block the Egyptian weaponry.

Stairway to Sinai: Smoke and Synthesia

January 17, 2014

For those who treat Led Zeppelin as sacred scripture, the following lines from “Stairway to Heaven” have presumably been the subject of great inquiry:

*In my thoughts I have seen
rings of smoke through the trees
and the voices of those who stand looking*

How can one see voices, even in one’s thoughts?

Ibn Ezra notes that sensation is fundamentally a cognitive phenomenon, and the wires from the various sense organs can be crossed. Synaesthesia can have many causes, including heredity, and is often prized by those who experience it. It is also a common side effect of hallucinogens, which may well exclaim the presence of rings of smoke in the lyrics.

Now the title of “Stairway to Heaven” is obviously a reference to Yaakov’s dream, and it seems reasonable therefore to look for Biblical allusions in the lyrics as well. The line “and the voices of those who stand looking” seems to me a clear play on Shemot 20:14

וכל העם ראים את הקולות
ואת הלפידים
ואת קול השפר
ואת ההר עשן
וירא העם
וינעו
ויעמדו מרחק:

*All the nation were looking at the voices and the lightning bolts
and the voice of the shofar
and the mountain smoking;
The nation looked
and they trembled
and they stood at a distance*

Many, many beautiful interpretations - pace Ibn Ezra - have been offered for the phenomenon, experience, and/or metaphor here of visible voices. Targum Yonatan captures some of the opportunities as follows:

וכל עמא חמיין ית קלייא
היך הוו מתהפכין בשמעהון דכל חד וחד
והיך הוו נפקין מן גו בעוריא
וית קל שופרא היך הוה מחי מיתיא
וית טורא תנין

*And all the nation saw the voices
how they were altering in the hearing of each individual
and how they were emerging from the flames
and how the voice of the shofar was resurrecting the dead
and the mountain smoking*

For Targum Yonatan, the voices are made visible so that each Jew can hear the voice particular to him or herself, and at the same time see that their subjective experience does not capture the objective reality of Torah. Perhaps the collective transgenerational experience of Klal Yisroel can capture that reality, and that is why it was necessary to resurrect the dead at Sinai. (Perhaps the song really means “the voices

experienced by those who stand looking”; what would it have been like to stand at Sinai, see everyone else’s experience, and yet hear no Voice of one’s own?)

What becomes clear by contrast, however, is that Targum Yonatan offers no explanation of what the smoke signals.

The standard midrashic interpretation reads the smoke as an allusion to the Covenant between the Pieces in Genesis 15:17, and in both places as a stand-in for Gehennom (from which one can be saved by the fire of Torah). I find this deeply unsatisfying; fire causes smoke, rather than saving from it, albeit an image of Torah as gasmask might not be effectively inspirational. And why must a negative image, even threat, be part of Ultimate Revelation?

Meshekh Chokhmah offers the best alternative I have thus far found, although even he cannot avoid a negative association. I suspect (although he says none of this explicitly) that he began with the conviction that the fire of the Burning Bush did not smoke; smoke is a side effect of fuel consumption. He then moved to the claim in Yoma that manna is angel food = לחם אבירים, and therefore produces no bodily waste to eliminate. Combining these tropes yields the realization that smoke is the product of an imperfectly efficient flame, which is neither self-sustaining nor non-polluting. Why would the flame of Sinai be imperfect?

Here is his daring answer in part:

הביאור, דאמרו דבכל המסעות כתיב "ויסעו ויחנו" בלשון רבים -
שנסעו במחלוקת,

עד שבאו לסיני ונעשו הגמוניה אחת שלא היו במחלוקת.

אמר: הרי השעה שאתן תורה לבני!

אמנם, כי אם לא היה להם מחלוקת, בכל זאת היה בהם ניצוץ קנאה אחד בחבירו, שלא הגיעו עוד לאהוב חבירו כנפשו ולשמוח במעלת חבירו. ועל זה אמרו במכילתא (יתרו פרשה יט, כ) אף כשעמדו בסיני נאמר עליהם (תהלים עח, לו) "ויפתוהו בפיהם ולבם לא נכון עמו", שהיה הלב לא מטוהר מקנאה.

והנה אמרו כי משה שקול ככל ישראל, אבל כן היו כל ישראל שקולים כמשה (מכילתא בשלח טו, א). ואם כן, אם היה בלא שום קנאה ושום פירוד לבבות זה מזה, רק כל העדה כולם קשורים בלב ונפש אחד, הלא היו כולם איש אחד, והיו ראויים לקבל כל התורה כמשה.

אבל כיון שלא היו קשורים בלבב אחד, אם כן כל אחד בפרט לא הגיע לשלימות כזה לקבל התורה. ומה שראו ושמעו בדברות היה כדי לאמת האמונה בלבם, וכמו הוראת שעה.

The explanation is that in all their travels Scripture writes "And they travelled and they camped", because they travelled in מחלוקת=controversy,

until they came to Sinai and became one bloc with no controversy.

G-d said: Behold the time that I will give Torah to My sons!

However, even though they had no controversy, there was yet among them a spark of interpersonal jealousy, as they had not yet reached the level of loving their friend as themselves and celebrating the greater achievement of a friend.

About this Mekhilta (the halakhic midrash on Exodus) writes that "Even while they stood at Sinai Scripture (Psalms 68:36) says of them "They seduced Him with their lips, but their hearts were not prepared to be with Him", because their hearts were not purified of jealousy.

Now the Rabbis said that Mosheh was equivalent to all Israel, but likewise all Israel are equal to Mosheh, and if so, had their been no jealousy or division of hearts among them, rather all the congregation bound together as one heart and spirit, they would all have been one person, and they would have been fit to receive the whole Torah, just like Mosheh.

But since they were not bound together as one heart, each individual did not reach the level of perfection necessary for receiving the Torah, so that what they saw and heard at the Statement was only to verify faith in their hearts, and it was like a הוראת שעה=temporary suspension of the Law . . .

Among the beauties of Meshekh Chokhmah’s reading is that he notes the irony of having smoke obscure the astounding visual experience of voices. Perhaps he believes that in a perfect world each of us, like Mosheh Rabbeinu, would have heard all voices simultaneously – “*zakhor and shamor* in one Statement”

– and Hashem resorted to synesthesia only because of our limitations. It is quite astonishing to claim that the Law was given in the equivalent of a (justified and necessary) breach of the Law!

Meshekh Chokhmah also beautifully captures the Rabbinic idea that all future interpretations of Torah were already revealed to Mosheh. But this Rabbinic notion has an underappreciated consequence – it means that Mosheh Rabbeinu, uniquely among all Jews, was never able to experience himself as contributing creatively to Torah. Perhaps G-d gave us the Torah just before we reached perfect concord to ensure that we would have the capacity to be partners in the creation of Torah just as we are in the creation of the physical world. Perhaps this is why the Sages often praise the mutual jealousy of scholars when it is harnessed to productive Torah ends.

Sinai and Orthodox Authority

January 28, 2016

The Jewish people are a political community bound by religious law. I contend that this proposition emerges from the *Aseret HaDibrot* and indeed all of Torah and is a fundamental necessary assumption of any halakhic Judaism.

By 'political', I mean that we take collective responsibility for the distribution and exercise of power in our community.

By 'religious', I mean that we see Jewish law as deriving its authority from G-d's will.

A community can be bound by religious law, but not be political, if it sees obedience to that law by its members as solely a matter of personal choice. The easiest reasonable way to accomplish this is to restrict religious law to ritual while allowing a parallel, nonreligious system to take responsibility for issues such as the distribution of material goods (economic policy, *Choshen Mishpat*), the regulation of information (libel and slander laws, *lashon hora*), criminal justice (*dinei nefashot*), and even of membership in the community (immigration policy, *gerus*).

I contend that an authentically halakhic Judaism has a principled opposition to such restriction.

Nonetheless, an authentic halakhic Judaism may accept or even advocate for such restriction in particular circumstances, on practical or moral grounds. For example, when the Jewish community is practically unable to use physical force against its members, criminal law must be handled by other agencies. When many segments of the Jewish community fundamentally reject the authority of *halakhah*, coercing obedience is practically counterproductive and morally offensive.

A community is political, but not bound by religious law, if it grounds the legitimacy of power on a basis other than Divine Will.

But a community bound by religious law does not have to ground the legitimacy of power *exclusively* on the basis of Divine Will, nor on the basis of *direct* Divine Will.

In fact, halakhic Judaism rejects both exclusive and direct Divine Will, and holds that power must be grounded in both heteronomy and autonomy in order to be legitimate. The Torah became binding when we accepted it, not when G-d gave it.

Furthermore, many features of *halakhah* are specifically and explicitly intended to distance direct Divine Will from power. The clearest illustration of this is Rabbi Yehoshua's use of the Biblical clause *לא בשמים היא*, "It is not in Heaven", in the Oven of Akhnai story. The point of this story is not to celebrate autonomy but rather to legitimate the use of coercive authority by some human beings against others, specifically against others who claim the right to act on the basis of their direct experience of Divine Will.

Halakhic Judaism is an intricate dance that revolves around the dynamic interaction of autonomy and authority. That dance must be enacted differently in different contexts. Contemporary Orthodox versions incorporate the reality that formal halakhic authority is greatly diminished, in three interconnected ways:

First, the halakhic community has little-to-no access to any means of power other than social suasion. (This is mostly true even in the State of Israel.)

Second, there is almost no formal framework for granting halakhic authority within the community, especially outside Israel. Even those who believe that titles matter should recognize that having met the minimal standards for *semikhah* properly confers only minimal authority.

Third, many of the *halakhah's* internal tools for granting authority have been sidelined. *Midrash Halakhah* is not used to generate law; legislation is binding at most on narrow local communities;

mechanisms for seizing property or annulling marriages are used only in directly precedented cases; there is no framework for taking a binding vote on issues of controversy.

In a dance, the weakening of one partner does not properly lead to the other asserting more and more dominance. Rather, as in all relationships, one proper response to weakness is to make greater efforts at self-restraint, to ensure that one's partner is still given the fullest possible capacity for self-expression and influence in your shared being.

So too, the proper response to the weakening of formal halakhic authority may not be exuberant celebration, but rather the voluntary restriction of halakhic autonomy, especially in areas where the stakes are lower. (Note that both halakhic autonomy and its restriction may play out differently for those who formally make decisions only about their own actions, and those who formally make decisions with the intent to set halakhic precedents.)

A strong-form statement of this argument would be that in the absence of formal authority, the preservation of *halakhah* as law requires us to seek to constitute informal authority whenever and wherever possible.

But I think this is false. *Halakhah's* rationale for restricting the authority of direct Divine Will is not that it mistrusts G-d; it restricts that authority because it mistrusts the humans who would be the conduits of that Will, or would claim to be the conduits. Therefore, *halakhah* has no brief for giving similar authority to human beings on any other basis. An authentic halakhic system must always allow for authority to be religiously challenged, rebuked, or even disobeyed.

But there must be an authority to challenge, rebuke, or even disobey. A paradox of modernity is that one may be obligated to establish authority in order to disobey it.

So the issue of non-Orthodox halakhic-ness cannot be about, or at least not only about, whether Orthodoxy is generally and/or fundamentally right or wrong about gender roles, or about sexuality. The question is not even whether Orthodoxy generally and/or fundamentally excludes the objectively correct positions on such issues.

The question is whether it is possible to reject the informal Orthodox authority exercised on such issues and still authentically maintain a conception of the Jewish people as a political community bound by religious law, and sustain the dance of autonomy and authority in one's individual and communal life.

In the context of that question, I want to make a descriptive sociological claim that may have significant normative implications. Orthodox identity exists prior to and independent of practice, whereas non-Orthodox halakhic identity is constituted by practice. With rare exceptions, Jews today who identify as both halakhic and non-Orthodox are an epiphenomenon of Orthodoxy. They have rationales for their rejection of specific Orthodox rulings, but they have no independent rationale for accepting the rest of the system.

This reflects the failure of American Conservative Judaism to develop a successful non-Orthodox ground of halakhic obligation. No one has yet successfully developed a Jewish theology that both accepts Higher Biblical Criticism and convinces Jews that they are obligated to subordinate their immediate perception of the Divine Will to the perception of others more grounded in Jewish tradition; and no one has successfully developed a non-Orthodox *halakhah* that Jews see as authoritative whether or not they experience its observance as immediately religiously meaningful.

I confess that the successful development of such a theology for *halakhah* would not necessarily lead me to accept it as religiously legitimate. The tradition I see as authoritative has often utterly excluded positions that were genuinely halakhic, meaning that they held with integrity that the Jewish people are a political community bound by religious law. Take for example the Sadducees, or *lehavdil elef alfei havdalot*, Beit Shammai.

But I also want to be clear that Orthodoxy is not a magic word, in three ways:

First, the Orthodoxy of today includes positions that are halakhically legitimate but evil, not because they offer intellectually implausible readings of traditional texts, but because they offend against an objective moral order. If I had my choice, I would exclude them. Because I do not have the social power to accomplish this, my Orthodox identification requires me to take responsibility for them. Yigal Amir is Orthodox; at least some of the “price-tag” terrorists are Orthodox; there are virulent racists in American Orthodoxy; and so on. It is *davka* Orthodox Jews who need to denounce them and work toward making such positions unacceptable in our community to the point that they are no longer Orthodox.

Second, the Orthodoxy of tomorrow may be halakhically illegitimate. If tomorrow all the Orthodox synagogues in the world introduce idol worship, with the approval of their rabbis, DON'T LISTEN!

Third, Orthodoxy today or tomorrow may choose to exclude halakhic people or communities for illegitimate reasons. If it chooses to exclude a sustainably halakhic community, that community would be entitled to see Orthodoxy rather than itself as violating *lo titgodedu*, the prohibition against factionalism.

I suggest overall that the interests of Torah are better served in our day if:

- (1) People who have moral problems with specific areas of *halakhah*, but recognize the religious necessity of authority, make their critiques within the Orthodox system rather than excluding themselves.
- (2) People who have authority within the halakhic system recognize the religious value and necessity of internal moral and intellectual critique, and see those who engage in such critique—even when they go to the extent of civil disobedience—as vital positive members of their community. (Note that civil disobedience, which involves acceptance of the legitimacy of penalties, must be sharply distinguished from secession or rebellion.)
- (3) People who have authority within the halakhic system recognize that authority is constituted not by agreement, but rather by eagerness to engage and willingness to obey in the face of disagreement.

I believe that these recognitions would lead to different and better handling of current and future controversies within and on the borders of Modern Orthodoxy.

I also suggest cautiously that Modern and Centrist Orthodox leaders should recognize the extent to which their own community's continued presence in the Orthodox coalition is not inevitable. I say cautiously because the recognition of insecurity can lead to the persecution of alleged heretics to prove one's own loyalty. But it can also lead to a mature recognition of the dangers posed by zealots, and concerted effort to prevent them from unnecessarily burning bridges, or grain silos.

The Decalogue in Rabbinic Literature

by Dr. Malka Simkovich

February 16, 2017

This week's parsha features a passage that in many ways, is the most central document in Israelite history. This passage, Exodus 20:1–13, is known as the Decalogue, or The Ten Commandments (although some of these commandments are actually statements). In the centuries following the dramatic moment of divine revelation at Sinai, the Decalogue took hold as the central articulation of Israelite theology. Its contents, along with the ethical injunctions in Vayikra 19, were paraphrased and referenced in many passages preserved in biblical prophetic literature. And by the Second Temple period, the Decalogue was not only a central idea, but a liturgical document. Despite its importance in the biblical and late Second Temple periods, the Decalogue is not preserved in rabbinic liturgy. Nor is it of central theological interest in rabbinic literature. While its verses have retained an important place in Jewish tradition, they have also been eclipsed by a different statement, one uttered not by God, but by Moshe. This passage is, of course, the Shema (Deut 6:4–9). In order to understand why the Shema came to replace the Decalogue, it is helpful to explore how Jews and early Christians living during this period related to this text.

In the Second Temple period, the Decalogue had pride of place in Jewish thought and liturgy. *Tefillen* discovered at Qumran, the archaeological site adjacent to the caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, contain parchment that records both the Shema and the Decalogue. These *tefillen* were likely used in the first century BCE or first century CE, when the Qumran sect flourished. Other Jewish documents written during these two centuries also mention the Decalogue. The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides, a wisdom text that was written in Greek by a Jew who probably lived in Alexandria, Egypt, opens with a paraphrasing of the Decalogue: the writer mentions every injunction of the ten commandments except the proscription to keep the Sabbath (Pseudo-Phocylides, 1–18). A second document, which is part of a twelve-book collection probably written and assembled by Jews in the late Second Temple period called The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, also paraphrases the Decalogue (Testament of Issachar 5:1-5). Even the great first century CE Jewish Philosopher Philo of Alexandria was fascinated with the Decalogue: he wrote an entire treatise devoted to interpreting it.

Early Christian documents whose authors had not fully severed their ties to Judaism referred to the Decalogue as an authoritative text that was foundational to their faith. The early Christian text written in Greek known as the Didache, was written in the late first or second century, cites the twelve apostles of Jesus as paraphrasing the Decalogue to their students. Likewise, the third century Christian document called the Didascalia, which also purports to record the teachings of the apostles, does the same (Didache 2:1–3; Didascalia 26:9–10).

But by the early rabbinic period, the Decalogue was falling out of favor in some Jewish circles. Even as Christians were making reference to the Decalogue, Jews were disputing whether to recite it regularly in their synagogues.

The decision to stop reciting the Decalogue after the Shema is well documented. The Bavli explains that the daily liturgy used to comprise the Decalogue, the Shema, and the Amidah, but the recitation of the Decalogue was abolished because of the heretics (*minim*) (b. Berakhot 12a). Perhaps the concern was that the heretics would argue that the recitation of the Decalogue proved that only the portions of the Torah that the Israelites heard directly from God were true (Rashi on Berakhot 12a). Or perhaps the rabbinic concern was that reading the Decalogue would affirm sectarian claims that only the Written Law was authoritative, whereas the Oral Law was not. But these explanations do not explain why the Shema continued to be recited. After all, the Shema is part of the Written Law as well.

Perhaps the reason why the Decalogue fell out of favor in lieu of the Shema is that for the most part, the Decalogue comprises ethical instructions that, with the exception of the injunction to keep the Sabbath, all of humankind are expected to observe, whereas the Shema is a theological statement that affirms the election of Israel by God. By the early rabbinic period, the seven Noahide laws had taken form which

included some of the statements of the Decalogue (t.Abodah Zara 9:4; b.Sanhedrin 56a; earlier articulations of these laws in the second century BCE document Jubilees 7:20–21, as well as Sibylline Oracle 4:24–39, a document probably composed in the late Second Temple period). This led towards a sense that the Decalogue had universalist elements in it.

Even the mention of the Sabbath in the Decalogue would not have necessarily been viewed by the rabbis as particularistic. In the Roman period, many Gentiles observed the Sabbath without converting to Judaism. These people were called God-fearers (see, for instance, Juvenal, *Satires*, 14.96–106). The Decalogue, then, may have been viewed as potentially applicable to all of humankind from start to finish.

A second difference between the Decalogue and the Shema is that the Decalogue is a document that was spoken by God, whereas the Shema was spoken by Moshe. The Shema, then, represents the affirmation of all Israelites to commit themselves to a covenantal relationship, whereas the Decalogue represents the divine injunction to do so.

Given the fact that the Decalogue has been subjugated to the Shema, how might we appreciate its importance in our tradition today?

I believe that both the Decalogue and the Shema are foundational to Jewish thought. At the moment that the Israelites were leaving Egypt and making the transition from slavery to freedom, they needed to hear a universalist message: a message that while they were chosen by the One True God to be His elect people, this same God that had just chosen them had jurisdiction over the entire world. Indeed, the major trope of the Exodus story is that God controls the entire earth (see, among others, Exodus 8:6, 8:18, 9:14, 9:29, 10:2, 14:1, 14:18). Forty years later, a new generation of Israelites on the cusp of entering into Israel needed to hear a different message: As they entered the an unknown land, aware that they were embarking on inevitable military conflicts and the loss of their main conduit to God, Moshe, the Israelites needed to hear that God was committed to a relationship with them that, while it could include suffering as punishment for sins, would endure for perpetuity.

The community of Israelites who entered the land of Israel and their descendants held fast to the idea that God was committed to an eternal relationship with them. This relationship was reflected in the relational text of the Shema, in which the Israelites affirmed that God was *our God*, rather than the Decalogue, which affirmed that God was *the God*—the God who had taken the Israelites out of Egypt. Since the Decalogue was spoken by God and the Shema was spoken by Moshe, the Shema represented the *Israelite* side of the covenantal relationship—the side that required the Israelites to continually affirm their identities in light of their connection to God.

The rabbis understood that the Decalogue and the Shema were given at different turning points in Israelite history, bore different theological messages, and reflected two different voices. Aware that non-rabbinic communities were espousing views that they regarded as heretical, and that these same communities were laying claim to their holy texts, the rabbis turned to the document that they believed represented their own voice, and their own commitment to serving God, rather than the voice of God that proscribed them to do so.

Dr. Malka Simkovich (SBM 2006) is the Crown-Ryan Chair of Jewish Studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.

Can G-d Command Us to Believe in Him?

February 11, 2009

The late Thomas Kuhn incisively argued that philosophers (and Briskers) tend to overread texts with a form of excessive intellectual generosity. Because their interest is in ideas rather than in history, they assume that authors are aware of all logical challenges to their ideas, and therefore interpret texts in ways that takes those challenges into account, even if those challenges are not explicitly recorded until centuries later.

Ramban's defense of Halakhot Gedolot's failure to count the opening sentence of the Aseret haDibrot among the 613 commandments is likely familiar, but I return to it regularly because of my uncertainty as to whether I overread it. Ramban suggests, as do contemporary scholars of ancient Hittite vassal treaties, that "I am Hashem your G-d" is a preamble rather than a command, a statement of sovereignty that grounds and whose acceptance is a necessary precondition for all subsequent commands.

To a contemporary philosopher, ever sensitive to reflexive loops and a passionate partisan of autonomy, the position Ramban articulates (not his own position) is tantamount to a conscious recognition that belief cannot be commanded, and accordingly that there can be no justification for religious coercion against agnostics, and no blame for those whose failure to uphold halakhic commitments stems from denial of the premise that G-d commands us, or even of the premise that G-d commands us to observe Halakhah.

However, these conclusions seem a difficult fit for Ramban in historical context, and a close reading of his words yields no clear indication that his argument goes beyond the technical claim that metamitzvot can be excluded from the number 613. One can evade the historical issue by suggesting that he merely attributes this position to Halakhot Gedolot, and thereby legitimates it, but himself does not believe it – but I find that approach unconvincing. One can also argue that Ramban legitimates the position, and we are then free to draw our own implications from that position, but that only begs the question of whether the implications are necessarily legitimate.

But perhaps it is disrespectful to Ramban to read him as missing what seems to me such a clear implication of his argument? I would be hard-pressed to accept such a contention in any other area of Rabbinic discourse.

Art and Orthodoxy

February 3, 2015

The term “*avodah zarah*” has two distinct referents: worship of a false god, and false worship of G-d. The temptation is strong to collapse the two meanings and argue that worshipping G-d falsely betrays a theological error and misidentifies something else as G-d. This is along the lines of the version of the ontological argument which proves that G-d exists by defining Him as the being Who cannot be conceived of as nonexistent; any god one does not believe in is therefore not the true G-d. Here similarly, any god one worships falsely is not the true G-d.

This is a purely rationalist worldview, in which the only goal is comprehension and in which the risks and rewards of religion have reality only within the human consciousness. The extreme opposite is a magical worldview, in which the powers of idolatry and evil are real and to some extent capable of opposing and frustrating the intent of G-d.

A middle ground, the artistic worldview, concedes that the risks and rewards of religion are psychological, but holds that the attractions of *avodah zarah* are not all smoke and mirrors. There are routes to transcendence other than the legitimately halakhic, and genuine experiences of divinity that are halakhically forbidden.

Here we run squarely into a variant of the question that catalyzes Maimonides’ *Guide for the Perplexed*, and *lehavdil* Chaim Potok’s novel *My Name is Asher Lev*: Why would G-d deny us any powerful experience? This question is at the root of the not-merely-perceived tension between art and Orthodoxy.

One daring answer is that no such experiences are ever completely forbidden. Even (black) magic, the Talmud teaches, is permitted להתלמד, as a teaching tool in a course on defense against the dark arts. Any regime of censorship requires the censor to see all. As a parallel, it’s no secret that pop Orthodox culture is rarely more than a severely attenuated version of past pop American culture. But someone had to see and filter the originals to produce this skim milk.

When it comes to sculpture and representational art, it is clear that the *Mishkan* and its accessories served as outlets for the aesthetic impulse. Rabbinic literature flaunts the perilously fine distinction between the *keruvim* (cherubs) over the Ark and gods and goddesses of eros. My question is whether they were merely an outlet, or rather an acknowledgment that the visual and plastic are religiously necessary in all contexts.

As a parallel, consider Maimonides’ treatment of the sacrificial ritual within the *Mishkan*’s precincts. Many argue that Maimonides believed that the sacrificial ritual was a concession to a particular cultural context which we have overcome. It is a concession to an intrinsic human drive which we pay a price for extirpating, and should instead channel.

Here is a sharp test case: Should synagogues, which we can conceptualize as denatured Temples, display representational art? This question is presented by *Beit Yosef* YD 141, following Mordekhai AZ 440, as the subject of a dispute between Rabbeinu Elyakim and Rabbeinu Efraim. Reports of that dispute shape halakhic discussions of art to this day. I want to reframe the issue from technical matters of law to more abstract questions of the power and purpose of art and the ideal human relationship to the aesthetic impulse.

On *Avodah Zarah* 42b, Rav Sheshet assembles a halakhic triptych:

כל המזלות מותרין – חוץ ממזל חמה ולבנה
וכל הפרצופין מותרין – חוץ מפרצוף אדם
וכל הצורות מותרות – חוץ מצורת דרקון

*All astronomical representations are permitted – except for those of the sun and moon;
All faces are permitted – except for the human face;*

All pictures are permitted – except for the picture of a dragon.

The Talmud initially understands Rav Sheshet as drawing a distinction between the creation and the maintaining-in-existence (=appreciation?) of such works. This distinction, however, proves inadequate. Other halakhic statements apparently demonstrate that the production of any astronomical symbol is forbidden, and that the appreciation of even human faces is permitted. On the other hand, Rabban Gamliel possessed and used models of the moon!

The Talmud then tries to distinguish between works with idolatrous intent and works without such intent. This too, fails; surely any and all pictures with idolatrous intent may not even be maintained! At this point the answers come fast and furious:

We distinguish between

- 1) perfect and damaged representations.
- 2) cultural contexts in which the worship of images is likely, and those in which it is unlikely
- 3) images intended to be permanent, and those which can be disassembled and reassembled
- 4) images with positive educational purposes, and those without such purposes.

The last of these answers is the most astonishing and creative. The permission להתלמד, or alternatively להבין ולהורות, is in other contexts about the necessity to learn things in order to defend against them, whether through defensive charms or simply by having the capacity to judge those accused of exercising dark powers. Here, by contrast, Rabban Gamliel uses lunar models in order to become expert in, and properly set, the Jewish lunar calendar! A grudging concession to necessity is transformed into a pedagogic Torah tour-de-force.

It is in this light that I think we should see the medieval controversy. The question is not merely technical, whether flat images are within the scope of formal Biblical prohibitions or whether the local populace was likely to worship such images. Rather, the first question was whether such images could contribute to proper worship as more than mere decoration. The second question was whether creating such an atmosphere was worth it if at the same time the atmosphere became more susceptible to idolatry.

All this requires much more analysis. For this week, I want simply to have introduced a brief excerpt of Rabbeinu Elyakim, as per Raavyah 1049, for your evaluation:

Regarding the structure that they built as a synagogue in Cologne, in the north wall, and they formed on the windows forms of lions and snakes

I was greatly astonished that they had done this, coming to change the ancient practice in a manner never practice by their ancestors in all their places of exile, when it was clear to my teachers that the practices of our ancestors is complete Torah and an embedded peg to hang on and lean against

Even though their intent was for Heaven, to create beauty before their Creator in the context of mitzvot, we are commanded in the Second Statement not to do this, as Scripture writes “Do not make any sculpture” . . .

Let no one consider saying “But we find in the Temple that there were cherubs and other forms – since they were permitted there, they should also be permitted in synagogues”, as there is a Biblical verse explicitly banning this (extension from Temple to synagogue)

If their proof is from “All faces are permitted, except for the human face”, “All” does not mean to permit every face other than the human face . . . and we have found in many places that even when the text says “all” and “except for”, it is not comprehensive and other cases may not be derived from it . . .

In the Temple as well, in a matter regarding which they were commanded, such as two golden cherubs, if he added onto the two and made four they are considered as if golden gods (i.e. avodah zarah) and from Rabban Gamliel as well one cannot derive permission for this matter as the Talmud concludes that he acted להתלמד, but making such images not להתלמד would have been forbidden,

as it is not only for a minor prohibition that להתלמד is a sufficient ground for permission, rather it is sufficient even for severe prohibitions such as capital crimes, and even for crimes that carry within them a loss of the World that is All Good (i.e. the World to Come) . . .

Rabbeinu Elyakim is opposed to the windows. But what interests me is his acknowledgement that they might be permitted if להתלמד. His assumption is that visual art, and stained or etched glass windows in particular, serve only להתנאות, to provide a beautiful context for independently meaningful actions. Would he have thought it better if his questioners had argued that the figures served להתלמד, that they directly related to the prayer experience? Or worse?

Interpreting the Second Commandment

by Rabbi Jared Anstandig

January 29, 2016

Though the Torah consists of 613 *mitzvot*, there is no question that we ascribe the Ten Commandments a more significant and fundamental role. Accordingly, readers of the Ten Commandments look carefully at the content and presentation of the Ten Commandments. Though each one appears quite straightforward, many of them are subject to great, and somewhat surprising, dispute.

Consider the beginning of the second commandment:

לא יהיה לך אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל פְּנֵי
You shall have no other gods before me.

At its surface, this verse appears quite simple. Nonetheless, commentators interpret these words in various ways. Namely: does this verse prohibit the worship of other gods because other gods do not exist? Or, is the fact that the verse has to prohibit worship of other gods indirectly affirm the existence of other supernatural powers?

Rambam, in his *Mishneh Torah*, emphatically takes the former approach. In the first chapter of *Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah*, *halacha* 6, Rambam writes,

כל המעלה על דעתו שיש שם אלוה אחר חוץ מזה עובר בלא תעשה, שנאמר: 'לא יהיה לך אלוהים אחרים על פני'
Anyone who entertains the idea that there is a G-d aside from G-d transgresses the negative commandment of "You shall have no other G-ds before me."

Here, Rambam recognizes this *mitzvah* as delegitimizing any other metaphysical powers. To be sure, in his commentary to the tenth chapter of *Masechet Sanhedrin*, when explaining his 5th Principle of Faith, Rambam acknowledges the existence of angels. He writes,

אין משפט ולא בחירה להם אלא לו לבדו השם יתברך
There is no judgement and no choice [for angels] but to perform G-d's will

This statement does indicate that Rambam recognizes metaphysical powers. Nonetheless, for Rambam these powers are fully subservient to G-d, exercising no will of its own. Therefore, within this *mitzvah* is the understanding that G-d is the Supreme Ruler, and that no angel possesses any power of its own.

Ramban, however, views this *mitzvah* slightly differently. In his commentary to this verse, Ramban writes,

והנכון גם לפי הפשט ... שלא יהיה לנו בלתי השם אלוהים אחרים מכל מלאכי מעלה ומכל צבא השמים הנקראים אלוהים, כענין שנאמר (להלן כ"ט): "זובח לאלוהים יחרם בלתי לה' לבדו", והיא מניעה שלא יאמין באחד מהם ולא יקבלהו עליו באלוה ולא יאמר לו אלי אתה

What is correct, even according to the peshat...is that, aside from G-d, we cannot have any gods from among all of the angels on high and from the hosts of the heavens, which are called gods (elohim), just as it says later "One who sacrifices to the gods, aside from G-d, shall be destroyed." This is a prohibition not to believe in any of them, nor to accept them upon oneself as a G-d, nor to say "you are my G-d."

For Ramban, it is clear that there are independent supernatural powers in existence. The prohibition here is saying to any of them, as he puts it, "you are my G-d."

Whereas Ramban acknowledges that it is fair to refer to the supernatural powers as independent "gods," Rambam appears to discredit their independent existence entirely (This argument manifests itself in each of their opinions toward the prohibition on magic; Rambam believes it is forbidden because it is false, while Ramban believes it is forbidden precisely because it works).

This metaphysical *machloket* between Rambam and Ramban may be difficult for modern day Jews to appreciate; belief in numerous supernatural powers is not prevalent in our society. Rabbi Yitzchak Arama, in his *Akedat Yitzchak*, presents a more relatable approach to this prohibition. He expands the prohibition of idolatry to include subservience to material goals and wealth. He writes,

יש בכלל זה העבודת אלילים הגדולה המצויה היום בעולם מציאות חזק... לקבוץ הממון והצלחות הנכסים שהמה להם האלהים האדירים אשר עליהם הם נשענים ובאמונתם הם נסמכים

Included within this prohibition of idolatry is something significant that is common and strong in our world today, and that is ... the pursuit of gathering wealth and success. These have become mighty gods for people, upon whom they rely and have faith.

Rabbi Yitzchak Arama argues that the prohibition of idolatry extends to more than the belief or reliance upon supernatural powers, but even upon very natural and basic necessities. If we allow ourselves to be driven not by the Divine, but by our material wants and needs, then we are guilty of idolatry. Our belief in G-d, as laid out in the Ten Commandments, demands that we give up our obsession with and dependence upon the superficial “gods” in our lives.

Rabbi Jared Anstandig (SBM '11) is from West Bloomfield, MI, and a graduate of RIETS.

For Us or for G-d?

by Noam Weinreich

February 3, 2013

Parsha Yitro ends on a puzzling note. After giving the “Ten Commandments” and making some final narrative comments (20:15-18), it seems like a perfect opportunity to end the Parsha, and indeed a section break appears right there. However our Parsha continues for an additional five *pesukim* (19-23). In them, G-d says not to create “gods of silver and gods of gold.” Rather, Bnai Yisrael should build “an altar of earth” and make sacrifices upon them. Additionally, if they make stone altars, “cut stones” cannot be used and those who ascend to the altar must not expose their nakedness.

Assuming that the Parsha is a single unit and there should be some thematic connection between the various sections, how does this section fit with what preceded it? Granted, much of the Parsha dealt with Bnai Yisrael’s unique relationship with G-d, and the second commandment explicitly forbids idolatry, but this does not explain why these commandments should be found here, as an epilogue to the Ten Commandments. It seems the second commandment is exactly where the prohibition against gold and silver idols should have been included! Furthermore the specific commandments pertaining to the types of stones which are usable for an altar, and the proscription of nakedness on the altar seem out of place.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch offers a fascinating explanation, but first it is important to mention another idea of his. In his comment on verses 19 and 20, he writes that after being given the commandments by G-d, and being spoken to directly by Him, Bnai Yisrael should realize we do not need to make representations of G-d and put them on this earth. After the revelation at Har Sinai, Bnai Yisrael should not feel the need for any intermediaries to connect to G-d. Rav Hirsch then asks, if this is so, why do we have so much symbolism in our tradition? He claims this symbolism is not to represent the Divine on earth, but actually to “show man the human traits that He demands of him.” In other words, the purpose of the many symbols found within our religious practice is not to try to make a model of heaven on earth, but in trying to learn the proper actions and behaviors here, on this earth.

Rav Hirsch claims that what these final verses are coming to teach us is that our worship of G-d (on the altar) is not about G-d Himself, but about our relationship to G-d, as well as our relationship to each other, and to ourselves. To further his point, he suggests that these final commandments are specifically in reference to the three “Cardinal Sins”: *Avodah Zarah*, *Shefichat Damim*, and *Giluy Arayot*. The commandment not to make gold or silver idols is obviously connected to *Avodah Zarah*, the commandment against using stones carved with swords is related to *Shefichat Damim*, and the commandment against revealing nakedness on the altar is related to *Giluy Arayot*.

What is the significance of these three cardinal sins? Rav Hirsch in general has a theory that these three sins are related to the three spheres of human relationships, between G-d and man (*Avodah Zarah*), between man and man (*Shefichat Damim*), and between man and himself (*Giluy Arayot*). Each of these three sins represents the ultimate perversion of one of these relationships. So these specific laws are coming to teach us that in the context of the altar, arguably the ultimate tool for expressing our relationship the G-d, we must emphasize that the purpose of the Torah is not to create a Divine figure on this earth, but to sanctify our concrete and real human relationships.

It is easy for us to think of religion as unrelated to the everyday life of man, merely confined to the supernal realms and divinity. However, this Parsha teaches us that fundamentally, the Torah is not about the heavens, but about earth. Even while worshipping G-d through the altar, the goal is not to be concerned with what happens in the realm of G-d, but rather the human relationship with Him, as well as all of our other relationships. This is arguably the theme of the Ten Commandments, and so makes for a perfect epilogue to this Parsha. This Parsha reminds us that even after revelation, our goal is to be human, albeit the best humans we can be.

Noam Weinreich (SBM 2014) is currently a senior at Cornell University, studying Philosophy and Mathematics.

Talmud Torah as the Shared Spiritual Language of the Jewish People

December 29, 2013

This week klal yisroel mourned the death of Rabbi David Hartman and celebrated the inaugural Knesset speech of Dr. Ruth Calderon⁷. The connection between these events is direct, in that Dr. Calderon describes Rabbi Hartman as her mentor. But even more so, her speech represented a partial fulfillment of one of Rabbi Hartman's dreams, that Talmud Torah could function as the "shared spiritual language of the Jewish people"⁸. This is a dream that continues to inform and challenge much of what I teach, and it is appropriate here to acknowledge again that my understanding of Religious Zionism is deeply indebted to Rabbi Hartman's "Joy and Responsibility". Yehi zikhro barukh.

Among Rabbi Hartman's arguments (as I understand and/or extend it) for the possibility that halakhic conversation could cross the boundaries of observance or legal commitment was the following: If one recognizes that Halakhah is one particular human concretization of the values expressed in Revelation, one can recognize that other people's nonhalakhic norms and behaviors might well be other such hypothetically possible concretizations, in the same way that we recognize rejected halakhic positions as nonetheless having the status of Torah, or "divrei Elokim chayyim". Differing behavior thus may not mean that our understandings of Revelation are incompatible, and certainly does not mean that conversation about how to understand Revelation is impossible.

This argument depends on the assumption that there is no impassable chasm between an understanding of Revelation as a source of Law and an understanding of Revelation as a source of values. This to me is not obviously true or false, and so I spend a lot of time in my classes at Gann Academy testing it. I thought today it might be appropriate to consider the text taught by Dr. Calderon in light of this question.

כי הא דרב רחומי
הוה שכיח קמיה דרבא במחוזא
הוה רגיל דהוה אתי לביתיה כל מעלי יומא דכיפורי יומא חד - משכתי שמעתא.
הוה מסכיא דביתהו: 'השתא אתי, השתא אתי'. לא אתא.
חלש דעתה - אחית דמעתא מעינה.
הוה יתיב באיגרא - אפחית איגרא מתותיה, ונח נפשיה.
*In the manner of the following story about Rav Rechumai,
who was commonly found before Rava in Mechoza.
He regularly came to his house every Erev Yom Kippur.
One day – he was drawn in by his learning.
His wife was waiting: 'Now he comes, now he comes'.
He did not come.
She was depressed – a tear fell from here eye.
He was sitting on the roof – the roof collapsed under him, and he died.*

Dr. Calderon makes a number of beautiful and insightful interpretive comments, but I want to focus on the remarkable conclusions she drew.

- a) One must not indulge one's devotion to Torah at the expense of sensitivity to human beings.
- b) In Talmudic disagreements, one must assume that both sides have some aspect of truth. So Rav Rechumai must also be justified partially. The underlying point is that both those who see themselves as maintaining the nation practically (the wife, and the chilonim) and those who maintain the nation culturally/religiously/intellectually (Rav Rechumai, the charedim) see

⁷ An English translation of the speech, by SBM alum Rabbi Elli Fischer, is [here](#). The video of the original speech is [here](#).

⁸ Rabbi Hartman's relevant essay is titled "Halakhah as a Ground for Creating a Shared Spiritual Language" (Tradition 16:1). While the title refers to Halakhah specifically, I think it is at least as compatible with a form of Jewish discourse that integrates other modalities with the Halakhic, or that integrates them into the Halakhic.

themselves as maintaining it alone while the others are gamboling on Tel Aviv beaches or living on the public dole. A call for שווי בנטל, equality of burden-bearing, must go both ways, i.e. those who want the charedim to work for the state must recognize their own responsibility for the continuity of Torah, and devote significant resources to Torah study.

The first of these seems a highly plausible reading, and the second at least possible, if perhaps a little generous.

Both of these readings, however, rest on abstracting values from the story. Here I want to put the story in its Talmudic context.

The sugya begins with a Mishnah that states

התלמידים יוצאין לתלמוד תורה שלא ברשות –
שלשים יום

Students (of Torah) may leave (home) for the study of Torah without permission (from their wives) – for thirty days.

The Mishnah continues by stating that laborers may leave only for a week, and then provides a list of professions (including laborer) and the period defining the sexual obligations of each type of worker. It concludes by stating that some or all of the above represent the position of Rabbi Eliezer.

In the Talmud, Rav Ada bar Ahavah reports a tradition that the first line was the position of Rabbi Eliezer, whereas the Sages held that students of Torah may leave even for years without permission. Rava comments:

סמכו רבנן אדרב אדא בר אהבה ועבדי עובדא בנפשׂיהו

The rabbis relied on Rav Ada bar Ahavah and acted thus in practice “benafshaihu”.

The story of Rav Rechumai is offered as an illustration of the behavior described by Rava.

A normative reader of this story might relate to Dr. Calderon’s points as follows:

a) The issue is not how to balance devotion to Torah with human sensitivity, but rather how one balances devotion to Torah study with practical halakhic obligations, or at least with practical halakhic obligations toward other human beings – in this case the husband’s sexual obligation. My preference is for Dr. Calderon’s reading because the purely halakhic reading does not properly account for the wife’s tear causing the death. But a fuller analysis would require us to decide whether Rav Rechumai came home specifically on Yom Kippur because on that day marital intimacy is forbidden (in which case the story cannot be about his sexual obligation).

b) While it is often true in halakhic disputes that “These and those are the words of the living G-d”, this does not relieve us of the burden of deciding which position may be followed in practice. Here, if Rashi is convincing when he translates “benafshaihu” as “at the cost of their lives” rather than as “themselves” (cf. Yebamot 64b and Ketubot 22b), the whole thrust of the sugya is to reject the position of the students who leave for years, and Rav Rechumai is introduced as an example of someone who will die for his misdeed.

Dr. Calderon here tries to realize Rabbi Hartman’s vision from the opposite side – by presenting her vision through a (very generous) Talmudic parallel, she hopes to engage the charedi community in a real conversation about the extent to which the secular community can be expected to economically support their current social arrangements. Ironically, I think it is precisely the parts of her reading which are most generous to them – the identification of their society with the Torah-passionate Rav Rechumai, and the presumption that Rav Rechumai’s position carries practical weight – that may seem most alien to them.

Nonetheless, it seems to me that the effort more than deserves a sustained response. Perhaps, if we cannot quite achieve a fully shared language, we can at least develop reliable translation protocols that enable serious conversation. The key responsibility will then fall on those of us who can speak both dialects well. We should welcome it.

Why Study Talmud?⁹

June 4, 2008

A. Introduction

There are any number of sufficient rationales for observant Jews to intensively study the legal sections of Talmud in the 21st century. At the least, Talmud is a primary source of our practical Halakhah and the repository of a vast quantity of our moral literature. For those whose Talmudic orientation is provided by the “Brisker” tradition, especially those who understand that tradition through the lens of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik’s *Halakhic Man*, the legal discussions in the Talmud are also the raw material for our ongoing study of the abstractions that are our closest approach to the mind of G-d.

Each of these rationales focuses on the content rather than the process of Talmud. Talmudic sugyot are too often left unresolved for halakhic conclusions to be their purpose, and they rarely if ever employ conceptual analysis with all deliberate rigor.

This last point may not be self-evident, so I will cite one example to flesh it out. The Talmud often resolves apparent contradictions between texts by assigning them to different cases. But when doing so, the Talmud does not, as would be indicated by an interest in precise conceptualization, pick the cases that clearly illustrate principles. Rather, it picks cases that can clearly be distinguished, leaving an enormous gray area between them which can be explained equally well by a wide variety of abstract formulations.

It seems reasonable to suggest that we should also find religious meaning in the process of Talmudic legal thinking, for two reasons: First, this enables us to enter the minds of our revered forebears, to think as they thought. This constitutes an act of *dveikut b’talmidei chakhamim*, which the Masoret sees as tantamount to *unio mystica*. Second, thinking as they thought may enable us to grasp the foundational principles of their worldview and approach to Torah. We can then use those principles to shape our character and our scholarship by their light.

What I wish to do in this article is to suggest two such foundational principles, which I shall term “the humility of reason” and “the vulnerability of authority”.

B. The Humility of Reason

Any Jewish epistemology must begin by explaining the necessity of Revelation. After all, our minds were created by G-d, so why should He not have made them capable of apprehending truth independently? The compelling Kantian argument that ethical obligations, since they are universally binding, must also be universally accessible and discoverable, makes the idea of a private Revelation to a particular ethnic group downright scandalous.

Should we come to terms with Revelation, a uniquely Jewish conundrum arises. Halakhic tradition declares that “The Torah is not in Heaven”, meaning that claims of direct Divine Revelation are inadmissible in Jewish legal discourse. This means that Revelation can only affect Jewish law through the medium of interpretation, i.e. through the use of human reason. But what ground do we have for supposing that reason is more capable of reliably deriving truth from G-d’s Word than from G-d’s World?

To avoid this problem, we might suggest that G-d provided us with the Oral Torah, a readymade guide to interpretation. But this suggestion can only remind us of the elderly woman who suggested to Bertrand Russell that the world was held up by an elephant. Challenged as to what held up the elephant, she responded that it stood on a tortoise. Challenged as to what held up the tortoise, she wagged her finger and said: “You can’t catch me out, Lord Russell! It’s tortoises all the way down”. In other words, no matter

⁹ My thanks to my colleagues Dr. Susie Tanchel, Ms. Julie Koven, and Ms. Deborah Seidell, who hung in through my rather heavy first presentation of this material at a Faculty Learning session at Gann Academy. Thanks also to my fall ’07 Bioethics class for willingly subjecting themselves to the second iteration.

how many layers of interpretation G-d provides us with, the last will itself require interpretation, and the layers, however exquisitely detailed, are in the end only so many tortoises.

So reason must be insufficient, else revelation is unnecessary. But Judaism makes the content of revelation accessible only through reason. So we ask again, why is reason sufficient to interpret G-d's Word when it is insufficient to interpret His world?

My suggestion is that the Divine provision of a Revelation accessible only through Reason is designed to teach us that while we are, in the end, responsible for all our decisions, the recognition that all our conclusions are tentative is a key component in properly assuming that responsibility. The mere fact that G-d thought Revelation necessary teaches us the insufficiency of Reason. But Revelation embodied in text cannot absolve us of responsibility, as texts are incapable of defending themselves against the human capacity for projection.

So Talmudic thought involves the application of reason to the Revelation that demonstrates reason's insufficiency. It therefore ensures that reason remains humble, while at the same time ensuring that the claim of Revelation can never be a source of personal power.

When I introduced this idea to a class of non-Orthodox high school seniors recently, they protested that Orthodox rabbis often present their conclusions as absolutes. I responded by talking about how my kollel chavruta and I often used to "warm up" for a full-scale milchamah shel Torah (intellectual Torah battle) by making the strongest statements we could invent of our own correctness and the other's incorrectness, seeking to inspire ourselves to do battle for emes (truth), but learned in fine concord the moment our argument ceased being intellectually productive. The Talmud teaches us that milchamah shel Torah, engaged in properly, leads to deepest friendship. I submit that this is because all our battles take place in the constant consciousness of "eilu v'eilu divrei chayim" (these and those are the living words of G-d), that we must fight for our own perception of truth but never see triumph as proof. I hope that our batei midrash (houses of Torah study) live up to this principle, and encourage students to be suspicious of any Torah source that does not.

C. The Vulnerability of Authority

My Advanced Talmud for Beginners class begins by introducing participants to the four layers of Talmudic text – Biblical, Tannaitic, Amoraic, and Stam. I carefully explain that Tannaim cannot argue with the Bible, and that Amoraim cannot argue with Tannaim. Then I ask: If a Tannaitic statement apparently conflicts with a Biblical verse, what happens? The participants invariably reply confidently that the Tannaitic statement must be rejected, and are stunned when I tell them this is wrong.

Yeshiva students know better, of course. We assume (although their colleagues did not always assume) that every Tanna knew all of Tanakh by heart, and would never consciously argue with Tanakh, and therefore any contradiction is evidence not that the Tanna is incorrect, but that we are failing to understand how he understood the verse in question. Similarly, a contradiction between an Amora and a Tannaitic text leads most often to a reinterpretation of the latter.

The result of this process is that Amoraic statements in the Talmud often have only one meaning, and that meaning often seems to be pretty much what the words say. Tannaitic texts, by contrast, are often limited to esoteric cases, emended radically, or otherwise creatively interpreted, and Biblical texts generate so many interpretations that six-digit metaphors (e.g. 600,000 facets) are needed to describe the phenomenon of Rabbinic reading.

The broad principle illustrated here is that the more power and authority a text gains, the more likely its meaning is to change or fracture over time. This principle seems to me intuitive, as the following example demonstrates. Imagine two rules made in a school: The first, promulgated by a random secretary with delusions of grandeur, declares that all albino students under four feet tall must henceforth wear green sneakers each February 29th. The second, promulgated by the principal, requires all students to wear

green sneakers each day. It seems to me that the first rule would likely be left intact intellectually, as it would apply almost never and to no one and could be safely ignored in the rare cases that it applied. The second rule, however, would rapidly generate very broad and/or creative definitions of “green” and “sneaker”, and, conversely, creative narrow interpretations of “student”.

Properly understood, Talmudic reasoning thus leads to a deep awareness that attaining and maintaining the power to constrain the choices of others leads inexorably to profound constraint on one’s own choices. It also leads to the recognition that Jewish practice is never and can never be determined entirely by text, but rather by the ongoing negotiation between texts and the practical needs and moral convictions of the community that genuinely accepts their authority.¹⁰

Recognizing the vulnerability of authority to reinterpretation also helps us steer clear of the mirages of charisma-based leadership and personality cults. If heteronomous commands are always mediated by the commanded’s parameters of practicality and plausibility, then the content of charismatic authority is always granted by the commanded, and Nuremberg defenses are as illegitimate in religion as in politics.

D. Conclusion

The two principles we have distilled out of the Talmudic thought process, the humility of reason, and the vulnerability of authority, converge on the idea that each Jew and each Jewish community must take individual responsibility for Torah, that Torah is what Jews make of it in this world.

Why intensively study the legal sections of Talmud? Not because doing so is a guarantee of achieving Truth, or even of achieving good character; the Talmud itself records often that Torah study can lead to both personal salvation and personal destruction. But true internalization of Talmudic method can lead to scholarship simultaneously anchored in the past and alive to the present, and to leadership capable of “courage in the right, as G-d gives us to see the right”¹¹ without suppressing dissent. May we be blessed with such leaders.

¹⁰ It is necessary to stress that this negotiation does not take the form of a conscious effort to balance conflicting interests. Rather, dedicated talmidei chakhamim (rabbinic scholars) enter into the task of interpretation with an almost total commitment to both the text and the community, and thus with a sincere belief that the two are almost always reconcilable. They therefore legitimately and with integrity see readings that reconcile the two as compelling even when they might out of context seem forced.

¹¹ From Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address

Who Wrote the Torah? An Intellectual Defence of Unitary Authorship for High School Students

October 13, 2010

1. Introduction

Who wrote the Torah? Believing Jews (and Christians) generally gave a simple and straightforward answer to this question for at least a millennium – Moses wrote the Torah, at G-d’s dictation. The Jewish philosopher Benedict Spinoza, however, argued in the seventeenth century that the Torah includes editorial insertions that were not part of the original Mosaic text, and in the nineteenth century a group of German Protestant scholars developed the thesis that the Torah is actually a composite of documents written by four authors. You are probably aware that one or another version of their thesis, known as the Documentary Hypothesis, is currently the standard answer to “Who wrote the Torah?” in university Bible departments.

You may be asking yourself, then, whether you can be a reasonable and modern person and still believe that Moses wrote the Torah. I’m writing in the hope of persuading you that you can, that a reasonable person looking fairly at the evidence can reasonably conclude that the Torah is a unified document with a single author.

It is important at the outset to separate three issues:

- a. unified authorship (whether the Torah was written as one document, or rather is a combination of several different documents edited together into a single book),
- b. historicity (whether what the Torah tells us about the past is true)
- c. sanctity (whether the Torah was written, inspired, or ratified by G-d, or whatever term one uses to describe the source of value in this world).

What I mean by “separate” is that it is possible to believe

- a. in unified authorship, even in Mosaic authorship, and not believe that the Torah is sacred; one can, for example, believe that Moses was deluded, or
- b. that the Torah was written by four or more unknown people, but that each of them was a prophet inspired by G-d, and that the Torah is therefore sacred¹², and/or.
- c. that the Torah is sacred but has no interest in accurately conveying history, or that the Torah is not sacred but nonetheless a meticulously accurate historical account.

This article addresses only the issue of unified authorship – it does not discuss whether the Torah is historically accurate, or whether it is sacred.

It is also important to recognize that scholars may bring three different types of evidence when seeking to divide the Torah by author –

- a. historical/archaeological,
- b. linguistic, and
- c. literary.

In other words, they may argue that

- a. different sections of Torah reflect historical circumstances from different time periods;
- b. that the language of different sections of Torah show that they come from different regions and/or times; or
- c. that some sections of Torah simply cannot fit with other sections because of contradictions, redundancies, or other incompatibilities.

¹² Serious scholars have also argued that G-d deliberately dictated to Moses a Torah so that it would seem to be written by four different people, or that each of the four documents represents a different inspired reconstruction of a lost original Mosaic Torah.

The body of this article addresses and makes only literary arguments. This is largely because I see myself as much more competent in the area of literary analysis than in either linguistics or history. You should understand, however, that the historical and linguistic arguments generally depend on the literary argument. For example, if we assume the unified authorship of the Torah, it would by itself be our largest and oldest repository of Ancient Hebrew, in light of which all other linguistic data would be dated. Similarly, those who claim that sections of Torah represent one or another political faction in First Temple Israel generally acknowledge that other sections represent the claims of conflicting factions; if one assumes unified Mosaic authorship, the Torah of course ends up presenting a nuanced and complex position on the issue that is debated later in Jewish history.¹³

Finally, it is necessary to clarify at the outset the rules of the game. What constitutes literary evidence for or against multiple or unified authorship? We cannot say that any single unsolved contradiction or redundancy demonstrates multiple authorship – if that were the case, no story or book would ever be seen as the product of one author, and I would have to cover every sentence of Torah with absolute thoroughness to usefully make my point. At the same time, showing that the parts of one section of Torah fit together better if we assume unified authorship doesn't prove that other parts aren't composite.

One tack that has been tried by proponents of unified authorship is to find cross-documentary thematic patterns for example, showing that aspects of a story or set of laws found only in "E" make sense only if they serve as rewards and punishments for actions taken in a story found only in "J". For example, the rule that one may not distinguish between sacrificial animals that are "tov" and those that are "ra" in Leviticus 37, generally assigned to "P" or "H", may indicate that the purpose of animal sacrifice is to undo the sin of eating the fruit in Eden which enabled human beings to distinguish "tov: and ra", a narrative assigned to "J".

This type of argument, though, even when done extremely well, does not necessarily accomplish its goal.

- a. Firstly, proponents of multiple authorship can always argue that R, the final editor, combined his materials so skillfully that the texts relate to each other now, when they did not relate to each other originally.
- b. Secondly, they can argue that the alluded-to text originally existed in both documents, but that we only have fragments of each document.
- c. Finally, they can argue that the argument simply shows that we have not previously divided the documents correctly, not that the principle of division is incorrect.

These responses highlight two issues that make the task of this article highly challenging.

- a. First, the Documentary Hypothesis, like any living academic theory, exists in many forms and changes constantly; thus the reaction to any argument can be to adapt the theory, or adopt a different version of the theory, and present it anew as unchallenged. For example, the original Hypothesis found four sources, of which P (the hypothetical Priestly writer, of Vayikra and much else) was the latest, and which the final redactor had no license to change in any way. But one can find significant contemporary versions with anywhere from five to tens of sources, which see P as earlier than at least Devarim, and which give the redactor(s) the capacity to alter his/her/their sources at will.
- b. Second, belief in multiple authorship goes together with belief in unified editing, or redaction, and it is always possible to dismiss evidence of unity as the product of redaction rather than authorship. Scholars call this "the vanishing redactor problem" – in other words, at what point does one have to make such strong claims about what the redactor did with/to her sources that one might as well say that s/he wrote the book her/himself?

¹³ As Michael Pershan noted (private communication), the meaning of a text can be altered by knowledge of its historical circumstances in various ways. For example, one text cannot be a parody of another text unless the other text was written first. Nonetheless, it seems to me that in the absence of compelling evidence of a text's historical situation, one is entitled to adopt the most likely meaning on purely semantic grounds.

My approach in this article will therefore be as follows: I will take several examples of narratives that I think historically have and still are seen as primary evidence for the Hypothesis, and seek to show that each of them is as well or better explained if we assume unified authorship. It seems to me reasonable that this should shift the burden of proof back to those who endorse multiple authorship. After all, many books, for example business advice books and Maimonides' Mishneh Torah¹⁴, contain numerous apparent contradictions¹⁵, and yet we do not presume that such books were written by committees!

Additionally, I will show you that the literary questions raised by expositors of the Hypothesis have often been addressed directly by traditional Jewish commentary, especially rabbinic midrash. It seems to me that if many, many brilliant people who studied the Torah intensely for many years were capable of believing it the work of a single author, the burden of proof is on those who see that position as unreasonable. Of course, one may find the propositions and arguments of multiple authorship more compelling than the older approach, but to my mind, if the questions are not new, the old answers remain at least plausible, unless something has happened to make the assumptions that they were based on untenable.

Finally, before we address the Documentary Hypothesis directly, I think it will be worthwhile to discuss the granddaddy of them all, the question that made Benedict Spinoza first argue that parts of the Torah were post-Mosaic. This is an example of Lower rather than of Higher Biblical criticism; it argues that the Torah contains a post-Mosaic editorial insertion, not that the Torah is fundamentally a composite work. But I want to address it because of its historical importance, and because it offers a useful window onto differences between classical and some contemporary modes of reading.

2. "The Canaanites were then in the land"

So here is Genesis 12:1-7:

בראשית פרק יב

(א) ויאמר יקוק אל אברם לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך אל הארץ אשר אראך:
 (ב) ואעשך לגוי גדול ואברכך ואגדלה שמך והיה ברכה:
 (ג) ואברכה מברכך ומקללך אאר ונברכו בך כל משפחת האדמה:
 (ד) וילך אברם כאשר דבר אליו יקוק וילך אתו לוט ואברם בן חמש שנים ושבעים שנה בצאתו מחרן:
 (ה) ויקח אברם את שרי אשתו ואת לוט בן אחיו ואת כל רכושם אשר רכשו ואת הנפש אשר עשו בחרן ויצאו ללכת ארצה כנען ויבאו ארצה כנען:
 (ו) ויעבר אברם בארץ עד מקום שכם עד אלון מורה והכנעני אז בארץ:
 (ז) וירא יקוק אל אברם ויאמר לזרעך אתן את הארץ הזאת ויבן שם מזבח ליקוק הנראה אליו:

JPS Translation

1. *The Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you.*
2. *I will make of you a great nation, And I will bless you;*

¹⁴ Here is an example of such contradictions.

Maimonides Laws of Character Traits 1:4

The straight path is the intermediate measure within each and every trait among all the traits that a human being possesses, meaning the trait that is equidistant from the two extremes and not closer to one than the other. Therefore the First Sages ordered that a person should constantly evaluate his traits and measure them and direct them to the middle path so as to be complete in his body. How should this be done? He should not be hot-tempered, easy to anger, nor like a corpse that has no feeling, but rather intermediate.

Maimonides Laws of Character Traits 2:3

There are traits which it is forbidden for a person to adopt regarding them an intermediate position, but rather he should distance himself from one extreme all the way toward the other extreme . . . so too anger is a most negative trait and it is fitting for a person to distance himself from it to the other extreme and to teach himself not to get angry, even about things that it is fitting to be angry about.

Yet to my knowledge no one has ever questioned that Maimonides wrote both passages!

¹⁵ perhaps because life is complex and can best be dealt with by navigating between coherent but extreme positions

*I will make your name great,
And you will be a blessing.*

*3. I will bless those who curse you
And curse him that curses you;
And all the families of the earth
Shall bless themselves by you.*

4. Abram went forth as the Lord had commanded him, and Lot went with him.

5. Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the wealth they had amassed, and the persons they had acquire in Haran; and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in the land of Canaan,

6. Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shekhem, at the terebinth of Moreh. The Canaanites were then in the land.

7. The L-rd appeared to Abram and said: 'I will assign this land to your offspring'. And he built an altar there to the L-rd who had appeared to him."

Spinoza argued that the last sentence, "The Canaanites were then in the land", meaning "then as opposed to now", could not have been written at the time of Moses, as the Canaanites were still in the land. The sentence could only have been written at a time when the Canaanites were no longer in the land, so as to convey needed historical/ethnographic context to contemporary readers.

Spinoza did not see himself as having discovered this; he believed that he was following in the footsteps of the thirteenth century Spanish commentator Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra. Let's take a look then at Ibn Ezra's comments to Genesis 12:6:

"והכנעני אז בארץ" - יתכן שארץ כנען תפשה כנען מיד אחר. ואם איננו כן יש לו סוד. והמשכיל ידום:
"The Canaanites were then in the land" – plausibly the Land of Canaan was grabbed by Canaan from the hands of another. But if this is not so, it has a secret, and the one who comprehends it will fall silent.

The "secret" Ibn Ezra alludes to here is probably the "secret of the twelve" that he refers to elsewhere in his commentary, and the other verses he mentions in those contexts also seem to raise the possibility of post-Mosaic editorial insertions. It therefore seems fair to cite Ibn Ezra as someone who was theologically okay with there being post-Mosaic insertions in the Torah.

However, Ibn Ezra first offers an alternative reading, which he may prefer. Perhaps the verse teaches us that the Canaanites had taken the land by force from someone else. In other words, the verse is best translated as "The Canaanites were then in the land", meaning "then as opposed to previously". That translation allows the verse to be written at the time of Moses.

Why might Ibn Ezra think this reading more likely? I suggest that the answer can be found one chapter later, in Genesis 13:1-7.

בראשית פרק יג
(א) ויעל אברם ממצרים הוא ואשתו וכל אשר לו ולוט עמו הנגבה:
(ב) ואברם כבד מאד במקנה בכסף ובזהב:
(ג) וילך למסעיו מנגב ועד בית אל עד המקום אשר היה שם אהלה בתחלה בין בית אל ובין העי:
(ד) אל מקום המזבח אשר עשה שם בראשונה ויקרא שם אברם בשם יקוק;
(ה) וגם ללוט ההלך את אברם היה צאן ובקר ואהלים:
(ו) ולא נשא אתם הארץ לשבת יחדו כי היה רכושם רב ולא יכלו לשבת יחדו:
(ז) ויהי ריב בין רעי מקנה אברם ובין רעי מקנה לוט והכנעני אז ישב בארץ:

JPS Translation

1. From Egypt, Abram went up into the Negeb, with his wife and all that he possessed, together with Lot.

2. Now Abram was very rich in cattle, silver, and gold.

3. And he proceeded by stages from the Negev as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been formerly, between Bethel and Ai,

4. the site of the altar that he had built there at first; and there Abram invoked the L-rd by name.
5. Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents,
6. so that the land could not support them staying together; for their possessions were so great that they could not remain together.
7. And there was quarreling between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and those of Lot's cattle – the Canaanites and Perizzites were then dwelling in the land.

Here are Ibn Ezra's comments to 13:7:

וטעם הכנעני והפריזי כרעו. ויתכן היות הפריזי מבני כנען והוא אחד מהזכרים, ויש לו שני שמות כאשר מצאנו שני שמות לבן שמואל, וגם לאבי אביו:

The meaning of "The Canaanites and the Perizzites" is like its peer. It is plausible that the Perizzites were among the Sons of Canaan and that he was one of the sons mentioned, but that he has two names, as we found two names for Shmuel's son, and also for his grandfather.

Ibn Ezra recognizes that this verse raises the same interpretive issue as its peer, 12:6. In other words, one can either translate "then, as opposed to now", or "then, as opposed to earlier".

But here a new issue intrudes. Granted that each verse on its own can stand either translation, the new issue is how either translation accounts for the existence of both verses. Should not readers of 12:6 have been aware by now that the Canaanites were then in the land? Why is it necessary to inform them of this twice?

Furthermore, it is reasonably clear why 12:6 is a good place to inform an otherwise ignorant reader of the Canaanite presence; Avram has just entered the land. But what purpose does the information serve in 13:7?

Finally, the two verses are not identical: 12:6 refers only to Canaanites, whereas 13:7 refers to both Canaanites and Perizzites, and 12:6 mentions Canaanite presence, whereas 13:7 refers to Canaanites and Perizzites as dwelling in the land. Are these differences significant?

To these questions, Ibn Ezra has no evident response. Rashi, however, who shares Ibn Ezra's preferred reading, addresses some of them directly and others implicitly. Here are Rashi's comments to 12:6 and 13:7.

והכנעני אז בארץ - היה הולך וכובש את ארץ ישראל מזרעו של שם, שבחלקו של שם נפלה כשחלק נח את הארץ לבניו, שנאמר (בראשית יד יח) ומלכי צדק מלך שלם. לפיכך (פסוק ז) ויאמר ה' אל אברהם לזרעך אתן את הארץ הזאת, עתיד אני להחזירה לבניך שהם מזרעו של שם:

ויהי ריב - לפי שהיו רועים של לוט רשעים ומרעים בהמתם בשדות אחרים, ורועי אברם מוכיחים אותם על הגזל, והם אומרים נתנה הארץ לאברם, ולו אין יורש, ולוט יורשו, ואין זה גזל, והכתוב אומר והכנעני והפריזי אז יושב בארץ ולא זכה בה אברם עדיין: *"The Canaanites were then in the land" – he was in the process of conquering the Land of Israel from the descendants of Shem, as it fell into the portion of Shem when Noah divided the land among his sons, as Scripture says 'And MalkiTzedek King of Shalem'¹⁶ (Genesis 14:18). Therefore Hashem said to Avraham: "I will assign this land to your descendants" – I will ultimately return it to your children, who are from the descendants of Shem.*

"And there was quarreling" – because Lot's herdsmen were wicked and would graze their cattle on other people's land, and Avram's herdsmen would rebuke them about this robbery, and they would reply: "The land is given to Avram, and as he has no heir, Lot will be his heir, so this is not robbery". So Scripture says "the Canaanites and Perizzites were then dwelling in the land", and Avram had not yet acquired it.

Rashi takes these two verses as together making a complex point: promising the land to Avraham did not deprive the Canaanites as a class of their patrimony, but rather reversed an illegitimate conquest that

¹⁶ According to Rabbinic tradition MalkiTzedek was another name for Shem, and Shalem for Yerushalayim (Jerusalem)

occurred at just about the same time as his arrival (12:6), but that nonetheless the individual property rights of the Canaanites were valid so long as the conquest had not been reversed (13:7). Thus the shift from “Canaanites” in 12:6 to “Canaanite and Perizzites” is intended to show that the conquest was ongoing and developing. The same is true of the shift from present to “dwelling”.

It should be clear that Rashi’s interpretation of these phrases does not depend on the accuracy of his reconstruction of the argument between the shepherds. I might argue, for instance, that the point of 13:7 in its specific context is to provide an ironic counterpoint: the land could not sustain both individuals, Avraham and Lot, and yet it could sustain two entire nations, the Canaanites and the Perizzites! Nor is it necessary to believe that Malki Tzedek was in fact Shem, or that the original inhabitants of Canaan were Shemites. The key point is that it was necessary for the text to provide two separated snapshots of the Canaanite presence so as to show that it was developing, and therefore that at the time Hashem promised it to Avraham, He was not taking it away from anyone. Avraham’s claim is therefore morally legitimate.

On these grounds it seems to me that Ibn Ezra would have been correct to prefer the first reading in 12:6, that “the land of Canaan was grabbed by Canaan from another”.¹⁷

We can now point out that the first reading brilliantly situates this story within the overall context of the book of Genesis.

a. In 15:16, as part of The Covenant among the Torn Pieces, G-d tells Avraham that His promise will not be fulfilled until the fourth generation because “the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete”. In other words, Avraham cannot receive the land until his claim is just.

b. Nachmanides compellingly reads the pre-Abrahamic narrative in Genesis as an extended demonstration that the consequence of sin is exile. Thus Adam sins and is exiled from the Garden of Eden; Cain sins and is sentenced to wander; the Flood Generation sins and is wiped off the land; and the Tower generation sins and is scattered from Babel.

In the second reading, there is no thematic content to the editorial insertions, and the story of Avraham’s arrival is largely isolated from anything that happens before or after.

It thus turns out that the second reading leaves room for seeing these stories as stemming from separate authors, whereas the first reading ties them all together tightly.

If the first reading is correct, then, we must acknowledge that acceptance of any version of the Hypothesis that sees any of the Garden story, the murder of Hevel, the Babel story¹⁸, 12:6, 13:7, and 15:16 as stemming from separate authors requires sacrificing a powerful reading of the book as a whole. I am unaware of any version which allows them to remain together.

One last point before we move on. The claim that 12:6 is an editorial interpolation is a historical claim, not a literary one. Even if we accept the reading “then, as opposed to now”, a single author would also provide necessary background for the reader. What grounded Spinoza’s claim of editorial insertion, ironically, was the belief that the rest of Torah was written at a time when there were still Canaanites in the land, specifically the time of Moses.

We turn now to the issue that lent the Hypothesis its trademark initials, the use of the Divine Names in the various Creation stories.

¹⁷ I have two additional grounds for preferring the first reading.

a. The second reading assumes that the editorial insertion was necessary for readers who were unaware that Canaanites had ever lived in the land of Israel. This requires a quite astonishing feat of historical amnesia on the part of an Israelite of any time, as every cultural history of Israel mentions the Canaanites.

b. Genesis 11:31 already refers to Israel as the Land of Canaan. If the hypothetical editor’s intent was simply to provide background information for ignorant readers, s/he could have provided the information there rather than waiting for 12:6.

¹⁸ I leave the Flood off this list because Higher Critics universally see it as existing in each document, albeit in different versions.

3. The Names of G-d and the Creation Narratives

Every reader of Genesis notices that it contains two introductions to narratives of Creation: 1:1-2 and 2:4-5. Furthermore, each of those introductions is followed by an account of human creation, and a third account of human creation is introduced and told in 5:1-2. Thus:

בראשית פרק א

(א) בראשית ברא אל-הים את השמים ואת הארץ:
(ב) והארץ היתה תהו ובהו וחשך על פני תהום ורוח אלהים מרחפת על פני המים:

בראשית פרק ב

(ד) אלה תולדות השמים והארץ בהבראם ביום עשות יקוק אל-הים ארץ ושמים:
(ה) וכל שיח השדה טרם יהיה בארץ וכל עשב השדה טרם יצמח כי לא המטיר יקוק אל-הים על הארץ ואדם אין לעבד את האדמה:
(ו) ואד יעלה מן הארץ והשקה את כל פני האדמה:

בראשית פרק ג

(א) זה ספר תולדות אדם ביום ברא אל-הים אדם בדמות אל-הים עשה אתו:
(ב) זכר ונקבה בראם ויברך אתם ויקרא את שמם אדם ביום הבראם: ט

It is also evident that the two general creation narratives (for our purpose now 1:1-2:3 and 2:4-25) seem to contradict one another in detail, and it is easy to argue that they contradict one another thematically as well. Thus the first narrative has male and female created together, whereas the second has the female created from the male, and the first leads up to Shabbat and Divine rest and restoration, whereas the second leads up to sin and human banishment.

Finally, the first narrative (and the third) identifies G-d as E-lohim, which is a generic term for divinity, whereas the second identifies him as J-H-W-H E-lohim, with J-H-W-H apparently being a unique name.

The Documentary Hypothesis as originally formulated said that the first and second narratives came from separate documents and reflected radically divergent religious traditions. It further argued that each of these documents had originally been complete narratives of pre-Sinai Israelite history, although each of them had suffered significant losses. A redactor (R) had taken the fragments that survived from both traditions, perhaps along with elements of two other traditions as well, and combined them to create a Book of Genesis roughly equivalent to the book that begins the Torah today.

How was one to tell which segment came from which document? The simplest way was to see which name of G-d the segment used – continuations of the first narrative (E) would use only E-lohim, whereas continuations of the second narrative (J) would use J-H-W-H. The reason E would never use J-H-W-H was spelled out in Exodus 6:2-3.

שמות פרק ו

(ב) וידבר אל-הים אל משה ויאמר אליו אני יקוק:
(ג) וארא אל אברהם אל יצחק ואל יעקב בא-ל ש-ד י ושמ י יקוק לא נודעתי להם:

This was understood as a claim that the name J-H-W-H could not be used to describe the G-d Who communicated with or was experienced by human beings at any prior point. Therefore any text that used that name in Genesis clearly came from a different tradition.¹⁹

In the years since, many elements of this argument have been modified. For example,
a. the first narrative has been ascribed to P (the proposed author of most of Leviticus), or to H (the proposed author of specific elements of Leviticus),

¹⁹ This claim is of course not by itself evidence that the second Creation narrative could not have been written by the author of Exodus 6:2-3. There are many, many traditional solutions to that problem.

- b. J and E are said to have been combined (by RJE) before their combined text was interwoven with P, D et al by R; and
- c. the Israeli scholar Yechezkel Kaufman argued that J and E (and P and D for that matter) did not reflect radically divergent religious traditions, but rather were just different literary crystallizations of the same basic religious tradition.

What has remained constant, however, is the assertion that the two creation narratives come from separate authors whose works continue to be interwoven throughout Genesis, and that the use of the name J-H-W-H is a good marker as to which document is the source of any particular unit.

Traditional interpreters of course noticed the same phenomena. Rashi to 1:1 cites a midrash that beautifully captures an elegant solution to the questions of why there are two creation narratives, and why the two narratives use different identifiers for the Divinity.

ברא אל-הים - ולא אמר ברא ה', שבתחלה עלה במחשבה לבראתו במדת הדין, ראה שאין העולם מתקיים, הקדים מדת רחמים ושתפה למדת הדין. היינו דכתיב: (להלן ב ד) "ביום עשות ה' אלהים ארץ ושמים".

This midrash contends that the first narrative reflects a Divine fantasy of the world as it might have been, whereas the second narrative reflects the world as actually created²⁰. Using the standard rabbinic equivalence E-lohim = justice whereas J-H-W-H = mercy, it suggests that the first narrative is what the world would have been like absent Divine Mercy. In fact, though, the world was created with both justice and mercy, and therefore the second narrative refers to G-d as J-H-W-H E-lohim.

It is important to realize that the midrash does not in any way seek to harmonize the two narratives, or to argue that they reflect a common vision of the world, or even a common vision of G-d. If anything, it emphasizes the incompatibility of the two narratives. This approach, albeit often with entirely different substance, is shared by almost all modern advocates of unified authorship as well. It therefore appears that the issue of multiple versus unified authorship cannot be decided simply by pointing out that there are two very different creation narratives.

How, then, can we decide which position better explains the text?

There might seem to be a simple answer: The proponents of multiple authorship do not rest their argument on the Creation narratives alone, but rather argue that each narrative is part of a separate originally independent document that can be traced through the rest of Genesis. The dispute should then rest on whether the Creation narratives are the only example of double narratives, and the existence of such narratives with consistent use of different Divine names should be conclusive proof for the multiple authorship position.

This analysis has some power with regard to a very narrow understanding of the specific midrash that Rashi cites. One can argue that according to that midrash, once the world has in fact been created with both mercy and justice, there is no point to a continuing narrative of the fantasy world of complete justice. On the other hand, an obvious counterargument is that telling the alternative story serves to clarify the role of mercy in our world. With regard to approaches such as Rav Joseph B Soloveitchik's, which assume that the two stories provide complementary perspectives on the world as it is, the argument has no force at all.

So we need to think more deeply about what the real issues are. It is useful to remember here that the question of historicity is not relevant to our issue. Neither position is compelled to take one or both narratives as conveying, or even trying to convey, actual historical events.

It is also important to recognize that proponents of unified authorship need not believe that Genesis was written in a vacuum. They may believe that the author of Genesis had access to a rich, diverse, and

²⁰ For an interesting literary parallel see Alan Lightman, *Einstein's Dreams*, which describes Albert Einstein asleep in a rowboat dreaming of universes in which time functions differently than in our own. It should be evident that seeing the second narrative as describing the world we experience does not require treating that narrative as literal history rather than as metaphor.

contradictory array of Israelite Creation and origin narratives, and that the original audience of Genesis was aware of all these traditions. They may argue that Genesis is written against a background of competing narratives, and that it seeks to incorporate elements from multiple perspectives. Think of someone writing a popular history of the United States who wants readers to understand both that the US is the fountain of freedom and that it was founded on chattel slavery, and so incorporates the perspectives of both John Calhoun and Frederick Douglas.

What, then, is the difference between their position and that of the Hypothesis? Proponents of the Hypothesis argue that the redactor was at least generally bound by not only the substance but the specific language of previous sources; whereas proponents of unified authorship see the author as having complete linguistic freedom.

How can we test which position better explains the evidence? Evidence for multiple authorship would be elements of the text, especially contradictions, redundancies, or inconsistencies, that so clearly detract from the book's effect that it seems unlikely that a competent writer would have included them by choice. Evidence for unified authorship would include places where texts apparently reflecting differing perspectives nonetheless refer to each others' specific language, or places where terms, phrases, or styles from one stream cross over into another.

How do these criteria would play out with regard to the Divine name question? The multiple authorship perspective would be strengthened if

- a. we could show that there are redundant stories that serve no apparent purpose, except that the two versions use different Divine names; or
- b. we can show that one or the other Name is used in places where the alternative would be more appropriate contextually.

The unified authorship perspective would be strengthened if

- a. we could show Divine Names occasionally appearing on occasion in texts reflecting the other perspective, or
- b. we could find texts from one perspective that are significantly more meaningful if one is aware of the language used to convey the other perspective.

Let's move to the text, and see what emerges.

The first thing to consider is that the double Divine Name used in Genesis 2:3 does not appear again in Genesis. Later apparent doublets in Genesis, as we will see in

our discussion of the Flood, use either E-lohim or J-H-W-H, never J-H-W-H E-lohim. This suggests that Genesis seeks to make the second Creation narrative foundational for later narratives using either Divine Name, rather than maintaining it as the fountainhead of one perspective. One can argue that the double name reflects an editorial interposition in an original document which had only J-H-W-H, but if the redactor could change the Divine Names at will, how can they serve as markers of documentary boundaries? Furthermore, if the redactor could make such radical changes, in what sense was s/he bound by the original sources? How does s/he differ from an author?

The second thing to consider is that the Divine Names are not used consistently in the very next narrative unit, chapters 4-5, which traces the descendants of Adam. Let's look at that unit; it's long, but the structure should be clearly visible.

בראשית פרק ד

- (א) והאדם ידע את חוה אשתו ותהר ותלד את קין ותאמר קניתי איש את יקוק:
- (ב) ותסוף ללדת את אחיו את הבל ויהי הבל רעה צאן וקין היה עבד אדמה:
- (ג) ויהי מקץ ימים ויבא קין מפרי האדמה מנחה ליקוק:
- (ד) והבל הביא גם הוא מבכרות צאנו ומחלבהן וישע יקוק אל הבל ואל מנחתו:
- (ה) ואל קין ואל מנחתו לא שעה ויחר לקין מאד ויפלו פניו:

- (ו) ויאמר יקוק אל קין למה חרה לך ולמה נפלו פניך:
 (ז) הלוא אם תיטיב שאת ואם לא תיטיב לפתח חטאת רבץ ואלריך תשוקתו ואתה תמשל בו:
 (ח) ויאמר קין אל הבל אחיו ויהי בהיותם בשדה ויקם קין אל הבל אחיו ויהרגו:
 (ט) ויאמר יקוק אל קין אי הבל אחריך ויאמר לא ידעתי השמר אחי אנכי:
 (י) ויאמר מה עשית קול דמי אחריך צעקים אלי מן האדמה:
 (יא) ועתה ארור אתה מן האדמה אשר פצתה את פיה לקחת את דמי אחריך מידך:
 (יב) כי תעבד את האדמה לא תספך תת כחה לך נע ונד תהיה בארץ:
 (יג) ויאמר קין אל יקוק גדול עוני מנשא:
 (יד) הן גרשת אתי היום מעל פני האדמה ומפניך אסתר והייתי נע ונד בארץ והיה כל מצאי יהרגני:
 (טו) ויאמר לו יקוק לכן כל הרג קין שבעתים יקם וישם יקוק לקין אות לבלתי הכות אתו כל מצאו:
 (טז) ויצא קין מלפני יקוק וישב בארץ נוד קדמת עדן:
 (יז) וידע קין את אשתו ותהר ותלד את חנוך ויהי בנה עיר ויקרא שם העיר כשם בנו חנוך:
 (יח) ויולד לחנוך את עירד ועירד ילד את מחויאל ומחויאל ילד את מתושאל ומתושאל ילד את למך:
 (יט) ויקח לו למך שתי נשים שם האחת עדה ושם השנית צלה:
 (כ) ותלד עדה את יבל הוא היה אבי ישב אהל ומקנה:
 (כא) ושם אחיו יובל הוא היה אבי כל תפש כנור ועוגב:
 (כב) וצלה גם היא ילדה את תובל קין לטש כל חרש נחשת וברזל ואחות תובל קין נעמה:
 (כג) ויאמר למך לנשיו עדה וצלה שמען קולי נשי למך האזנה אמרתי כי איש הרגתי לפצעי וילד לחברתי:
 (כד) כי שבעתים יקם קין ולמך שבעים ושבעה:
 (כה) וידע אדם עוד את אשתו ותלד בן ויקרא את שמו שת כי שת לי אל-הים זרע אחר תחת הבל כי הרגו קין:
 (כו) ולשת גם הוא ילד בן ויקרא את שמו אנוש אז הוחל לקרא בשם יקוק: פ

בראשית פרק ה

- (א) זה ספר תולדות אדם ביום ברא אל-הים אדם בדמות אל-הים עשה אתו:
 (ב) זכר ונקבה בראם ויברך אתם ויקרא את שמם אדם ביום הבראם: ו
 (ג) ויחי אדם שלשים ומאת שנה ויולד בדמותו כצלמו ויקרא את שמו שת:
 (ד) ויהיו ימי אדם אחרי הולידו את שת שמנה מאת שנה ויולד בנים ובנות:
 (ה) ויהיו כל ימי אדם אשר חי תשע מאות שנה ושלשים שנה וימת: ו
 (ו) ויחי שת חמש שנים ומאת שנה ויולד את אנוש:
 (ז) ויחי שת אחרי הולידו את אנוש שבע שנים ושמנה מאות שנה ויולד בנים ובנות:
 (ח) ויהיו כל ימי שת שתים עשרה שנה ותשע מאות שנה וימת: ו
 (ט) ויחי אנוש תשעים שנה ויולד את קינן:
 (י) ויחי אנוש אחרי הולידו את קינן חמש עשרה שנה ושמנה מאות שנה ויולד בנים ובנות:
 (יא) ויהיו כל ימי אנוש חמש שנים ותשע מאות שנה וימת: ו
 (יב) ויחי קינן שבעים שנה ויולד את מהללאל:
 (יג) ויחי קינן אחרי הולידו את מהללאל ארבעים שנה ושמנה מאות שנה ויולד בנים ובנות:
 (יד) ויהיו כל ימי קינן עשר שנים ותשע מאות שנה וימת: ו
 (טו) ויחי מהללאל חמש שנים וששים שנה ויולד את ירד:
 (טז) ויחי מהללאל אחרי הולידו את ירד שלשים שנה ושמנה מאות שנה ויולד בנים ובנות:
 (יז) ויהיו כל ימי מהללאל חמש ותשעים שנה ושמנה מאות שנה וימת: ו
 (יח) ויחי ירד שתים וששים שנה ומאת שנה ויולד את חנוך:
 (יט) ויחי ירד אחרי הולידו את חנוך שמנה מאות שנה ויולד בנים ובנות:
 (כ) ויהיו כל ימי ירד שתים וששים שנה ותשע מאות שנה וימת: פ
 (כא) ויחי חנוך חמש וששים שנה ויולד את מתושלח:
 (כב) ויתהלך חנוך את האל-הים אחרי הולידו את מתושלח שלש מאות שנה ויולד בנים ובנות:
 (כג) ויהי כל ימי חנוך חמש וששים שנה ושלש מאות שנה:
 (כד) ויתהלך חנוך את האל-הים ואיננו כי לקח אתו אל-הים: פ
 (כה) ויחי מתושלח שבע ושמונים שנה ומאת שנה ויולד את למך:
 (כו) ויחי מתושלח אחרי הולידו את למך שתים ושמונים שנה ושבע מאות שנה ויולד בנים ובנות:
 (כז) ויהיו כל ימי מתושלח תשע וששים שנה ותשע מאות שנה וימת: פ
 (כח) ויחי למך שתים ושמונים שנה ומאת שנה ויולד בן:
 (כט) ויקרא את שמו נח לאמר זה ינחמנו ממעשנו ומעצבון ידיו מן האדמה אשר אררה יקוק:
 (ל) ויחי למך אחרי הולידו את נח חמש ותשעים שנה וחמש מאות שנה ויולד בנים ובנות:
 (לא) ויהי כל ימי למך שבע ושבעים שנה ושבע מאות שנה וימת:

(לב) ויהי נח בן חמש מאות שנה ויולד נח את שם את חם ואת יפת:

Chapter 4 tells us of the birth of Kayin and Hevel, Kayin's life story, and provides a list of Kayin's descendants. It then tells of the birth of Shait, but lists only one of his descendants. Both the first and last verses contain the Name J-H-W-H, which appears seven other times in the chapter.

Chapter 5 gives a multigenerational list of Shait's descendants. The Name E-lohim appears twice in the opening verse, and five times overall.

What should interest us here is that each chapter contains one instance of the "wrong" Name. In 4:25, Chavah uses E-lohim when naming Shait, which seems especially significant when we notice that in the opening verse Chavah used J-H-W-H when naming Kayin. And in 5:29, Lemekh uses J-H-W-H when naming Noach. Furthermore, he uses it while naming Noach as one who will relieve the land cursed by the Divinity, and the land is cursed by the Divinity in the second Creation narrative, not the first!

These phenomena can be explained by proponents of multiple authorship, but not without either conceding that the Divine Names *as we have them in the text* do not observe the supposed documentary boundaries, but instead reflect either scribal errors or redactional decisions, or else granting the redactor the right to cut individual phrases and sentences from one document and insert them in the other.

A third thing to consider is the relationship between the names of Kayin's male descendants in Chapter 4 and those of Shait's in Chapter 5. I list them below, not in order of appearance but rather arranged to show the relationship.

Chapter 4	Chapter 5
1. קין	1. קין
2. חנוך	2. חנוך
3. עירד	3. ירד
4. מחויאל	4. מהלאל
5. מתושאל	5. מתושלח
6. למך	6. למך
7. נעמה	7. נח
8. יבל יובל תובל קין	8. שם חם יפת

There are many ways in which the clear confluence of names can be explained,²¹ but it seems to me very difficult to argue that it results from pure coincidence. At least one of the chapters must have been written in the expectation that readers would know the other, in other words, most plausibly in the expectation that they would appear in the same book²².

In summary:

We began by saying that

a. "evidence for multiple authorship would be elements of the text, especially contradictions, redundancies, or inconsistencies that so clearly detract from the book's effect that it seems unlikely that a competent writer would have included them by choice."

²¹ Most of which turn on the interpretation of the wonderfully multivalent phrase "אז הוחל לקרא בשם ה'" at the close of Chapter 4.

²² If this argument is accepted, the centrality of the word טוב in both Creation narratives, apparently meaning very different things in each, becomes highly significant. I did not cite this as evidence, as one could plausibly contend that the two texts coincidentally but independently evolved around the same word. Along the same line, it becomes clear that both narratives build toward the declaration that human beings are like Elo-him, but that they differ dramatically as to how that comes about.

b. “Evidence for unified authorship would include places where texts reflecting differing perspectives refer to each others’ specific language, or places where terms, phrases, or styles from one stream cross over into another.”

We conclude that:

a. In Genesis 1-5, as we have seen, the names of the descendants of Adam, while appearing in texts that use different Divine Names, refer to each other’s specific language. Therefore the Divine Names themselves are terms that cross over from one stream into another.

b. We have not, by contrast, seen contradictions, redundancies, or inconsistencies that cannot be well explained as authorial choice.

Accordingly, it seems to me that unified authorship is at least as plausible, and more likely a superior, explanation of the data in this text than multiple authorship.

We move on to two texts that are generally regarded as tours de force of the Hypothesis: the narratives of the Flood and of Korach’s Revolt.

4. Noah and the Flood

Up to now we have largely dealt with discrete units of narrative, in which the Divine Names generally played prominent parts. The issues were whether the differences among those discrete units were evidence of multiple authorship, or conversely, whether the crossing over of Divine Names and the literary interrelationships of the stories were evidence of unitary authorship. But there was almost no question as to the boundaries of literary units.

The Noah story is very different. Here the Divine Names appear together twice – once in the same verse, and once in consecutive verses within a unit – and significant blocks of text do not mention the Divine Names at all. In other words, the use of Divine Names is at best an insufficient guide to literary boundaries. Furthermore, if the Divine Names are to be taken as significant for documentary boundaries, parts of the text must be a pastiche of scraps, half-sentences pasted together, rather than the sequence of coherent units earlier in Bereishit and even earlier in this narrative. Proponents of multiple authorship need to explain this radical shift in redactional style.

Nonetheless, the Noah story is seen as a parade case by advocates of the Documentary Hypothesis. They note that the story contains apparent redundancies and contradictions, and more importantly claim that the text can be divided in such a way that two narrationally sufficient stories (stories that are complete by themselves) appear, which generally use different Divine Names and are free of redundancies and contradictions. Their argument is that the capacity to be divided in this manner is so unusual as to make it evident that the text was originally two separate narratives.

However, these advocates often disagree among themselves as to which verses belong to which narrative, making it difficult to evaluate their claims. What I will do here, then, is take as a sample the extremely popular, and yet academically respected, work of Richard Eliot Friedman. Indeed, it is Friedman’s presentation of the two flood stories that students and teachers alike often cite as first convincing them of the multiple authorship perspective.

Here is Friedman’s translation of the “J” story.

And it was when humankind began to multiply on the face of the ground and daughters were born to them: and the sons of God saw the daughters of humankind, that they were attractive, and they took women, from all they chose. And Hashem said: ‘My spirit won’t stay in humankind forever, since they’re also flesh: and their days shall be a hundred twenty years.’ The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and after that as well, when the sons of G-d came to the daughters of humankind, and they gave birth to them. They were the heroes who were of old, people of renown.

And Hashem saw that human bad was multiplied in the earth, and every inclination of their heart's thoughts was only bad all the day. And Hashem regretted that He had made humankind in the earth. And He was grieved to His heart.

And Hashem said: "I'll wipe out the human whom I've created from the face of the earth, from human to animal to creeping thing, and to the birds of the skies, because I regret that I made them. But Noah found favor in Hashem's eyes.

And Hashem said to Noah: "Come, you and all your household, into an ark, for I've seen you as virtuous in front of me in this generation. Of all the pure animals, take seven pairs, man and his woman; and of the

*animals that are not pure, two, man and his woman. **Also of the birds of the skies seven pairs, male and female, to keep seed alive on the face of the earth. Because in seven more days I'll rain on the earth, forty days and forty nights, and I'll wipe out all the substance that I've made from on the face of the earth.***

And Noah did according to all that Hashem commanded him.

*And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him came to the ark **from before the waters of the flood.***

***And seven days later** the waters of the flood were on the earth.*

***And there was rain on the earth,** forty days and forty nights.*

And Hashem closed it for him.** And the flood was on the earth for forty days, and the waters multiplied and raised the ark, and it was lifted from the earth. **And the waters grew strong,** and multiplied very much on the earth, and the ark went on the face of the waters. **And the waters had grown very, very, strong** on the earth, so they covered **all the high mountains** that are under all the skies. Fifteen cubits above, the waters **grew stronger,** and they **covered the mountains.

Everything that had the breathing spirit of life in its nostrils, everything that was on the ground, died.

And He wiped out all the substance that was on the face of the earth, from human to animal to creeping thing and to bird of the skies, and they were wiped out from the earth and just Noah and who were with him in the ark were left.

And the rain was restrained from the skies. And the waters went back from the earth, going back continually.

And it was at the end of forty days, and Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made.

*And he let a dove go from him to see whether the waters had eased from the face of the earth. And the dove did not find a resting place for its foot, and it came back to him to the ark, for waters were on the face of the earth, and he put out his hand and took it and brought it to him to the ark. And he waited **still another** seven days, and he let a dove go, and it did not come back to him again.*

And Noah turned back the covering of the ark and looked, and here the face of the earth had dried.

And Noah built an altar to Hashem, and he took some of each of the pure animals and of each of the pure birds, and he offered sacrifices on the altar. And Hashem smelled the pleasant smell, and Hashem said to his heart: "I won't curse the ground on account of humankind again, because the inclination of the human heart is bad from their youth, and I won't strike all the living again as I have done. All the rest of the earth's days, seed and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night will not cease."

And Noah's sons who went out from the ark were Shem and Ham and Yaphet. And Ham: He was the father of Canaan. These three were Noah's sons, and all the earth exploded from these. And Noah began to be a man of the ground, and he planted a vineyard. And he drank from the wine and was drunk. And he was exposed inside his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside. And Shem and Yaphet took a garment and put it on both their shoulders and went backwards and covered their father's nakedness. And they faced backwards and did not see their father's nakedness. And Noah woke up from his wine, and he knew what his youngest son had done to him. And he said: "Blessed is Hashem, God of Shem, and may Canaan be a servant to them." "May God enlarge Yaphet, and may he dwell in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be a servant to them."

As careful readers, you have doubtless noted that J still contains one major gap – there is no antecedent for "and God closed it for him." You may also have noted that Noah's family apparently enters the ark a week before the rains begin, and that apparently the "waters of the flood are on the earth" before the rains

begin. Finally, you noticed that the waters' strength is mentioned in three consecutive verses, and the mountains are covered in two of them, with the second providing less detail than the first. Overall, then, the separation of J from the narrative as a whole does not fully resolve the issues of redundancy or contradiction, and introduces a new gap.

What about the second narrative, which Friedman identifies with P? Here a simple demonstration suffices to demonstrate its failure to eliminate redundancy - this narrative can itself be divided into two (unlike "J") genuinely complete narratives! Here they are:

I.

Noah was a virtuous man. He was unblemished in his generations. And Noah fathered three sons: Shem, Cham, and Yafet.

And the earth was corrupted before God, and the earth was filled with violence.

And God said to Noah²³: *"The end of all flesh has come before me, because the earth is filled with violence because of them. And here: I'm destroying them with the earth.*

Of the birds by their kind and of the domestic animals by their kind, of all the creeping things of the ground by their kind: two of each will come to you to keep alive. And you, take some of every food that will be eaten and gather it to you, and it will be for you and for them as food."

And Noah did it.

In this very day Noah came, and Shem and Ham and Yaphet, Noah's sons, and Noah's wife and his sons' three wives with them to an²⁴ ark, they and all the wild animals by their kind and all the domestic animals by their kind and all the creeping animals that creep on the earth by their kind and all the birds by their kind, all fowl, all winged things. And they came to Noah, to the ark, by twos of all flesh in which was the breath of life, and those who that came were male and female; some from all flesh came, as God had commanded him.

And the waters grew strong on the earth a hundred fifty days.

And God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were with him in the ark. And the water receded at the end of a hundred fifty days. And the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat.

And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, and fear of you and dread of you will be on every living thing of the earth and on every bird of the skies, in every one that will creep on the earth and in all the fish of the sea . . ."

And children were born to them after the flood.

II.

Noah walked with God.

And God saw the earth, and here, it was corrupted, because all flesh had corrupted its way on the earth.

And God said to Noah: "Make yourself an ark of gopher wood (insert architectural directions) . . . And I, here: I'm bringing the flood, water on the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life from under the skies. Everything that is in the earth will expire. And I shall establish my covenant with you. And you'll come to the ark, you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. And of all the living, of all flesh, you shall bring two of each to the ark to keep alive with you. They shall be male and female."

According to everything that God commanded him, he did so.

Of the animals that were pure, and of the animals that were not pure, and of the birds and everyone that creeps on the ground, they came by twos to Noah, to the ark, male and female, as God had commanded Noah.

²³ The introduction "and God said to Noah" appears only once, but I have used it in both narratives, as by the rules of the DH advocates it may simply have been elided when the texts are combined, and in any case there are other cases in Tankah which switch from narrator to character speech without notice.

²⁴ "התיבה" might be better translated "the ark", but the instruction to build the ark is given only once, and so I have borrowed Friedman's translation of the initial התיבה in "J".

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, in the seventeenth day of the month, on this day all the fountains of the great deep were split open, and the apertures of the skies were opened. And all flesh that creep on the earth – of the birds and of the domestic animals and of all the wild animals and of all the swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all the humans – expired. and God passed a wind over the earth, and the water decreased. And the fountains of the deep and the apertures of the skies were shut, in the seventh month, in the seventeenth day of the month. And the water went on receding until the tenth month. In the tenth month, in the first of the month, the tops of the mountains appeared. And he let a raven go, and it went back and forth until the water dried up from upon the earth. And it was in the six hundred and first year, in the first month, in the first of the month; the water dried from on the earth. And in the second month, in the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth dried up. And God spoke to Noah, saying: Go out from the ark, you and your wife and your sons, and you sons' wives with you. Bring out with you all the living things that are with you, of all flesh, of the birds and of the domestic animals and of all the creeping animals that creep on the earth, and they will swarm in the earth and be fruitful and multiply on the earth. And Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. All the living things, all the creeping animals and all the birds, all that creep on the earth went out from the ark by their families. And God said to Noah and to his sons with him, saying: "And I: here, I'm establishing my covenant with you and with your seed after you . . ."

Now you might say – very well and good – why should we not accept your argument as a useful continuation to the critical discussion, and believe that there are three “flood narratives” rather than two as Friedman suggested, and one as I contend? One can – but in that case one loses a major claim of the DH advocates, namely that documents can be traced throughout Chumash, as these have no analogues elsewhere. Furthermore, these have no unique linguistic markers at all. It follows, therefore, that the capacity to be divided into independent narratives is no evidence of composite composition.

One might argue, however, that while Friedman at least fails to live up to his claim of producing independent and coherent narratives out of the whole narrative, and presents as unified a subnarrative that can in fact be divided, we still need to explain the redundancies and inconsistencies in the text overall, specifically -

- A. Just how many “pure” animals did Noah bring aboard the ark?
- B. Did the water come from the skies, or from underground?
- C Aren't the mentions of periods of 150, 40, and 7 days contradictory? How do they relate to the dates given in the text?

These are good questions all. But these kinds of questions occur in almost every text, and as we've noted, occur within the hypothetical documents as well. So if you don't what I say here compelling, that should have little effect on your position on the overall issue of composite vs. unitary authorship. But just for the sake of Torah, in reverse order, here is my current best thinking about these questions:

- A. Just how many “pure” animals did Noah bring aboard the ark?

In (7:2-3), Hashem tells to take seven pairs of “pure” animals, and either one or two pairs of “not pure” animals.²⁵ In 9:20 he brings sacrifices of “pure” birds as well, and he clearly had the “impure” raven in the ark as well. In 6:19-20, and 7:9 and 7:15, only twos are mentioned. Two approaches (there have been many) seem to me most likely:

1. 6:19-20, 7:9, and 7:15 mean that they came by twos, and make no reference to how many pairs came.

²⁵ but apparently seven pairs of birds regardless of their “purity” – this is a problem for all approaches, and therefore will not be addressed here but apparently seven pairs of birds regardless of their “purity” – this is a problem for all approaches, and therefore will not be addressed here.

2. 6:19-20, 7:9, and 7:15 refer to taking for the sake of preserving the species, whereas 7:2-3 refer to taking for personal use, including sacrifices - thus לך"תקח".

B. Did the water come from the skies, or from underground?

It is clear that in at least one version of the story the water came from both the "windows of Heaven" and the "springs of the deep". I see no reason not to identify the water that falls when the windows of the heavens are opened with rain, and thus the text before us consistently says that the water came from both above and below.²⁶

C. mentions of periods of 150, 40, and 7 days all occur?

The entire flood, according to the dates provided within the story, takes a solar year (12 lunar months plus 10 or 11 days). The dates in the text are as follows (month/day/year)

2/17/1- the windows of heaven and springs of the deep open

7/17/1- ark comes to rest in the hills of Ararat (5 months = 150 days²⁷ since previous date)

10/1/1 - the tops of the mountains become visible (2 months and 14 days²⁸)

1/1/2 - Noach removes the ark's cover and sees that the "face of the land has become "חרבה" (3 months)

2/27/2 - the land becomes יבשה (1 month plus 27 days).

In addition, we are told that:

a. It rained for forty days

b. the waters were "stronger than the land", or "strong on the land", for 150 days

c. the waters had receded from the land after 150 days (so the ark came to rest on 7/17/1)

d. Noah sent the raven at the end of a forty day period

e. Noah sent the dove out three times, and the third time he is described as waiting "yet another seven days"..

Now since the 150 day period after which the waters had receded, and the ark lands, end five months after the flood begins, it seems clear that it and the 150 days in which the waters were stronger than the land are identical; in other words, that 150 days is the point at which the waters stopped overpowering the land. Now as the waters at their highest rose 15 cubits above the ground, they must have started receding well before that mark. Accordingly, it must have rained (and the fountains of the deep remained open) for forty days, so that the waters reached their maximum heights soon thereafter, and then receded for the next approximately 110 days, after which the ark came to rest.

It seems reasonable from the order of the text to assume that all the bird-sending activity happened between 10/1/1 and 1/1/2, which works out well if we say that Yonah sent the raven out on day 40, the dove for the first time on day 47, and the second time on day 54, and the last time on day 61, after which he removed the ark's cover.

What emerges, then, is a clear account of every time period mentioned in the text that corresponds to the dates mentioned in the text.

Now Friedman of course will argue that the dates are inserted by a redactor seeking to unify the time period mentioned in the text, but one wonders in that case why we have gaps in the dates mentioned that do not correspond to any of the periods (7/17/1-10/1/1 and 1/1/2 - 2/27/2)! Furthermore, if that were true, why is it necessary to even mention stages in the flood's decline that are not in any way required by

²⁶ It seems possible that the opening of windows and springs sets the Flood up as the undoing of the division of upper and lower waters on the second day of Creation, whereas the rain is the antithesis of the $\tau\kappa$ in Genesis 7:6.

²⁷ This assumes that each of the months was 30 days long. However, if that is assumed for all 12 months, the flood overall takes 370 days, rather than a solar year.

²⁸ See previous note

the “earlier” narratives, such as the date the tops of the mountains appeared, and the date that the waters had dried but the earth had not yet dried up?

One can ask more deeply why the Torah chooses to tell this particular story with so much apparent redundancy, and why events during the flood occurred at such apparently random intervals of days. It seems likely, for instance, that forty days can refer to the forty days Moses spend on Sinai receiving the Torah, and that seven days Noah waits refer to Shabbat, but why one hundred fifty, or one month plus 27 days, or two months plus fourteen days? I encourage you to seek answers, or develop your own.

What I hope to have shown is that these questions, and others like them, cannot be effectively evaded by denying the unity of the text, and are more likely answerable if one takes one’s interpretive stance within rather than without Jewish tradition.

5. The Rebellion(s) of Korach, Datan, Aviram, and On

This is the last unit we will study together, and we’ll do it very briefly. Multiple authorship advocates contend that there are actually two rebellion stories intertwined here – one about Korach, which relates to Aaron’s assumption of the High Priesthood, and the other about Datan and Aviram, which relates to Moses’ leadership. As evidence, we are shown several paragraphs at the outset that refer, respectively, only to Korach or only to Datan and Aviram.

I am puzzled by this argument. Every real-life rebellion involves bringing together people with divergent grievances so as to overthrow the power structure, and intelligent leaders respond to such challenges by seeking to break apart the coalition and show each constituent that they will gain nothing if another constituent triumphs – why, then, should Korach not build a coalition with Datan and Aviram, and why should Moshe not seek to address them separately?

The truth is – and I hope that by now you’ve seen enough to be asking these questions on your own, before you read the next few sentences – that the multiple authorship contention here is worse than utterly unjustified – it requires ignoring and manipulating evidence. Because in our text, not only do Korach and Datan and Aviram approach Moshe together, Moshe speaks to them together twice, and their fates are intertwined in the final paragraph! Friedman, whom we will once again take as typical, treats the mention of Datan and Aviram in the first paragraph as an interjection of J into P, the mention of Korach in the last paragraph as an interjection of P into J, and the appearances of Datan and Aviram together with Korach in both the second and the third to last paragraphs as insertions of the redactor! In sum: Korach and Datan and Aviram appear together in the text more often than they do apart, and Friedman essentially erases all their joint appearances in order to support his thesis.

We should note as well that:

- a. There is no reason at all that these stories should have been combined, if they were originally separate; after all, as Friedman helpfully points out, the two rebels have very different issues, and certainly the Torah contains more than one story of rebellion against Mosheh!
- b. On, son of Pelet, appears in the opening verse of the story but never again – why is this not at least as significant as the later separate appearance of Korach and Datan and Aviram? Shall we now posit yet another lost story interwoven here, of which only the name of one character survives?!
- c. Bamidbar 26:9-11 speaks of Datan and Aviram being swallowed up by the earth as part of “adat Korach”. The integration of the stories must then have happened deliberately in that text as well, but why is it necessary?

In summary, I do not see how any fair-minded person could cite the Korach story as evidence for multiple authorship, and it is not clear to me that the argument for splitting the story up is even plausible²⁹.

²⁹ The analysis here does not address Devarim 11:6 and Tehillim 106:17, both of which mention Datan and Aviram but not Korach. Devarim refers to the being swallowed up by the earth; Tehillim refers to that but also to their being consumed by fire. I anticipate integrating discussion of those verses into the next draft.

E. Conclusion

We've now read four narrative sections together, and I hope you've been convinced that in each of these sections unitary authorship is at least plausible intellectually, and perhaps significantly more probable than multiple authorship.

This does not, of course, respond to every issue raised by advocates of multiple authorship. We have not addressed the same types of questions as they occur in legal texts; why, for instance, the Torah presents so many, and so divergent, accounts of the laws of Jewish avadim,. We have also not addressed newer models of the Hypothesis which see each document as explicitly incorporating its predecessors. But I hope that you will be able to see how the arguments made here can be applied to other cases, and that you will understand if I choose to move on to learning Torah on my own terms rather than feeling the need to be continually responding to someone else's claims. Ultimately, it makes more sense to choose an interpretative stance and work within it, than to continually defend it against other stances. My stance is within Jewish tradition – which does not inhibit creativity or the search for personal meaning – and I hope you will join me there.

The Boundaries of Torah Study

by Morah Deborah Klapper

May 25, 2012

Shavuot is all about “Torah”. The Kadosh baruch Hu gave us the Torah today, to tell us who He is and what He wants. But what do we mean by “Torah”? “Torah” has a wide range of definitions. At its most narrow, it refers specifically to the 5 books of the Torah (Braishit, Shmot, Vayikra, Bamidbar and Devarim) and at its most broad it can refer to almost any endeavor designed to understand God, what he wants from us, and how best to carry out His will. In the gemara, for example, Rabbi Yehuda haNasi asks Rabbi Yehoshua ben Karcha, “How did you live so long?” When Rabbi Yehoshua ben Karcha responds with “Why, are you tired of me being alive?” Rabbi answers “תורה היא וללמוד אני צריך”. There are three other instances of this phrase, all of which involve inappropriate invasion of privacy in order to learn how great people conduct their private lives, but the specifics do not really belong in a “family dvar Torah”.

Somewhere in the middle is the meaning we most often intend when we speak of “learning Torah”. We mean to include all of Rabbinic tradition, and any new thoughts we might be inspired with while reading Rabbinic or Tanachic books, but not science, history or philosophy books, however much they may affect our understanding of how best to live. This middle position is a convenient way of distinguishing “our” learning from the learning we share with the rest of the world, which is very important – our relationship with God is built on yetzi’at mitzrayim and matan Torah, which are particularistic events. We are special precisely because we have experiences and information the rest of the world does not have. That is what happens in this morning’s laining – we become God’s people because we receive God’s message.

But does this distinction between “Torah” and shared or secular knowledge actually work? Six years ago, in daf yomi, I learned through several pages of astronomy in masechet Pesachim. I remember complaining to my husband that my time would be better spent reading a “real” physics or astronomy textbook. Why, I asked, should learning ancient Greek astronomy count as Talmud Torah? Could it be, as someone suggested to me, that it is because it is printed in Hebrew letters in an official-looking book?!

Perhaps the distinction I made a moment ago doesn’t work; maybe we should be prepared to include learning about God from other sources in our definition of learning Torah. If learning these pages of gemara is Talmud Torah because it is meant to teach us about the universe that God created, then shouldn’t modern astronomy, which we think is true, be Talmud Torah by kal vachomer? The same could be said for the many times that math, medicine, physics, and other information or misinformation about the physical world is included in the Talmud and other rabbinic texts.

Let’s look further at the value Torah and Judaism place on learning about the world around us. The Torah commands us, as we recite every day in kriyat shma, to “love” Hashem. In the second chapter of hilchot Yesodei Hatorah, the Rambam tell us that the proper path to love of God is knowledge of his creations. The theory is that knowing what God has created fills one with awe and love of the Creator. The Rambam even goes so far as to include a fair amount of physics and metaphysics, as they were known in his time, to facilitate this knowledge.

Rav Yitzchak Twersky, zichron tzadik l’vrachah used to say that for the Rambam, there were 2 sources of truth: The Torah and Aristotle. We would have to substitute modern science for Aristotle, but I suspect that given that substitution most of our community would feel the same. If reality is a coherent whole, and we are to be whole people, we must, as Rav Twersky said the Rambam did, integrate these sources of truth into one coherent understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

Claiming that Aristotle and the Torah are on par with each other as sources of truth seems, at first glance, religiously problematic. However, I think if we look at it from the right perspective, it works perfectly. The Kadosh baruch Hu gave us the Torah, and that tells us a lot about who He is and what He wants, but it also gives us clues as to other places in which that information might be located. The Torah tells us the He created the world. Presumably, insofar as a human can understand God or his motives and behavior, God

expressed his personality and values (keveyachol) in His creations. Kal vachomer in his creation of people, who are supposed to resemble God in some ineffable fashion. That is why so many ancient and medieval rabbis studied physics and metaphysics – they were seen as windows into the mind of God Himself. I see no reason that modernity should change the basic truth that reality is a source for information about God.

Perhaps my argument only applies to the sciences, and not to the humanities? I think not. Since the Torah tells us that people are created in the image of God, it follows that the study of human nature can also tell us about God. There are countless places in midrash and Talmud where some action of God is explained by telling a story about a flesh and blood person, usually a king, who found himself in a similar situation. That process should be reversible – that is, the study of what real people have actually done and wanted and thought should tell us something about their Creator.

For much of Jewish history, higher-level study of any topic was restricted to the privileged few. And so the mitzvot of Talmud Torah and Ahavat Hashem were fulfilled by most people only in a limited way. In our time and place, though, things have changed. For the first time ever, we have a religious school system that is teaching almost all of our children science, math, history, and other subjects at a sophisticated level. Our children are some of the best educated laypeople in the history of the Jewish people, and they are being educated in a Jewish environment that we can control. This seems like a perfect opportunity to imbue all of our children's learning with religious meaning by putting all of this information into religious context. We have the best opportunity ever seen by the Jewish people to engage in true ahavat Hashem as a community.

In our classrooms full of Modern Orthodox children, we could ask students to contemplate the religious meaning of each thing they learn. This would, of course, have to be done according to the age and sophistication of the students and the specific content being taught. We could train our students in a habit of mind – to treat each event in life and each learned fact as an opportunity to connect to Judaism and God. That is, the purpose of asking a student to consider the religious meaning of what they learn is for them to understand their education as one coherent and religious whole and for them to develop a relationship with God. The specific meanings they derive are secondary.

Let me offer a couple of examples that I find personally meaningful. My examples are the meaning I find, obviously, not an authoritative treatise on theology. First, in honor of the Rambam, an example from astronomy. We see that moons revolve around planets, planets around stars, solar systems around the centers of galaxies, etc. It seems to me that God might be demonstrating through this that whatever appears to be at the “center” of a particular system is still just a small detail in yet another system. I take this as a great lesson in humility – I may be the center of authority in my classroom or my home (at least I wish I were), but in the grand scheme of things I am a relative nobody. Likewise with the people who hold authority over me. The only exception to this rule is God Himself.

Whenever he hears an evolutionary biology theory of why a species has a particular feature, my husband likes to say that maybe that species has that feature because Hashem finds it cute, nothing more or less. He may intend this comment as a joke, but I think there is actually a great insight here – what survives in this universe is what Hashem likes and approves of, and we should be able to learn from that. This sort of understanding would stand in contrast to the reactionary response to evolution sometimes found in the Orthodox Jewish community. Just last week, someone told me of a school (not a Modern Orthodox one) that tears out the evolution chapter from the biology textbook before distributing it to students. It seems to me that this is kfira – they deny students scientific knowledge because they think Torah isn't compatible with it, and if Torah isn't compatible with reality, then Torah is false. That aside, the study of how species come to be should be able to tell us a great deal about what God likes and does not like. For example, it seems that God has an esthetic sensibility -- acts that are pointless except as a sort of decoration are common in many species. Yes, I know the theory about demonstrating fitness by using energy for something pointless, but the two are not incompatible.

A midrash in Sanhedrin 38b tells us that before creating people, God asked the angels their advice. They advised against creating people, predicting that people would not behave well. God has to destroy two sets

of angels before the third set finally sees that what God really wants is to be told that He's in charge and can do as He pleases. It may be that this midrash indicates that God himself engages in artistic but inefficient endeavors. Which is to say that we can learn from the species God created, including ourselves, that there is purpose and beauty even (or maybe especially) in that which is not useful.

In addition to reflecting on our theology, knowledge of the world can also directly impact our understanding of the written Torah. The Torah tells us what Hashem thinks about events, but it doesn't actually tell us what happened. I like to think of it as the op-ed page or blog. The problem with such things is that they only have their complete meanings when the history is also known. To some extent, we have preserved this information in Torah She'be'al Peh. To the extent that we have lost this information, though, archeology is vital. Of course, since archeology is very much a work in progress, it is wise to refrain from making any hasty conclusions, but nonetheless one can look for information and meaning.

When we study literature, we can also find new meaning that reflects back on our study of Torah. I did not really understand why we needed 40 years in the desert until I read *Beloved*, by Toni Morrison. It was very clear to me that her characters were not ready for independent existence, and they could really have used a generation or two of specialized care in the isolation of the desert before they tried to cope on their own. When I tried to explain this to my very secular public school English teacher, I was met with blank stares, but I hope that in a Modern Orthodox day school the response would be different.

Likewise, I find I can no longer read or teach the story of Moshe Rabbeinu's infancy without using what I have learned reading the Harry Potter series. It is, in many ways, a meditation on what it means to grow up with other people knowing that you are the savior, even though you do not. Rashi indicates both at Moshe's birth and at the moment when he is pulled from the Nile that his appearance is unusual and miraculous. Is this to indicate that Yocheved and Bat Paro know what he is and what he will do while he is still a baby? How did this impact on his upbringing? For me, anyway, I really only understood these questions after seeing J K Rowling's fictional treatment of a savior character being manipulated by his adults, so that he will be in exactly the right places, with exactly the right tools, feelings, and beliefs, at exactly the right moment. In that light, I now wonder, when Moshe went out to his brothers, who made sure that he went out at that moment, in that place, and saw those people? What preparation had he received for that moment? Was it divine providence? Human interference? Chance?

I hope that we have designed our Modern Orthodox day schools to facilitate this sort of thinking and learning. I am concerned, though, that our schools teach children that some subjects are "secular" and others are "holy". Also, at some schools many "secular studies" teachers do not share our religious beliefs and values, and many Torah teachers are unsure of the value of learning secular subjects. I fear that sometimes we may give our students the impression that it is best to leave their souls at the door when they enter a science classroom and to leave their scientific minds at the door when they enter the beit midrash.

I have been asked, doesn't the school system you're asking for require all of our teachers to be modern Orthodox? Wouldn't that be impractical? Are there enough modern Orthodox teachers? I answer with some questions of my own: if we have to ask if it is a good idea for the people raising our children to share our values, in what sense are they our values? If we do not educate our children to be the best Jews they can be, then who are we? The Kadosh baruch Hu gave us the Torah. Now it is our role to find out who He is and what He wants.

Why “Why” Questions Belong in the Beit Midrash

August 18, 2016

Does the study of halakhah lead to philosophic depth? Or are the disciplines of halakhah and hashkafah utterly separate and distinct?

These questions present a false choice, and our failure to recognize the falseness of the choice is part of what ails Modern Orthodoxy. Let me explain briefly.

Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik argued that in the modern era³⁰ halakhah – by which he meant a descriptive conceptualization of Jewish law, not an array of prescriptive details – should be the source of hashkafah. He was less successful in conveying the need for serious philosophic training, or at the least for a developed philosophic sensibility, to make the leap from one to the other. The result too often was a culture with an impoverished hashkafah, and worse, an inability to recognize its own lacks. And even worse, an incapacity to appreciate the contributions and integrity of those who saw the relationship between halakhah and hashkafah differently.

For example: The Rav brilliantly argued that a halakhah-generated hashkafah looks for imperatives rather than for explanations when confronted by tragedy. But to make a normative response to tragedy meaningful, one has to genuinely understand why the question matters, why tragedy can change the nature of faith. Someone who genuinely understands the available theological alternatives will likely also understand why the normative response doesn't satisfy everyone, and appreciate the value of profound classical and contemporary theodicies even as they choose a different path.

Intense and conceptually rigorous study of halakhah **can, but does not necessarily**, lead to hashkafic depth. A key pedagogic challenge for Modern Orthodoxy is to teach Talmud and Halakhah in a way that nurtures philosophic sensibility **as organic to** the development of passionately committed Jews who care deeply about the depth, breadth, and rigor of their learning.

I think it can be done. Here's an example of how, via a discussion beginning from Devarim 5:16.

כְּבַד אֶת־אָבִיךָ וְאֶת־אִמְךָ
כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּךְ יְקֹוֹק אֱלֹהֶיךָ
לְמַעַן יֵאָרִיכוּ יְמֵיךָ
וְלְמַעַן יֵיטֵב לָךְ
עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר־יְקֹוֹק אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ:
*Honor your father and your mother
as Hashem your G-d commanded you
so that your days will be extended
and so that it will be good for you
on the ground which Hashem your G-d is giving you.*

What is the meaning of “on the ground which Hashem your G-d is giving you? Perhaps it implies that honoring parents outside Israel does not generate extended life. This topic is addressed in an essay (#245) by Rabbi Yaakov Chaim Sofer in the journal *Mevakshei Torah*. Among the sources he cites is the Midrash Tannaim to our verse:

כשאתם על האדמה – יש אריכות ימים ויש טובה מצויה;
הא אינן מצויין לא בגולה ולא בתושבות.
*When you are on the ground – there is extension of days and good is to be found;
But these are not to be found neither in the golah/exile nor in the toshavot/settlements.*

³⁰ On some other occasion I hope to flesh out why the Rav's statements were intended only for the 'modern' era, and to discuss whether their claims apply in the intellectual environment of today's West.

What are these *toshavot*/settlements, which seem to be neither in Israel nor in exile? Rabbi Dovid Tzvi Hoffman (as cited by Rabbi Sofer) defined them as follows:

תושבות הם מקומות שהיהודים נתיישבו שם בחוץ לארץ
כמו אלכסנדריה של מצרים והעיר של רומי
*Toshavot are places where the Jews settled there in "outside the Land"
such as Alexandria of Egypt and the City of Rome*

Here we appear to have an early recognition of – and perhaps resistance to – the idea that a thriving Jewish community outside the Land of Israel is not fully in exile. This is our first philosophic opportunity.

Regardless, this midrash clearly held that honoring parents outside Israel does *not* generate extended life. Rabbi Sofer himself, however, believes that a story on Chullin 110 furnishes conclusive evidence that the Babylonian Talmud held otherwise.

רמי בר תמרי,
דהוא רמי בר דיקולי מפומבדיתא,
אי קלע לסורא במעלי יומא דכפורי...
אייתוהו לקמיה דרב חסדא...
חזייה דלא הוה קא רמי חוטי. אמר ליה: מאי טעמא לית לך חוטי?
אמר ליה:
טלית שאולה היא,
ואמר רב יהודה:
טלית שאולה, כל שלשים יום – פטורה מן הציצית.
אדהכי, אייתוהו להווא גברא דלא הוה מוקר אבוה ואמיה.
כפתוהו.
אמר להו:
שבקוהו,
דתניא:
כל מצות עשה שמתן שכרה בצדה –
אין בית דין שלמטה מוזהרין עליה.
אמר ליה:
חזינא לך דחריפת טובא!
אמר ליה: אי הוית באתריה דרב יהודה, אחוינא לך חורפאי!
*Rami the son of Tamri/Datepalms,
who is the same as Rami the son of Dikkulei/Datepalms from Pumbedita
arrived in Sura on the eve of Yom Kippur . . .
They brought him before Rav Chisda . . .*
*[Rav Chisda] saw that he was not wearing tzitzit. He asked him: Why don't you have tzitzit?
He replied:
My tallit is borrowed,
and Rav Yehudah said:
A borrowed tallit is exempt from tzitzit for the first thirty days.
Meanwhile, they brought in a man who would not honor his father and mother,
They prepared him for flogging.
[Rami] said:
Leave him be!
for we learned in a beraita:
"Every mitzvah that has its reward (written) next to it –
the courts Below are not commanded regarding it.
[Rav Chisda] said to him:
I see that you are very sharp!
[Rami] replied:*

If you were in the territory of Rav Yehudah, I would show you my sharpness!

Why are such mitzvot exempt from humanly administered punishment? Rashi (following Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael) explains that the Torah can be interpreted via implication: If the reward for such mitzvot is X, it follows that the (only mandated) punishment for them is NOT X. By this logic, the exemption is derived from the reward, and therefore, the exemption applies only where the reward does, and therefore, as the story takes place in Babylonia, the reward must apply even outside Israel.

But there are at least two ways to reject this proof.

A)

Devarim 25:15 reads

אֵבֶן שְׁלֵמָה וְצִדְקַת יְהוָה לָךְ
אֵיפֶה שְׁלֵמָה וְצִדְקַת יְהוָה לָךְ
לְמַעַן יֵאָרְכּוּ יְמֵיךָ עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר יִקְוֶה אֶל-לְהִירְ נִתֵּן לָךְ:
A complete and accurate weight-measure there must be for you
A complete and accurate weight-measure there must be for you
so that your days will be extended on the ground which Hashem your G-d is giving you

Yerushalmi Bava Batra 5:5 derives from “there must be for you” an obligation to appoint inspectors. Since the commands in this verse also “have their rewards written next to them”, this obligation seems to contradict the *beraita* cited by Rami, which he claimed meant that such obligations were unenforceable. The Yerushalmi, after citing that *beraita*, therefore reinterprets it to mean that a Rabbinic court is not punished for failure to enforce such laws, but it is nonetheless obligated to try to enforce them. This reinterpretation undermines Rabbi Sofer’s proof. He can still argue, however, that the Bavli stands by Rami’s reading.

B)

On Chullin 142a and elsewhere, the Talmud seems to accept the position of Rabbi Yaakov that “extended days” refers to the Word to Come, or to Resurrection, rather than to an extended life in the here-and-now. Indeed, Masekhet Chullin closes with the declaration that the apostasy of Elisha ben Avuyah (known as *Acher*) could have been prevented had he known of this interpretation.

It seems to me that this interpretation of the verse is also incompatible with Rami’s argument. If the reward referred to in the verse is metaphysical, or eschatological, it seems likely that the excluded punishments are as well, and the verse poses no bar to here-and-now physical punishments.

Given these weaknesses in Rami’s argument, it may be that we have mistaken the entire episode. Maybe Rami is showing off his cleverness, rather than consistently making arguments that he actually believes. There is no indication in the story that Rav Chisda actually releases the man he intended to flog.

Rabbi Yaakov’s interpretation is part of his broader position that שכר מצוה בהאי עלמא ליכא (there is no reward for mitzvot in this world). This position enables him to sideline the otherwise pressing issue of theodicy, of why bad things happen, especially to good people.

WRAPUP

Our apparently small opening questions led us to at least two major hashkafic issues – the status of Jewish life outside Israel, and the connection between virtue and success in this world.

At this point, it is the teacher's choice whether these questions are seen as irrelevant or rather as essential, and if the latter, to convince the students that properly approaching them requires learning the halakhic topic and texts that triggered them more deeply – and yet to recognize that this is not all that is required.

This, I submit, is what the Modern Orthodox classroom should be like, and I believe that our community will be much healthier to the extent that it absorbs and models this sensibility.

How to Teach Halakhah: “Whether” and “Why” Classes

December 1, 2017

We need to think about halakhah curricularly. I don't mean that questions of the pedagogy of halakhah should be confined, or even largely contained, within a halakhah curriculum. Rather, we need to think about how we as a school or community teach halakhah holistically – what is our students' overall experience of the practice and study of halakhah?

Let's start by distinguishing between “whether” and “why” classes.

In a “whether” class, the default goal is to be comprehensive, to present every interpretive option, and to present each option in its best possible light. “Whether” classes validate multiple practice options, and empower students to make choices.

In a “why” class, there may be less need to present positions that we won't end up following leHalakhah, at least so long as the students would not think of or encounter those options on their own. “Why” classes convince students to exclude options, and to make only choices which the teacher would approve.

Both types have a place in our schools and shuls. But they require very different pedagogies.

In every pedagogic context, teachers must decide whether their primary goal is empowerment or persuasion, validation or standardization. They must decide whether setting themselves up as a source of authority is a desideratum; and whether they seek to position the class as deepening the students' appreciation of their community, or rather as critiquing it. Sometimes these decisions can be made ad hoc; sometimes they require a sustained and consistent pedagogic approach.

These choices often reflect the instructor's goals for his and her students throughout their lives. Should students learn to see halakhah as a menu from which they can choose (not that they can refuse to eat, or skip a course – but they have options for each course) or as a blueprint they must follow? Should their study of halakhah be an experience of autonomy, or rather of submission? Should their default be to ask a sh'eilah whenever they experience uncertainty, or only when they have a conflict of interest, or when the stakes are communal rather than individual?

On a deep level these are false either/ors. The experience of studying halakhah should be one of both submission and autonomy; students should see halakhah as both blueprint and menu; and there are many different kinds and degrees of uncertainty. We must also distinguish among “asking a sh'eilah”, “looking it up yourself”, “doing the research yourself”, and “making your own decision”. But pedagogically it is often important and necessary to choose which side of these dichotomies to emphasize.

Let's concretize these issues with a tale of two teachers, Ayelet and Brokhoh. Ayelet falls on the authority/standardization/blueprint side of the spectrum, while Brokhoh falls on the autonomy/validation/menu side. Let's make the issue the kashrut of a school sukkah under windy conditions, where the skhah has been blown away from the walls toward the middle of the roof. Ayelet and Brokhoh are each scheduled to teach their classes in the sukkah, with school-provided cookies so students can fulfill the mitzvah.

Each teacher will think of the issue of *dofen akumah*, the concept that a sukkah is valid even if kosher skhakh begins up to 4 amot away from a required wall because we treat those 4 amot as an extended wall, which goes up to where the kosher skhakh, or “roof”, begins.

Each teacher will discover after minimal research that there may be a machloket rishonim, a disagreement among medieval authorities, as to whether this principle can be applied if there is in fact just open space in the 4 amot, rather than invalid skhakh. According to the Encyclopedia Talmudit, the issue depends on whether we view the wall as literally “bent over”, in which case the wall must continue physically, or rather as if it is “moved over” so that its vertical component reaches the kosher skhakh. In that case the

horizontal space can be ignored, so it makes no difference whether it is empty or filled. Most rishonim hold that it is considered “bent over”; therefore most rishonim hold that it must be solid; therefore a sukkah whose skhakh is blown more than three tefachim away from a necessary wall becomes invalid. QED. So, Ayelet concludes as she emphatically takes the cookies off the table, our class will not be eating in the Sukkah today.

What questions was Ayelet asking herself as she read the Encyclopedia? It seems to me that she focused on clarity and authority. How can the dispute be most clearly and neatly explained? What are the “nafka minas”, the practical differences, that flow **inevitably** from the clearly identified and explained conceptual positions? Which position has more **authority** attached to it? How must we act?

Brokhoh also read the Encyclopedia Talmudit. But her conclusion from its citations is that the issue has not really been addressed directly by the poskim, which means that this is an opportunity for the students to think for themselves. She has a different set of questions than Ayelet : Which interpretation of *dofen akumah* fits better with the nominal phrase itself? Which interpretation seems a better explanation of the Talmudic passages in which the term appears? If walls need not reach vertically up to the skhakh, so that we treat empty vertical spaces as extensions of the walls, why can't we treat empty horizontal spaces as extensions of an L-shaped wall? What about spaces that still have a framework, just not enough skhakh to be kosher? What if the framework is tight-knit enough to meet the standards for a valid wall, even though it would not be enough for skhakh? Even if she can explain some or all of these issues to the students, will they understand them well enough, and have the breadth and maturity necessary, to evaluate them sufficiently to make their own decisions by the end of a single period? If she puts away the cookies because they can't make a decision, will they learn about the seriousness of the process, or rather about its futility? If she encourages them to eat the cookies, will they come to see halakhic discourse as a mere language game divorced from the realities of life?

There is a deeper issue hidden in the artificial limitation of the Ayelet and Berokhoh's research to the Encyclopedia Talmudit. Which is: What sort of competencies are needed to teach halakhah, in what ways?

It might be useful to think about a science classroom as an analogy. Science can be taught as an assemblage of existing knowledge, or as a process of discovery. A teacher may be excellent at digesting presentations of scientific consensus and of conveying that digest to students, but have no capacity to convey how that consensus was arrived at, or the limits of that consensus. For example, he or she may have no genuine understanding of research protocols, or of the extent to which “scientific method” is a poor description of the methods used by scientists (especially those engaged in highly creative science). I was deeply affected by Thomas Kuhn's biting critique of most high school labs, in which an experiment is judged a success or failure based on whether it achieved the predicted result, and the reaction to “failure” is to repeat the experiment until it “succeeds”. The teacher may also wish to encourage, or rather to discourage students to consider whether they agree with the consensus based on their intuition and the evidence available to them.

Encouraging students to think independently, no matter how carefully you try to circumscribe the methods they use, will always lead to some students thinking things the teacher passionately disagrees with. In that kind of science classroom, some students will conclude that global warming is not caused by human activity; the same will happen in a halakhah classroom. Teachers and schools need to decide whether and how they can handle this. (Note: Ayelet's students are much less likely to **voice** their disagreements with her presumptions in class and in assignments than Berokhoh's are, but this does not demonstrate that she is more effective than Berokhoh in shaping the broad parameters of her students' longterm thinking. But Ayelet does not have to deal directly with students whom she knows reject her assumptions, or with student work that upsets her.)

Moreover, Berokhoh is unlikely to be able to effectively teach the way Ayelet does, and vice versa, because each of them likely is teaching halakhah the way they themselves experience it. So a school or community needs to decide whether that diversity is a strength or a weakness – or my preference, to consider how to

make that diversity a strength. Part of that involves deciding whether education happens best when teachers are in their intellectual and spiritual comfort zones, or whether there is value in pushing teachers to model dealing with discomfort.

Five Choices About Teaching Halakhah

December 15, 2017

Note: This essay is adapted from Rabbi Klapper's podcast "Teaching Halakhah", featured on LOOKJED.

"CONTENT" and "PROCESS" are often presented in a zero-sum relationship. If the goal is for students to know, for example, Hilkhoh Chanukkah, and you only have, say, four periods, then really there's no time to do anything but teach them the facts. So schools and teachers say: we're only going to do "CONTENT".

This is FALSE. There is no way to do CONTENT without PROCESS. The only choices are what aspects of process to teach, what to teach about those aspects, and how well or badly to teach them.

One reason for this confusion is that we instinctively define PROCESS as "the way that poskim develop halakhah". But a more useful definition would be "the way that people decide what to do when they want to follow halakhah". That makes clear that each of us has our own "halakhic process". Our fundamental goal should be to shape students' halakhic processes.

For example – which book (if any) you choose to teach from will influence students' conceptions of authority, usefulness, and process. Whatever **your** source is, will likely become their source. If you cut and paste from Chabad.org – that's how they will look up new things. If you teach them Mishnah Berurah, they'll use Mishnah Berurah. If you dictate without giving them sources – they'll look for someone who will give them unequivocal and absolute answers.

All this assumes that you teach effectively. But, for example, if you teach them Mishnah Berurah, but don't teach them which things will be in Mishnah Berurah and which not, and how to find the things that are there – their future process will be dysfunctional, looking for halakhah in all the wrong places. We need to think about what sort of background information, textual ability, and **PRACTICE** a student needs in order to be able to use a Mishnah Berurah effectively **ONCE THEY GRADUATE**.

In any case, a Mishnah Berurah is only useful for Orach Chayyim, so if that is the process we set out, we may need to figure out how a student can learn to usefully abstract from it a process for dealing with hilkhoh kashrut. Or perhaps we want them to have different processes for different kind of issues? We must also account for the reality that students will probably access most materials online once they graduate – Mishnah Berurah on Bar Ilan or Sefaria may be a very different experience than in a book (to begin with, it gets rid of "Rashi script"). But we also need to account for Shabbat, when they will need to access Torah without the internet.

A second, related educational choice is whether to teach halakhah "SYNCHRONICALLY" or rather "DIACHRONICALLY".

Synchronically means presenting all positions as if they existed and came into being at the same time. Usually that time will be Maamad Har Sinai or yesterday.

DIACHRONICALLY means presenting the positions as they come into being over time.

For example: A class which uses Kitzur Shulchan Arukh as its primary text does not naturally develop any sense of halakhah as existing in time. But a class which uses Mishnah Berurah will naturally see the movement from Shulchan Arukh to Mishnah Berurah, and can easily be taught more about the acharonim.

What is true of time is also true of space. A class that uses the Kitzur as its base text does not naturally develop any sense of halakhah as having geographic coordinates. But a class which uses Mishnah Berurah, and therefore Shulchan Arukh, will naturally see the difference between "Ashkenaz" and "Sefarad".

Teachers and schools may see the relevance of time and space to halakhah as opportunities, or rather as challenges to overcome (or differently depending on the maturity and background of their students). My point is that the choice of base text matters for process, even if you are focused on content. So if your goal is for students to conceive of halakhah as existing outside of time and space, you are better off choosing the Kitzur, or dictating, than using Mishnah Berurah. Whereas if your goal is to develop students' sense of halakhah as developing in time and space, Mishnah Berurah offers opportunities.

The question of whether halakhah exists in or rather outside of time and space has implications not only for students' conception of the past of halakhah, but also for their conception of its future. So a third choice is: Do we wish students to understand and experience halakhah as static and uniform, or as changing and diverse?

Many Orthodox teachers instinctively shy away from making halakhic change and diversity explicit in the classroom. They see this question as a field of denominational battle, in which their job is to hold the line against the "historicism" of Zechariah Frankel and/or Conservative Judaism. Or they worry about individual students whose faith in the system may be shaken because they automatically identify pluralism with uncertainty and change with error.

These concerns are legitimate. But there are also students for whom the reality of halakhic change is so evident, whether as the result of nature or of nurture, that ignoring it leads them to question a teacher's integrity, and to lose faith in the system generally. For yet other students, the prospect of change gives them both energy – they have a purpose in this system! and hope – the things they see as spiritually/morally/ethically troubling about Halakhah may go away.

A fourth choice is whether we want our students to relate to Halakhah primarily as the unmediated Divine Will, or rather as the product of human mediation of that Will. We need to acknowledge the ideological and denominational backdrop; that there are many formulations of both/and rather than either/or; that different faculty members will legitimately take different positions; and that schools can seek either to eliminate or to leverage diversity.

A fifth choice is whether we want students to adopt a "Pan-Halakhic model" or rather a model of "Limited Halakhah".

By Pan-Halakhism I mean the position that every practical choice in life can be and ideally should be decided halakhically.

By "Limited Halakhah" I mean that there are practical choices in life that halakhah simply has no relevance to, and others that could be decided halakhically but should not be.

Let's illustrate these positions via the thought processes of twin sisters Gilah and Ditzah.

Gilah has thoroughly imbibed pan-Halakhism. For example: Yesterday she decided which brand of orange juice to buy for Shabbat. You might see this as a religiously neutral choice; but Gilah was trained to find the halakhic aspects of her options. So Gilah thought as follows:

I like Tropicana more, but the generic brand is cheaper. To what extent do I have a *chiyyuv* to spend more for *oneg* Shabbat? If I would use the money I save to buy dessert – is it a better *kiyyum* of *oneg* Shabbat to have more foods that I like, or to have only foods that I like very much? But what if, when I'm honest with myself, I realize that I would spend the money on dessert anyway, but there's a chance that I'll give the money I save to *tzedakah* – can I pass over better *oneg* Shabbat on the chance that I'll do a different *mitzvah* later? What if I take a *neder* now to give the *tzedakah* – is that real, or will I just give less *tzedakah* outside the *neder*? What if Ditzah, the older twin, also likes Tropicana better – do I have an obligation of *kibbud* toward her, and does it extend to paying more for the food she likes? What if my father always gets that worried look when he sees Tropicana, because it makes him think that we're making poor financial decisions?

Ditzah, by contrast, believes that Halakhah covers well-defined areas of life, and anything outside those areas is termed RESHUS and permits or requires different decisionmaking tools. As she was sent shopping without any specific instructions, it never occurs to her that halakhah as such enters into the decision. She thinks: I like Tropicana, but I'd rather have the money. But my twin Gilah really likes Tropicana better, and I really like seeing Gilah smile, especially on Shabbat. Yes, Abba will worry – but Abba also likes seeing Gilah smile, and I'll find some other way to show him that I'm being fiscally responsible.

Gilah and Ditzah probably think the way they do because they were taught that way, not in a formal halakhah classroom, but rather from the way Torah teachers in all disciplines responded when students raised practical questions from their own experience (or from watching their parents' halakhic lives). Each of them found a mentor whose approach resonated with them; each of them sometimes struggle with what they learned from their sister's favorite teachers. But all of this vital spiritual development happened essentially accidentally from the point of view of their parents and their schools. I think and hope that we can do better.

Teaching Hashkofoh

February 2, 2018

What should Modern Orthodox high schools teach their students to believe, and about belief? These questions are brought into sharp relief by the data from Rabbi Dr. Zvi Grumet's recent survey of graduates. Among his key findings are large gaps between what graduates think they were taught to believe, and what they believe now; and a correlation between such gaps and declines in halakhic observance.

Rabbi Dr. Grumet deserves enormous credit for raising critical issues in a substantive and nonpolemical fashion. Now we need to have real conversations about how to teach hashkofoh.

Let us take this week's parshah as a starting point. One of my beit din colleagues often asks conversion candidates: "What happened at Sinai?" Educators should ask each other, and themselves: How would you answer this question? How would you want your children or students to answer this question? Should they all give the same answer, or even the same kind of answer? Do you want them to give the same answer at 25, or 55, as they did when they were 15 years old?

Conversion candidates who were raised Catholic often talk about being turned off by a sense that key theological questions were out of bounds (they experience Orthodoxy in all its manifestations as much more open, in ways that can astonish those of us who have always lived within Orthodoxy), and they often cite their inability to believe critical dogmas as a key impetus for leaving Catholicism. What can their experience teach us about our own pedagogy (bearing in mind that dealing with conversion in the US naturally gives one disproportionate exposure to the failure of other religious educational systems)?

One mode of theological education can be termed "catechistic". Students are taught to memorize verbal formulas, and to affirm belief in those formulas. Understanding the formulas is a secondary goal. Sometimes, especially where the formulas are consciously designed to bridge mutually exclusive positions, or to contain paradoxes, deep understanding is *davka* not a goal for many teachers and institutions.

A very different mode can be termed "inductionist". In this mode, students are not taught beliefs qua beliefs, or that belief per se is a goal. Rather, they are immersed in a way of life, and encouraged to discover what beliefs are necessary to make that way of life meaningful.

These modes can be reframed in a specifically Jewish context as "Maimonidean" or "Alboistic" approaches to the concept of *ikkarei emunah*, or root principles of faith. Maimonideans see the willingness to affirm specific propositions as a necessary (and perhaps sufficient) condition for preserving a Jew's automatic share in *Olam Haba*. Alboists think it necessary to understand which propositions must be affirmed for the structure of Torah and mitzvot to stand in this world.

Alboists can concede that some non-*ikkar* propositions are nonetheless sine qua nons for a share in *Olam Haba*, and Maimonideans can concede that some *ikkar* propositions have no reverberations whatsoever. The difference between them is not necessarily about which propositions one ought to believe. It can be about whether the purpose of education is getting students to *Olam Haba*, or rather about enabling them to live with meaning in this world. Maimonideans may also believe that the only meaning this world has is as a vestibule in which to earn *Olam Haba*, while Alboists may find it difficult to fathom how a meaningless life can deserve an infinite sequel.

While Maimonideans and Alboists can be in complete substantive agreement about what Jews should ideally believe, their differing priorities will generate substantive differences in terms of what sorts of mistakes they will tolerate educationally, and what sort of theological latitude they give students.

Let us go back to Sinai. A Maimonidean might focus on having students affirm that every letter of the Torah today is exactly the same as the text that Mosheh wrote in a scroll at G-d's dictation after descending from Sinai. Furthermore, while Mosheh was on top of the mountain, G-d taught him every

possible true interpretation of Chumash. Mosheh then taught all these interpretations to the Jewish people, creating a live and comprehensive oral tradition that continues to this day. There is nothing new in Torah, although things can be forgotten and then rediscovered.

An Alboist might focus on the goal of having students relate to the Torah as a text worth studying so intensely and rigorously that even changes in orthography deserve attention. Students should find that the study of Torah through the lens of Rabbinic literature yields interpretations that consistently resonate with their souls in ways that no other interpretations can. Students should find it necessary and rewarding to bring all aspects of their being to bear on the study of Torah, including their creativity.

I emphasize again that we are discussing strategies, not ends. It may be that only students who believe in literal Divine dictation will relate to the text with ultimate intensity and rigor; that only students who believe that all of Rabbinic tradition was included in the original Revelation will find it a uniquely meaningful mode of study; and that only students who believe that all true interpretations were already given can use their creativity to uncover G-d's intent rather than their own desires in the text.

I also need to make clear that these strategies are not opposed and incompatible. Students are unlikely to arrive at these kinds of meaningfulness purely by induction, without having their models and mentors expressly state their own beliefs. Different approaches are likely to work better with different students. It may be possible and advisable to use different modes for conveying different beliefs. Furthermore, propositions may move into and out of the Alboistic *ikkar* framework, depending on external pressures and internal plausibility structures.

And – students' plausibility structures and sensitivity to external pressures change over time, as do their intellectual and spiritual capacities – hopefully for the better, at least for a very long time. These inevitable changes have implications for both Alboistic and Maimonidean educational contexts.

In my humble opinion – a fundamental error made by many Modern Orthodox schools is that they educate their students *ba'asher hem sham* – as they are now, without sufficient thought for whether and how what they teach will age as their students grow.

For example – imagine a high school which teaches its students that the truth of Orthodox Judaism is logically demonstrable. Every teacher affirms this, and experts are brought in occasionally to demonstrate or refute specific arguments, say in the fields of geology or cosmology or cryptography. If the school is at all competent at what it does, a strong majority of its students will graduate believing what it wants them to believe, with confidence and intensity.

Some of these graduates will go on to academically strong secular colleges. In those colleges they will meet very smart people who do not find the truths of Orthodox Judaism logically demonstrable; who are unimpressed by the arguments and evidence of the high school experts; and some of whom seem to be really good people. A high percentage of these graduates will have crises of faith, and many of them will go OTD. Is that their fault for choosing secular college, or the fault of their school or developing in them only a weak and cloistered virtue?

Secular college is a bugaboo. What about high schools which teach students that the text of chumash is unquestionably and perfectly what Mosheh gave us – “kol haTorah shemetzuyah atah b'yadeinu hanetunah leMosheh Rabbeinu”, only to be devastated in yeshiva by the one-letter difference between Ashkenazic and Sefardic scrolls, or the Rav Akiva Eiger on Shabbat 5b that lists all the places where the Talmud seems to have a different text than we do? There are academic and theological explanations for each of these that are compatible with the formulation in the *ani ma'amins*, but will students be able to accept them if they feel betrayed?

Issues of historical fact are rarely the key questions. What about schools that teach their students that there is a clear answer to why bad things happen to good people, or that great Torah scholars always show

excellent character and judgment? These beliefs are likely to be falsified by experience later in life, and what will happen to their graduates then?

Most of our students will experience doubt and uncertainty at points in their lives. The *ani ma'amins* are generally aspirational rather than descriptive, or we would live in a very different world. Many or most of them will also have long or short periods in which the practice of yahadut does not consistently provide them with meaning. We need to educate in a way which will enable them to get through these periods without despair. They need beliefs that can sustain their commitment when experience doesn't, and experiences that can motivate them when belief wavers.

Bottom line: We do not necessarily want Orthodox adults to believe religiously exactly what they believed when they graduated high school. (We should not want this in any other field either.) Recognizing this should have a significant impact on the way we teach hashkofoh.

Introduction to Rabbi Klapper's Translation of the Book of Rut

May 28, 2009

Kiddushin 49a

ר' יהודה אומר:

המתרגם פסוק כצורתו - הרי זה בדאי,

והמוסיף עליו - הרי זה מחרף ומגדף

Rabbi Yehudah said:

*One who translates a verse in its form – he is a fabulator;
but the one who adds to it – he is a denier and blasphemer.*

Translating the above statement is inherently ironic, and the irony is increased when, as here, it is cited to introduce a new translation. Nonetheless, I find translating a highly useful way into texts, and try to translate in advance every text that I teach.

Rashi reads Rabbi Yehudah in a way that removes the irony – he reads him as opposing translations that deviate from the official translation of Onkelos. Thus “in its form” means “in its form when Onkelos adds to it”. Onkelos’ own additions are based on a Tradition from Sinai, and thus not seen as deforming the text.

Rashi’s comments are also reflexive, in that he is clearly “adding to” Rabbi Yehudah, and his interpretation is compelling only if we assume that he had a tradition as to its meaning.

Apparently lacking such a tradition, Rabbeinu Chananel reads this statement “in its form”, without specific reference to Onkelos. An example of a fabulator is one who translates Exodus 24:10 as “they saw the Divinity of Israel”; this is literal but false, as it contradicts Exodus 33:20, “For no man can see me and live”. Contrarily, translating it as “they saw the angel of the Divinity of Israel” is blasphemy, as it conflates Him with His angels. Rabbeinu Chananel nonetheless holds that translation is possible, and he endorses Onkelos’ “they saw the Honor (*yikara*) of the G-d of Israel” rather than condemning it as an unjustified addition.

Both Rashi and Rabbeinu Chananel, *laaniyut daati*, miss the humor in Rabbi Yehudah’s statement. They read him as opposing two extremes, and advocating a middle path; I would rather read him as saying that translations inevitably fail because there is no middle ground. To develop this reading, I am pleased to make use of a metaphor drawn from my father’s work in communications engineering.

When we seek to communicate, or to transmit information from one place to another, the medium of transmission always distorts; the signal is corrupted by static, or “noise”. The engineer’s task is to design a receiver that can distinguish the signal from the noise, so that the volume of the static can be lowered without affecting the song.

Language is a medium of transmission, and language too generates “noise”. Each phoneme we speak, each syllable we write, raises resonances in our auditor’s and reader’s minds. Most of these are noise – for example, in the previous sentence the word “minds” does not in any way refer to whether someone is bothered. Syntax is the tool our minds use to filter the noise and decipher meaning correctly.

But some of the resonances are deliberate and enhance meaning. Thus puns, for example, require us to think of homonyms. In Megillat Rut, we must recognize that Naomi is both a proper name and a description (pleasant), so that when Naomi says “rather call me Marah (bitterness)”, we can understand that she is being darkly humorous rather than whiney. It is the impossibility of replicating these resonances that makes all translations lies.

But translations can nonetheless be useful if they make us aware of resonances we would otherwise have missed. So there is value, at least for audiences who don't think in Hebrew, in translating Naomi as "Pleasant" rather than transliterating it

Now midrash on the whole assumes that the Divine author produced a text in which all resonances are signal rather than noise, and the reader's task is to find out how everything suggested to our minds by the text is truly meaningful. I'm not sure how strongly this assumption applies to Nakh. But certainly once we know that one name in the book is a pun, we should ask whether others, perhaps all others, are puns as well.

Some clearly are – Orpah as "Back of the Neck", for instance. But perhaps the most interesting example, for which I credit Deborah Klapper, is when Naomi says "rather call me Bitterness". Naomi apparently adds "For Sha-dai has caused me much bitterness", but perhaps we should also read "for my breasts have caused me much bitterness", which may mean that the immediately following statement: "I went full, but Hashem returned me empty" should be understood literally as well as metaphorically. This in turn raises the possibility that Machlon and Kilyon were still nursing when Naomi left Israel, which would mean that their betrothal to Rut and Orpah must have occurred while they were children. This in turn suggests that Rut was a child as well, which would enable us to solve the conversion problem (she must have converted before her first marriage, else Boaz would not be related to her and the issue of geulah should not arise, but if she had converted earlier, how can Naomi try to send her away?) by suggesting that she was converted and married at age 2, and then given the halakhically mandated option of refusal ten years later at the age of bat mitzvah. (This also explains why Boaz is grateful to her for not marrying the young men; if she were older and not a virgin, why would they have been particularly interested in her?). And this in turn affects our translation of "naarah" in the text.

One general issue in translating Hebrew is how to render the connective "vav". Here Deborah and I argued about the end of Chapter 2 – where does Rut live during the gleaning season, in the fields or with Naomi? It depends on whether we translate the verse "She stuck to the lasses of ArrivingStrength, gleaning until the end of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest, **but** she lived with her mother-in-law", or rather, as Deborah preferred "**and then** she lived with her mother in law". I leave it to you to decide whether and how these options affect the relational dynamics of the narrative generally.

I hope the following translation stimulates many such conversations, and welcome your reports and comments.

The Book of Rut, a Translation

2007

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<p>It was in the days when the Judges {were} judged, and there was famine in the land, so a man went from BreadHouse in AcknowledgementofHashem, to sojourn in the fields of ChildofIncest, he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man – MyGodisKing; and the name of his wife – Pleasance; and the name of his two sons - Disease and Devastation, of the clan Fruitful from BreadHouse in AcknowledgementofHashem They came to the fields of ChildofIncest and they were there. MyGodisKing, husband of Pleasance, died, but she remained, and her two sons. They married ChildofIncest women – the name of the first was BackoftheNeck, and the name of the second was Companionship - and they stayed there for nearly ten years. The two of them also died – Disease and Devastation – but the woman remained from her two sons and from her husband. She arose, she and her daughters in-law - she returned from the fields of ChildofIncest, for she had heard in the field of ChildofIncest that Hashem had recalled His nation to give them bread. She went out of the place where she had been there, and her two daughters in-law with her, and they went on the way to return to the land of AcknowledgementofHashem. Pleasance said to her two daughters in-law: “Go, return, each wife to her mother’s house! May Hashem do kindness with you as you have done with the dead and with me! May Hashem grant you, that you find rest, each wife in the home of her man!” She kissed them; They raised their voices and cried saying to her:</p>	<p>וְיְהִי בַיָּמֵי שְׁפֹט הַשְּׁפֹטִים וְיְהִי רָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לָחֶם וְהוֹדָה לְגֹר בְּשָׂדֵי מוֹאָב הוּא וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּשְׁנֵי בָנָיו: וְשֵׁם הָאִישׁ אֱלִימֶלֶךְ וְשֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ נְעֹמִי וְשֵׁם שְׁנֵי בָנָיו מַחֲלוֹן וְכַלְיוֹן אֶפְרַתִּים מִבֵּית לָחֶם וְהוֹדָה וַיָּבֹאוּ שָׂדֵי-מוֹאָב וְיְהִי-וַשָּׁם: וַיָּמָת אֱלִימֶלֶךְ אִישׁ נְעֹמִי וַתִּשָּׂאֵר הִיא וּשְׁנֵי בָנֶיהָ: וַיִּשְׂאוּ לָהֶם נָשִׁים מֵאֲבֹת שֵׁם הָאֶחָת עֶרְפָּה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית רוּת וַיָּשְׁבוּ שָׁם כְּעֶשֶׂר שָׁנִים: וַיָּמָתוּ גַם-שְׁנֵיהֶם מַחֲלוֹן וְכַלְיוֹן וַתִּשָּׂאֵר הָאִשָּׁה מִשְׁנֵי יְלָדֶיהָ וּמֵאִישָׁהּ: וַתִּקַּם הִיא וְכַלְתֶּיהָ וַתָּשָׁב מִשְׂדֵי מוֹאָב כִּי שָׁמְעָה בְּשָׂדֵה מוֹאָב כִּי-פָקַד יְקוֹק אֶת-עַמּוֹ לְתַת לָהֶם לָחֶם: וַתֵּצֵא מִן-הַמְּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר הָיְתָה-שָׁמָּה וַיִּשְׁתִּי כַלְוֹתֶיהָ עִמָּה וַתִּלְכְּנָה בְּדֶרֶךְ לְשׁוֹב אֶל-אֶרֶץ יְהוּדָה: וַתֹּאמֶר נְעֹמִי לְשֵׁתִי כַלְתֶּיהָ לְכֹנֵה שְׁבֹנָה אֲשֶׁה לְבֵית אִמָּה יַעֲשֵׂה יְעֵשׂ יְקוֹק עִמָּכֶם חֶסֶד כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתֶם עִם-הַמֵּתִים וְעִמָּדִי: יִתֵּן יְקוֹק לָכֶם וּמְצֹאן מִנוּחָה אֲשֶׁה בֵּית אִישָׁה וַתִּשָּׂק לָהֶן וַתִּשָּׂאנָה קוֹלָן וַתִּבְכְּנָה: וַתֹּאמְרָנָה-לָּהּ</p>
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“But we will return with you to your people!”
Pleasance said:
“Return, my daughters!
Why would you go with me?
Do I yet have sons in my entrails,
who will become husbands to you?
Return, my daughters! Go!
For I have aged past becoming wife to a man.
If I were to say:
‘I have something to look forward to!’ -
even if I became wife to a man tonight,
and even if I bore sons,
would you wait expectantly for them,
until they grew up?
Would you chain yourselves up for them,
not becoming wife to a man?
Don’t, my daughters!
For I have been very bitter for your sakes,
since the hand of Hashem went out against me.”
They raised their voices and cried more.
BackoftheNeck kissed her mother in law,
but Companionship stuck to her.
She said:
“Here, your sister in-law has returned
to her people and to her gods;
return, following your sister in-law!”
Companionship said:
“Don’t press me to abandon you,
to return from following you,
for wheresoever you go, I will go,
and howsoever you lodge, I will lodge.
Your people is my people,
and your God is my God.
Howsoever you die, I will die,
and there I will be buried.
May Hashem do thus to me, and yet more!
if death could separate between me and you.”
She saw that she was resolved to go with her,
so she ceased to speak to her.
The two of them went
until they came to BreadHouse.
It was when they came to BreadHouse -
the whole city went into uproar around them,
saying:
“Is this Pleasance?”
She said to them:
“Don’t call me ‘Pleasance’!
Call me ‘Bitterness’,
for My Provider caused much bitterness for me.
I went full,
but G-d has returned me empty;
why would you call me Pleasance,
when Hashem has afflicted me,

כי-אתך נשוב לעמך:
ותאמר נעמי
שבנה בנותי
למה תלכנה עמי
העוד-לי בנים במעי
והיו לכם לאנשים:
שבנה בנותי לכן
כי זקנתי מהיות לאיש
כי אמרתי
יש-לי תקוה
גם הייתי הלילה לאיש
וגם ילדתי בנים:
הלהן תשבנה
עד אשר יגדלו
הלהן תעגנה
לבלתי היות לאיש
אל בנותי
כי-מר-לי מאד מכם
כי-יצאה בי יד-יקוק:
ותשבנה קולן ותבכינה עוד
ותשק ערפה לחמותה
ורות דבקה בה:
ותאמר
הנה שבה ובמתך
אל-עמה ואל-אלהיה
שובי אחרי ובמתך:
ותאמר רות
אל-תפגעני-בי לעזבך
לשוב מאחריך
כי אל-אשר תלכי אלך
ובאשר תליני אלין
עמך עמי
ואלקיך אלקי:
באשר תמותי אמות
ושם אקבר
כה יעשה יקוק לי וכה יוסיף
כי המות יפריד ביני ובינך:
ותרא כי-מתאמצת היא ללכת אתה
ותחדל לדבר אליה:
ותלכנה שתיהם
עד-בואנה בית להם
ויהי כבואנה בית להם
ותהם כל-העיר עליהן
ותאמרנה
הזאת נעמי:
ותאמר אליהן
אל-תקראנה לי נעמי
קראן לי מרא
כי-המר שדי לי מאד:
אני מלאה הלכתי
וריקם השיבני יקוק
למה תקראנה לי נעמי
ויהוה ענה בי

and My Provider has caused me evil?”
 So Pleasance returned,
 and Companionship the ChildofIncest woman
 her daughter in-law
 with her,
 the one who returned
 from the fields of ChildofIncest,
 and they came to BreadHouse
 at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Now Pleasance had a familiar of her husband,
 a man of mastery and valor,
 from the family of MyGodisKing,
 whose name was ArrivingStrength.
 Companionship the ChildofIncest woman said
 to Pleasance:
 “I will go, please, to the field,
 and I will glean among the stalks
 following he {He} in whose eyes I will find favor.”
 She said to her:
 “Go, my daughter”.
 She went; she came; she gleaned in the field
 following the harvesters,
 and it just so happened to her
 that the portion of the field
 belonged to ArrivingStrength
 who was from the family of MyGodisKing.
 Here ArrivingStrength came from BreadHouse -
 He said to the harvesters:
 “Hashem be with you!”
 They said to him:
 “May Hashem bless you!”
 ArrivingStrength said to his lad
 who was overseeing the harvesters:
 “To whom does this lass belong?”
 The lad who was overseeing the harvesters replied,
 saying:
 “She is a ChildofIncest lass
 who returned with Pleasance
 from the field of ChildofIncest.
 She said:
 ‘I will glean, please,
 and collect among the sheaves
 following the harvesters.’
 She came and stood from the dawn of morning
 until now
 that she has been sitting in the house
 for a little while.”
 ArrivingStrength said to Companionship:
 “Are you listening, my daughter?
 Don’t go to glean in another field;
 don’t even pass from here,
 and stick so,

ושדי הרע לי:
 ותשב נעמי
 ורות המואביה
 כלתה
 עמה
 השבה
 משדי מואב
 והמה באו בית לחם
 בתחלת קציר שערים:

ולנעמי מידע מודע לאישה
 איש גבור חיל
 ממשפחת אלימלך
 ושמו בעז:
 ותאמר רות המואביה
 אל-נעמי
 אלכה-נא השדה
 ואלקטה בשבלים
 אחר אשר אמצא-חן בעיניו
 ותאמר לה
 לכי בתי:
 ותלך ותבוא ותלקט בשדה
 אחרי הקצרים
 ויקר מקרה
 חלקת השדה
 לבעז
 אשר ממשפחת אלימלך:
 והנה-בעז בא מבית לחם
 ויאמר לקוצרים
 יקוק עמכם
 ויאמרו לו
 יברכך יקוק:
 ויאמר בעז לנערו
 הנצב על-הקוצרים
 למי הנערה הזאת:
 ויען הנער הנצב על-הקוצרים
 ויאמר
 נערה מואביה היא
 השבה עם-נעמי
 משדי מואב:
 ותאמר
 אלקטה-נא
 ואספתי בעמרים
 אחרי הקוצרים
 ותבוא ותעמוד מאז הבקר
 ועד-עתה
 זה שבתה הבית
 מעט:
 ויאמר בעז אל-רות
 הלוא שמעת בתי
 אל-תלכי ללקט בשדה אחר
 וגם לא תעבורי מזה
 וכה תדבקין

with my lasses.
 Your eyes should be
 on the field they are harvesting
 and you should follow them.
 Have I not commanded the lads
 not to touch you?
 When you become thirsty,
 go to the containers
 and drink from what the lads will draw.”
 She fell on her face and bowed to the ground,
 saying to him:
 “Why have I found favor in your eyes
 that you give me this recognition
 when I am a foreigner?”
 ArrivingStrength replied, saying to her:
 “There has certainly been told to me
 everything that you did for your mother in-law
 after the death of your husband;
 that you left your father and your mother
 and your birthland;
 that you went to a people
 which you had not known
 yesterday or the day before.
 May G-d repay you in full for all your works
 and may your reward be complete
 from Hashem the God of Israel
 under Whose wings you have come to shelter.”
 She said:
 “May I find favor in your eyes,
 my lord {Lord},
 because you have comforted me,
 and because you have spoken
 to your maidservant’s heart
 when I could not be
 as one of your maidservants.”
 ArrivingStrength said to her
 when it came time to eat:
 “Approach, come up here;
 you’ll eat from the bread
 and dip your slice in the vinegar”.
 She sat beside the harvesters;
 he held roast grains out to her;
 she ate and was sated and left over.
 She got up to glean.
 ArrivingStrength ordered his lads, saying:
 “Even if she gleanes among the sheaves
 you must not cause her shame,
 Indeed, you must even spill for her
 out of the bundles.
 You must leave them, and she will glean,
 and you must not express anger at her.”
 She gleaned in the field until evening;
 she beat out the grain that she had gleaned

עם-נְעֹרֹתַי:
 עֵינַיִךְ
 בַּשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר-יִקְצְרוּן
 וְהִלַּכְתָּ אַחֲרֵיהֶן
 הֲלוֹא צִוִּיתִי אֶת-הַנְּעָרִים
 לְבִלְתִּי נִגְעֶךָ
 וְצִמְתָּ
 וְהִלַּכְתָּ אֶל-הַפְּלִיִּם
 וְשָׁתִית מֵאֲשֶׁר יִשְׁאֲבוּן הַנְּעָרִים:
 וְתִפֹּל עַל-פְּנֵיהֶ וְתִשְׁתַּחוּ אֶרְצָהּ
 וְתֹאמַר אֵלָיו
 מִדּוּעַ מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ
 לְהַפְרִינִי
 וְאֲנֹכִי נֹכְרִיָּה:
 וַיַּעַן בְּעֵז וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ
 הֲגַד הַגִּד לִי
 כָּל אֲשֶׁר-עָשִׂית אֶת-חֲמוּתְךָ
 אַחֲרַי מוֹת אִישׁךָ
 וְתַעֲזְבִי אֲבִיךָ וְאִמְךָ
 וְאֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתְּךָ
 וְתֵלְכִי אֶל-עַם
 אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַעְתָּ
 תָּמוּל שְׁלוֹמוֹ:
 יִשְׁלַם יְקוּק פְּעֶלְךָ
 וְתִהְיֶה מִשְׁכֻּרְתְּךָ שְׁלֵמָה
 מֵעַם יְקוּק אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
 אֲשֶׁר-בָּאת לְחֹסוֹת תַּחַת-כְּנָפָיו:
 וְתֹאמַר
 אֲמַצָּא-חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ
 אֲדֹנָי
 כִּי נִחַמְתָּנִי
 וְכִי דִבַּרְתָּ
 עַל-לֵב שִׁפְחָתְךָ
 וְאֲנֹכִי לֹא אֶהְיֶה
 כְּאַחַת שִׁפְחֹתֶיךָ:
 וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ בְּעֵז
 לָעֵת הָאֵלֶּל
 גֹּשִׁי הֵלֶם
 וְאֲכַלְתָּ מִן-הַלֶּחֶם
 וְטִבַּלְתָּ פִתְךָ בַּחֲמֶץ
 וְתִשָּׁב מִצַּד הַקְּצָרִים
 וַיַּצְבֹּט-לָהּ קָלִי
 וְתֹאכַל וְתִשָּׁבַע וְתִתֵּר:
 וְתִקְּמוּ לְלֶקֶט
 וַיֵּצֵאוּ בְּעֵז אֶת-נְעָרָיו לֵאמֹר
 גַּם בֵּין הָעֹמְרִים תִּלְקַטְוּ
 וְלֹא תִכְלִימוּהָ:
 וְגַם שֵׁל-תִשְׁלוּ לָהּ
 מִן-הַצְּבֹתִים
 וְעִזַּבְתֶּם וְלֶקְטָהּ
 וְלֹא תִגְעְרוּ-בָהּ:
 וְתִלְקַט בַּשָּׂדֶה עַד-הָעֶרֶב
 וְתִחַבֵּט אֶת אֲשֶׁר-לֶקְטָהּ

and it was nearly an eiphah of barley.
 She picked them up and came to the city.
 Her mother in-law saw what she had gleaned;
 She took out and gave to her
 what she had left over from her satiety.
 Her mother in-law said to her:
 “Where {eiphoh} have you gleaned today,
 and where have you done this?
 May he (He) who recognized you be blessed!”
 She told her mother in-law
 what she had done with him,
 saying:
 “The name of the man
 whom I did this with today
 is ArrivingStrength.”
 Pleasance said to her daughter in-law:
 “Blessed is he to Hashem
 who has not left off his (His) kindness
 with the living and with the dead!”
 Pleasance said to her:
 “The man is a relative of ours;
 he is among our redeemers {from our Redeemer}”
 Companionship the ChildofIncest woman said:
 “He even said to me:
 ‘You must stick with my lads
 until they have finished
 all of my harvest.’”
 Pleasance said
 to her daughter in-law Companionship:
 “It is well, my daughter,
 if you go out with his lasses,
 so that they will not harass you in another field.”
 She stuck to the lasses of ArrivingStrength,
 gleaned until the end of the barley harvest
 and the wheat harvest,
 but she stayed with her mother in-law.

Pleasance her mother in-law said to her:
 “My daughter!
 Shall I not seek for you a resting place
 where it will go well with you?
 Now – is it not ArrivingStrength our familiar
 whose lasses you were with?
 Here – he is winnowing
 the barley granary tonight.
 You must wash and anoint
 and place your gown on you
 and go down to the granary.
 Don’t make yourself known to the man
 until he has finished
 eating and drinking!
 But when he lies down
 then you will know the place

וְיְהִי כְּאִיפָה שְׁעָרִים:
 וַתִּשָּׂא וַתָּבֹא הָעִיר
 וַתִּרְא חֲמוּתָהּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר-לָקְטָה
 וַתּוֹצֵא וַתִּתֶּן-לָהּ
 אֶת אֲשֶׁר-הוּתַרָה מִשְׂבְּעָהּ:
 וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ חֲמוּתָהּ
 אֵיפָה לָקְטִית הַיּוֹם
 וְאַנְה עֲשִׂית
 יְהִי מִכִּירְךָ בְרוּךְ
 וַתַּגֵּד לְחֲמוּתָהּ
 אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשְׂתָה עִמּוֹ
 וַתֹּאמֶר
 שֵׁם הָאִישׁ
 אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי עִמּוֹ הַיּוֹם
 בְּעַז:
 וַתֹּאמֶר נְעָמִי לְכַלְתָּהּ
 בְּרוּךְ הוּא לַיהוָה
 אֲשֶׁר לֹא-עָזַב חֶסְדּוֹ
 אֶת-הַחַיִּים וְאֶת-הַמֵּתִים
 וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ נְעָמִי
 קָרוֹב לָנוּ הָאִישׁ
 מִגְּאֻלָּנוּ הוּא:
 וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת הַמּוֹאָבִיָּה
 גַּם כִּי-אָמַר אֵלַי
 עִם-הַנְּעָרִים אֲשֶׁר-לִי תִדְבְּקִין
 עַד אִם-כֻּלּוּ
 אֶת כָּל-הַקִּצִּיר אֲשֶׁר-לִי:
 וַתֹּאמֶר נְעָמִי
 אֵל-רוּת כְּלַתָּהּ
 טוֹב בְּתִי
 כִּי תֵצְאִי עִם-נְעוּרוֹתַי
 וְלֹא יִפְגְּעוּ-בְךָ, בְּשֹׁדֵה אַחֵר:
 וַתִּדְבֹק בְּנְעוּרוֹת בְּעַז
 לְלֶקֶט עַד-כְּלוֹת קִצִּיר-הַשְּׁעָרִים
 וְקִצִּיר הַחֲטִיִּם
 וַתֵּשֶׁב אֶת-חֲמוּתָהּ.

וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ נְעָמִי חֲמוּתָהּ
 בְּתִי
 הֲלֹא אֲבִקֶשׁ-לְךָ מְנוּחַ
 אֲשֶׁר יֵיטֵב-לְךָ:
 וְעַתָּה הֲלֹא בְעַז מִדְּעַתְנוּ
 אֲשֶׁר הֵיית אֶת-נְעוּרוֹתַי
 הִנֵּה-הוּא זָרְחָה
 אֶת-גֶּרְן הַשְּׁעָרִים הַלְיָלָה:
 וְנִחְצֵת וְסָכַת
 וְשַׁמְת שְׁמַלְתְּךָ שְׁמַלְתֶּיךָ עָלֶיךָ
 וַיֵּרֶדְתִּי וַיִּרְדֶּת הַגֶּרְן
 אֶל-תְּדוּעֵי לְאִישׁ
 עַד כְּלַתּוֹ
 לֹאכַל וְלִשְׁתּוֹת:
 וַיְהִי בְשֹׁכְבוֹ
 וַיֵּדַעַת אֶת-הַמָּקוֹם

where he lies down
and you will come
and uncover his legs,
and lie down,
and he will tell you what you must do.”
She said to her:
“Everything which you will say to me
I will do.”
She went down to the granary
and she did in accordance with everything
that her mother-in-law had commanded her.
Arriving Strength ate and drank,
and his heart was cheered.
He came to sleep
at the edge of the grainheap
She came stealthily
uncovered his legs
and lay down.
It was in the middle of the night
and the man became terrified and shocked -
Here was a woman, lying at his feet!
He said:
“Who are you?”
She replied:
“I am Companionship your handmaiden
and you must spread your wing
over your handmaiden
for you are a redeemer.”
He said:
“Blessed are you to Hashem, my daughter!
Your last kindness has exceeded your first,
to not go follow the young men
whether rich or poor.
Now my daughter,
don't be afraid -
Everything which you say, I will do for you
as all those at the gate of my people know
that you are a woman of valor.
But know - while it is true,
while I am yet a redeemer,
but there is also a redeemer
more closely related than I.
Lodge for the night
and when it is morning
if he will redeem you, well,
he will redeem you,
but if he does not desire to redeem you
then I will redeem you, by Hashem the Living!
Lie down until morning.”
She lay down at his feet
until morning,
when she arose before
a man could recognize his companion.

אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכַּב-שָׁמַיְם
וּבָאת
וְגַלִּית מַרְגְּלֹתַי
וּשְׁכַבְתִּי וְשָׁכַבְתָּ
וְהוּא יַגִּיד לְךָ אֶת אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשִׂין:
וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ
כֹּל אֲשֶׁר-תֹּאמְרֵי אֵלַי
אֶעֱשֶׂה:
וַתֵּרֶד הַגֶּרֶן
וַתַּעַשׂ כְּכֹל
אֲשֶׁר-צִוְתָהּ הַמֹּזְתֵה:
וַיֹּאכַל בָּעֵז וַיִּשְׂתֶּה
וַיִּיטֵב לִבּוֹ
וַיָּבֵא לִישְׁכָּב
בְּקֶצֶה הָעֵרְמָה
וַתֵּבֵא בַלֵּט
וַתְּגַל מַרְגְּלֹתָיו
וַתִּשְׁכַּב:
וַיְהִי בַחֲצֵי הַלַּיְלָה
וַיַּחְרַד הָאִישׁ וַיִּלְפַּת
וְהִנֵּה אִשָּׁה שֹׁכֶבֶת מַרְגְּלֹתָיו:
וַיֹּאמֶר
מִי-אַתְּ
וַתֹּאמֶר
אֲנִי רוּת אִמְתְּךָ
וּפְרִשְׁתְּ כַנֶּפֶךְ
עַל-אִמְתְּךָ
כִּי גֹאֵל אֶתְּהָ:
וַיֹּאמֶר
בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ לַיהוָה בְּתִי
הִיטִבְתְּ חֶסֶדְךָ הָאֲחֵרוֹן מִן-הָרִאשׁוֹן
לְבַלְתִּי-לָקֵחַ אַחֲרַי הַבְּחוּרִים
אִם-דָּל וְאִם-עָשִׁיר:
וַעֲתָה בְּתִי
אֶל-תִּירָאִי
כֹּל אֲשֶׁר-תֹּאמְרֵי אֶעֱשֶׂה-לְךָ
כִּי יוֹדַע כָּל-שֹׁעֵר עַמִּי
כִּי אִשְׁתְּ חַיִּל אַתְּ:
וַעֲתָה כִּי אֲמַנָּם
כִּי אִם גֹּאֵל אֲנִי
וְגַם יֵשׁ גֹּאֵל
קָרוֹב מִמֶּנִּי:
לַיְלִי הַלַּיְלָה
וְהָיָה בַבֶּקֶר
אִם-יִגְאָלְךָ טוֹב
יִגְאָל
וְאִם-לֹא יִחַפֵּץ לִגְאָלְךָ
וַיִּגְאֹלְתִיךָ אֲנִי חַי-יְיָ
שָׁכְבִי, עַד-הַבֶּקֶר:
וַתִּשְׁכַּב מַרְגְּלוֹתָיו
עַד-הַבֶּקֶר
וַתִּקָּם בַּטְרוֹם בְּטָרֹם
יְכִיר אִישׁ אֶת-רַעְיוֹ

He said: Let it not be known
that the woman came to the granary.
He said:
"Bring the shawl which is on you,
and grasp it!"
She grasped it.
He measured out six of barley and placed it on her
and he came to the city.
She came to her mother in-law,
who said:
"Who are you,
my daughter?"
She told her
everything the man had done for her.
She said;
"These six of barley
he gave to me,
because he said to me:
'You must not come emptyhanded
to your mother in-law'"
She said:
"Sit, my daughter,
until you know
how the matter will fall out
for the man will not quiet
unless he finishes the matter today.

ArrivingStrength went up to the gate
and sat there.
Here the redeemer is passing,
of whom ArrivingStrength had spoken -
He said:
"Turn aside, sit here, Mr. Nameless!"
He turned aside and sat.
He took ten men from among the elders of the city
and said:
"Sit here!"
They sat.
He said to the redeemer:
"The portion of field
belonging to our brother,
to MyGodisKing,
was sold by Pleasance,
who has returned
from the field of ChildofIncest.
So I said:
"I will uncover your ear,
saying: 'Acquire',
opposite those seated,
and opposite the elders of my people.
If you will redeem, then redeem!
But if he will not redeem,
tell me, so that I will know this,

וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-יִדְע
כִּי-בָאָה הָאִשָּׁה הַגֵּרָן:
וַיֹּאמֶר
הֲבִי הַמִּטְפַּחַת אֲשֶׁר-עָלֶיךָ
וְאַחֲזִי-בָהּ
וַתֹּאחֲזֵהָ
וַיִּמַּד שֵׁשׁ-שְׁעָרִים וַיִּשֶׁת עָלֶיהָ
וַיָּבֹא הָעִיר:
וַתְּבֹא אֶל-חַמוּתָהּ
וַתֹּאמֶר
מִי-אַתְּ
בַּתִּי
וַתִּגְדֹּל-לָהּ
אֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה-לָּהּ הָאִישׁ:
וַתֹּאמֶר
שֵׁשׁ-הַשְּׁעָרִים הָאֵלֶּה
נָתַן לִי
כִּי אָמַר אֵלַי
אֶל-תְּבֹאִי רִיקָם
אֶל-חַמוּתְךָ:
וַתֹּאמֶר
שִׁבִי בַּתִּי
עַד אֲשֶׁר תִּדְעִין
אֵיךְ יִפֹּל דְבָר
כִּי לֹא יִשְׁקֹט הָאִישׁ
כִּי-אִם-כֹּלֶה הַדְּבָר הַיּוֹם:

וַבֵּעַז עָלָה הַשַּׁעַר
וַיֵּשֶׁב שָׁם
וְהִנֵּה הַגָּאֵל עֹבֵר
אֲשֶׁר דָּבַר-בְּעַז
וַיֹּאמֶר
סוּרָה שְׁבָה-פֹה פְּלִנִי אֶלְמִנִי
וַיִּסַּר וַיֵּשֶׁב:
וַיִּקַּח עֶשְׂרֵה אַנְשִׁים מִזְקְנֵי הָעִיר
וַיֹּאמֶר
שְׁבוּ-פֹה
וַיֵּשְׁבוּ:
וַיֹּאמֶר לְגָאֵל
חֲלֻקַּת הַשָּׂדֶה
אֲשֶׁר לְאַחֵינוּ
לְאֵלֵימֶלֶךְ
מִכְרָה נַעֲמִי
הַשְּׂבָה
מִשְׁדֵּה מוֹאֵב:
וְאַנִּי אֲמַרְתִּי
אֲגַלְהָ אֶזְנֶךָ
לְאִמֵּר קִנְיָה
בְּגַד הַיֹּשְׁבִים
וְנִגְדִי זַקְנֵי עַמִּי
אִם-תִּגְאָל גָּאֵל
וְאִם-לֹא יִגְאָל
הַגִּידָה לִי וַאֲדַע וְאֲדַעָה

as there is no one but you to redeem
and I follow you.”
He said:
“I will redeem.”
ArrivingStrength said:
“On the day that you acquire the field
from the hand of Pleasance,
And from Companionship of ChildofIncest
wife of the dead
you have acquired the obligation
to reestablish the name of the deceased
over his legacy.”
The redeemer said:
“I cannot redeem this for myself
lest I destroy my legacy.
You, redeem for yourself my redemption,
for I cannot redeem.”
This was the previous custom in Israel
in redemptions and exchanges
to establish any matter:
A man would remove his shoe
and give it to his companion –
This was the form of certification in Israel.
The redeemer said to ArrivingStrength:
“Acquire it for yourself!”
And he removed his shoe.
ArrivingStrength said
to the elders and all the people
“You are witnesses today!
That I have acquired
all that belonged to MyGodisKing
and all that belonged to Completion and Hope
from the hand of Pleasance.
Also – Companionship of ChildofIncest
Wife of Hope
I have acquired for myself as wife
to reestablish the name of the dead
over his legacy.
so that the name of the deceased will not be cut off
from among his brothers
and from the gate of his place
You are witnesses today!”
All the people at the gate, and the elders, said:
“We are witnesses!
May Hashem grant that the wife
who is coming to your house
be like Rachel and Leah
the two of whom built the House of Israel!
Do valor in Fruitful
and proclaim your name in BreadHouse.
May your house be like that of Overflow
whom Datepalm bore
for AcknowledgementofHashem

כי אין זולתך לגאול
ואנכי אחריך
ויאמר
אנכי אגאל:
ויאמר בעז
ביום-קנותך השדה
מיד נעמי
וימאת רות המואביה
אשת-המת
קניתי קניית
להקים שם-המת
על-נחלתו:
ויאמר הגאל
לא אוכל לגאול- (לגאל-) לי
פן-אשחית את-נחלתי
גאל-לך אתה את-גאלי
כי לא-אוכל לגאל:
וזאת לפני בישראל
על-הגאלה ועל-התמורה
לקים כל-דבר
שסף איש נעלו
ונתן לרעהו
וזאת התעודה בישראל:
ויאמר הגאל לבעז
קנה-לך
וישסף נעלו:
ויאמר בעז
לדקנים וכל-העם
עדים אתם היום
כי קניתי
את-כל-אשר לאלימלך
ואת כל-אשר לכליון ומחלון
מיד, נעמי:
וגם את-רות המואביה
אשת מחלון
קניתי לי לאשה
להקים שם-המת
על-נחלתו
ולא-יכרת שם-המת
מעם אחיו
ומשער מקומו
עדים אתם היום
ויאמרו כל-העם אשר-בשער והדקנים
עדים
יתן יקוק את-האשה
הבאה אל-ביתך
כרחל וכלאה
אשר בנו שתיהם את-בית ישראל
ועשה-חיל באפרכה
וקרא-שם בבית לחם:
ויהי ביתך כבית פרוץ
אשר-ילדה תמר
ליהודה

via the seed that Hashem will grant you from this lass”.

ArrivingStrength took Companionship and she became his wife.

He came in to her and Hashem granted her pregnancy and she bore a son.

The women said to Pleasance: “Blessed be Hashem Who today ensured your line of redeemers will not end and may his name be proclaimed in Israel. May he be for you a restorer of spirit and sustenance for your hoary old age Since your daughter in-law who has loved you bore him and she is better for you than seven sons.”

Pleasance took the child and placed him in her bosom and was a foster-nurse for him.

The neighboring women proclaimed his name, saying “A son has been born to Pleasance”, and they called his name “Service” – He was the father of Yishai, the father of David.

These are the generations of Peretz:
 Peretz sired Chetzron
 and Chetzron sired Rom
 and Rom sired Aminadav
 and Aminadav sired Nachshon
 and Nachshon sired Salmah
 and Salmon sired ArrivingStrength,
 and ArrivingStrength sired Service
 and Service sired Yishai
 and Yishai sired David.

מִן־הַזָּרַע אֲשֶׁר יִתֵּן יְקֹוֹק לְךָ
 מִן־הַנְּעֵרָה הַזֹּאת:
 וַיִּקַּח בְּעֵז אֶת־רוּת
 וַתְּהִי־לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה
 וַיָּבֵא אֵלֶיהָ
 וַיִּתֵּן יְקֹוֹק לָהּ הַרְיוֹן
 וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן:
 וַתֹּאמְרֶנָּה הַנְּשִׁים אֶל־נְעָמִי
 בְּרוּךְ יְקֹוֹק אֲשֶׁר
 לֹא הִשְׁבִּית לְךָ גְּאֹל הַיּוֹם
 וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:
 וְהָיָה לְךָ לְמֹשִׁיב נְפֹשׁ
 וּלְכֹלֵל אֶת־שִׁיבְתְּךָ
 כִּי כָלִתְךָ אֲשֶׁר־אָהַבְתְּךָ
 יִלְדֶתוּ:
 אֲשֶׁר־הִיא טוֹבָה לְךָ מִשִּׁבְעָה בָּנִים:
 וַתִּקַּח נְעָמִי אֶת־הַיֶּלֶד
 וַתִּשְׁתְּהוּ בְּחִיקָהּ
 וַתְּהִי־לוֹ לְאִמָּנָת:
 וַתִּקְרָאנָה לוֹ הַשְּׂכָנוֹת שֵׁם
 לְאִמֹר יֶלֶד־בֶּן לְנְעָמִי
 וַתִּקְרָאנָה שְׁמוֹ עוֹבֵד
 הוּא אָבִי־יִשִׁי אָבִי דָּוִד: פ

וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת פְּרָצִי
 פְּרָצִי הוֹלִיד אֶת־חֶצְרוֹן:
 וְחֶצְרוֹן הוֹלִיד אֶת־רֹם
 וְרֹם הוֹלִיד אֶת־עֲמִינָדָב:
 וְעֲמִינָדָב הוֹלִיד אֶת־נַחֲשׁוֹן
 וְנַחֲשׁוֹן הוֹלִיד אֶת־שַׁלְמָה:
 וְשַׁלְמוֹן הוֹלִיד אֶת־בְּעֵז
 וּבְעֵז הוֹלִיד אֶת־עוֹבֵד:
 וְעוֹבֵד הוֹלִיד אֶת־יִשִׁי
 וְיִשִׁי הוֹלִיד אֶת־דָּוִד.

Who Judged the Judges? Reading Rut Rabbah as Reading Rut

May 9, 2013

Chazal read Tanakh. This may seem too obvious to bother saying, but I think it bears repetition and emphasis, because there is a popular misimpression that Chazal instead used or mined Tanakh. One cause of this misimpression is that we generally encounter Chazal's readings in the context of public performances. These performances were generally intended to convey the outcomes of Chazal's readings with pedagogic and mnemonic effectiveness, rather than to convey their methodology.

Here is a parable: A teacher of astronomy taught the names of the planets from the verse My Very Eager Mother Just Sat Upon Nine Pickles. A student mistakenly concluded that the teacher had learned of the planets by unpacking the mnemonic, rather than by looking at the stars. So too, Chazal often used clever manipulations of verses to convey their readings memorably, but one must not conclude that they derived their readings from those manipulations.

Furthermore: The records of Chazal's performances often leave out many of the direct justifications of their readings. Reading Midrash is often akin to reading a technical article from which the footnotes have been removed, and concluding that the author was ignorant of all colleagues and predecessors. Often the key footnote is simply the instruction to read every verse cited in its own context.

Here is an example relating to Megillat Rut: Tehillim 50:7 reads

שמעה עמי ואדברה
ישראל ואעידה בך
א-להים א-להיך אנכי:
*Listen, My nation, and I will speak;
Israel, and I will testify about you;
E-lohim, I am E-lohekha.*

One of the formal performances (*petichtaot*) that introduces Midrash Rut Rabbah presents this as follows: The word E-lohim is a reference to Exodus 22:27, which reads

א-להים לא תקלל
You must not curse E-lohim

which is understood halakhically as a prohibition against cursing human judges. But the word E-lohim also refers to G-d. Tehillim 50:7 therefore is simultaneously a reminder to Israel that G-d has bestowed His authority on human judges – they are called Elohim - and a reminder to those judges that G-d judges them – they are subordinate to E-lohim. Therefore human beings must treat human judges with the respect due to Divine agents, but those agents must remember their subordinate status.

This reading superficially depends on translating verse 7 as

O Judges! I am your Judge

rather than the more likely

By G-d! I am your G-d.

However, verse 7 is the introduction to a paragraph – not cited in the *petichta* - which builds toward the declaration in verses 16-18

ולרשע אמר א-להים
מה לך לספר חקי ותשא בריתי עלי פיך:
ואתה שנאת מוסר ותשלך דברי אחרים:
אם ראית גנב ותרוץ עמו ועם מנאפים חלקך

*To the wicked said E-lohim:
 “What right have you to tell My statutes, and to have assumed My covenant in your mouth?
 You have hated rebuke, and thrown My words behind you;
 If you have seen a thief – you ran with him, and you share fortune with adulterers.*

So the rebuke in 7 is indeed to those who tell G-d’s statutes, and who run with thieves when they are responsible for restraining them.

Now Tehillim 50:6 – also never cited in the *petichta*- reads as follows:

ויגידו שמים צדקו
 כי א-להים שפט הוא
 סלה
*Heavens declare His righteousness
 that E-lohim is a **judge**
 Selah*

This likely stimulates – although it does not compel - a connection to Rut 1:1:

ויהי בימי שפוט השופטים
It was in the days when the judges (were) judged
 ואי לדור ששופט את שופטיו
 ואוי לדור ששופטיו צריכים להשפט
*Woe to the generation which judges its judges,
 and woe to the generation whose judges deserve to be judged.*

In other words: Tehillim 50:7 aspires to a society in which judges are respected and deserve that respect. Tehillim 50:16-18 acknowledges the breakdown of that ideal in part – the judges do not deserve respect. It does not discuss whether they should nonetheless be treated as if they deserved respect. Rut Rabbah may not take a position either – but it recognizes explicitly that there is a cost to treating judges with disrespect *even* when they don’t deserve respect, and so a decision to treat them disrespectfully must not be taken lightly.

Now is this reading derived from *ויהי בימי שפוט השופטים*? Put differently, is this how the author of the *petichta* read Rut 1:1? I suggest that a close reader would note immediately that the word שפוט seems unnecessary – tautologically, “shoftim” engaged in “shefitah”. If this reader has a bias – let us call it a Rabbi Akiva bias – toward assuming that such redundancies are substantively significant rather than inefficient idioms, s/he will argue either that

- a. the text is seeking to contextualize itself more precisely than would be accomplished by “In the days of the *shoftim*”, or that
- b. the reference is to a particular form of *shefita*, or that
- c. the phrase *שפוט השופטים* takes advantage of the syntactic ambiguity of שפוט, as in the awkward English translation “the judging of the judges”, which can mean either “the judging (of others) by the judges” or else “the judging (by others) of the judges”.

This *petichta* takes option c.

But why does it take option c? Not because option c is linguistically compelling, but rather because option c seems to be a proper frame for the book. In other words, option c is *contextually* compelling. Having read Megillat Rut, the author of the *petichta* concludes that one useful background for the story is a recognition that it occurs during a time when respect for authority has collapsed.

It must be understood as well that option c itself has two branches:

1. “the judging (by others) of the judges”
2. “the judging (by Another) of the judges”

The apparent redundancy of טוֹשׁ is adequately accounted for if one takes option 1. The *petichta*'s decision to take both options together reflects a reading of the entire megillah, and possibly as well of the entire Sefer Shoftim. This reading is derived in the *petichta* by noting that Shoftim 2:17 seems to criticize Israel for not following the shoftim, and yet that such shoftim as Shimshon and Gid'on seem not to have been models of propriety – although here again, other footnotes are almost certainly missing.

To sum up: The *petichta*, taken naively, cleverly overreads Rut 1:1 on the basis of a clever overreading of Tehillim 50:7. I argue that the substantive reading of Tehillim 50:7 is actually well-grounded in the full text of Tehillim 50, and that the substantive reading of Rut 1:1 is rooted in a well-grounded reading of the entire megillah and of Sefer Shoftim.

Tune in again Monday for iyH an exposition of those readings of Rut and Shoftim; a presentation of a *petichta* that adopts option a above; a discussion of whether one can choose both a and c; and especially for a new edition/presentation of the astonishing Rut Rabbah, which may not be a midrash after all, but rather a Chazalic commentary *al derekh hapshat*.

Excerpts from Midrash Rut Rabbah, Translated

May 14, 2013

CHAPTER 1

1

Said R. Zeira:

This megillah contains nothing of ritual impurity or purity, nothing of prohibition or permission; It was written solely to teach you how great a reward is given to those who do acts of kindness.³¹

2

In the days that the judges were judged

Analogize this to a province that owed a remainder of its tax-obligation to the king.

What did the king do?

He sent an official to collect it.

What did the people of the province do?

They took him and beat him and collected from him, saying: "What he sought to do to us, we did to him";

So too "**In the days that the judges were judged**"

a Jewish man would worship idols

and a justice would seek to impose justice on him

but he would come and beat the justice,

saying: "What he sought to do to me, I did to him".

Woe to a generation whose judges are judged!³²

3

Woe to a generation that judged its judges,

But also – woe to a generation whose judges deserve to be judged:

³¹ R. Zeira's statement may presume that most of Tanakh serves to teach law, whereas Rut exceptionally seeks to inspire us to emulate those who act with kindness. A similar assumption seems to stand behind the opening question of Rashi's commentary to Chumash: Why does the Torah not begin with the first mitzvah, namely "This month shall be for you etc."?

However – even if one assumes that

a) Rashi's question is intended seriously, and

b) its premise is not utterly rejected by his answer

it would be astonishing to apply the same principle to all of Tanakh. What matters of law do Yeshayah, Yonah, Iyov, etc. come to teach?

Alternatively, R. Zeira's statement may be read as reacting against a specific narrow reading of Rut which sees it as specifically intended to teach the law that Moabitesses may join "the community of Hashem", i.e. that male Jews may marry female Moabite converts, despite Devarim 23:4's ban against Moabites. This law is cited seven (7!) times in Rut Rabbah.

Of course, teaching the law also accomplished legitimating the Davidic monarchy, if one assumes that Biblical readers of the Megillah knew that King David had Moabite ancestors. For contemporary readers, it works the other way around – the story teaches us how tenuous the Davidic hold on aristocracy was.

My preference is to see the suggested purposes as conjoined. Megillat Rut teaches that Hashema rewarded acts of kindness with monarchy, even when that reward required choosing a less-likely reading of His Torah. Rut Rabbah states several times that the ruling permitting the inclusion of Moabitesses originated *when Rut* appeared in Beit Lechem – had she not appeared, or had she not been as impressive, the law would have remained gender-neutral. Torah has many potential legitimate meanings – "These and those are the living words of G-d" – and which become Halakhah is affected by human choices, both directly through *psak* and indirectly by influencing the moral and spiritual environment in which Halakhah is decided.

³² A weakness of both halves of the parable is that in each case, the defendant's objection is not to the character of the official seeking to impose the law, but rather to the law itself. In the next paragraph, by contrast, it is acknowledged that at least some of the Judges committed the same sins as the people they were judging, and it is not made clear whether or why defendants must submit to hypocritical authorities.

Perhaps the intent here is to explain the refrain of the Book of Judges: "In those days there was no king in Israel; each man acted as seemed proper in his own eyes". Hypocrisy is always with us, but there is a tipping point at which lack of respect for some of those who enforce the law generates a lack of respect for the entire notion of law.

The question that remains is: Given that this describes the environment of the period of the Judges, why is it *literarily* important to emphasize that the Book of Rut took place in a time when judges were justifiably disrespected, and so respect for law broke down?

Shimshon followed after his eyes,
as Scripture writes “take her for me, for she is proper *in my eyes*”;
Gid'on worshipped *avodah zarah*,
as Scripture writes: “Gid'on made it into an apron . . .”³³

4

In the days of the judging of the judges (plural) Who were the judges (who served simultaneously)?

Rav said: Barak and Devorah.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Shamgar and Ehud. Rav Huna said: Devorah and Barak and Yael.

“Judge” = 1; “Judges” = 2; “the Judges” = 3.³⁴

5

Because they tricked The Holy Blessed One,
some of them worshipping idols and some of them worshipping The Holy Blessed One.
The Holy Blessed One imposed a famine on them in the days of their Judges.³⁵

6

But did we not learn in a beraita:

“In times of plague, in times of war – bring all feet in; in times of famine – scatter all feet” –
why was Elimelekh punished (for leaving, when he was fulfilling *“in times of famine – scatter”*)?!

Because he collapsed the heart of Israel.

Analogize this to a senator who was situated in a province, and the people of the province thought and said
that if there would come years of scarcity,

he would be able to adequately supply the province with food for ten years.

When the years of scarcity came,

his maidservant went out and stood in the market with her container in hand,

and the people said:

“This is he whom we were confident that, if scarcity came, he would be able to support us for ten years?!

His maidservant is standing in the market with her container in hand!”

So too Elimelekh was among the greats of the province and sustainers of the generation,

but when years of famine came, he said: “Now all Israel surround my doorways, each with his container!”.

He arose and fled from before them –

This is the meaning of **“A man went from Bread Home in Acknowledgement of Hashem”**;

³³ Note that Shimshon married a woman who “seemed proper in his own eyes”. His action was emblematic of the failure of the period. However, as Torah Temimah notes, many Judges were righteous, and we will learn in the next paragraph that the story of Rut is not placed in the times of Gid'on or Shimshon. We must therefore say, as in the previous paragraph, that the obvious great failings of some Judges undermined the entire concept of law, so that even Judges of excellent character would be treated as brigands if they tried to enforce law.

³⁴ Torah Temimah points out compellingly that Shamgar's accession is reported in Judges 3:31, and Ehud's death in 4:1, suggesting that Shamgar and Ehud overlapped. 4:1 also reports that “Benei Yisroel continued to do that which “seemed evil in G-d's eyes”. However, there is no similar report for the times of Barak, Devorah, and Yael, although 6:1 reports an immediate backsliding after their days.

The question for us is whether these options are simply attempts to satisfy the condition of simultaneous Judges, or rather arguments as to the best temporal context for Megillat Rut. For example: Ehud fights against Moav, and Shamgar's period is described in Judges 5:6 as one in which travel was dangerous. Barak and Devorah, by contrast, fight against Canaan, and apparently secured the highways. Which of these circumstances seems a better fit for Elimelekh's upcoming removal to Moav, and Naomi and Rut's trek back?

Also: How might our perception of the story change if it occurs during the period that a woman serves as Judge? When two women serve as Judges?

Here we come to the border between one kind of “pshat”, which I will define here as what we can derive from the text, and one kind of “midrash”, which I will define here as how we can responsibly but speculatively fill gaps left in or opened up by the text. Would it matter if the leading Judges of Rut's time – when the law allowing the acceptance of Moabitesses was established – were women?

³⁵ As Torah Temimah points out, the use of “tricked” here is confusing, and the connection to famine is unclear.

when distress came, he went away and abandoned them.³⁶

7

A man went

Like a stump (i.e., without describing his possessions (Jastrow)).³⁷

8

He and his wife and his two sons

He primary, his wife secondary to him, and his sons secondary to them.³⁸

9

The name of the man – MyG-disKing

Rabbi Meir would interpret names;

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Karcha would interpret names.

The name of the man – MyG-disKing

Because he would say: “Kingship will come to me”

and the name of his wife – Pleasance

because her deeds were pleasing and pleasant.³⁹

10

and the name of his two sons – Disease and Devastation

Translate Machlon as “erased”; translate “Kilyon” as “Ended from the World”.⁴⁰

11

R. Yehoshua ben Levi said: Palace-men.

R. Menachama said: Aristocrats.⁴¹

12

³⁶ See Bava Kamma 60b and Sifrei Devarim 321 for discussion of and textual sources for the general advice to flee places of famine. The analogy is not at all clear, as Elimelekh does not fake poverty – he runs away.

See subsequent paragraphs for an explanation of why, if Elimelekh was wealthy, his possessions are not mentioned in the description of his departure. See also Rut 4:3.

I wonder if this interpretation is not based on the translation of **בית לחם** as BreadHome, i.e. as indicating that Elimelekh did not leave because he personally feared starvation.

³⁷ One explanation is that describing possessions is a mode of honoring, and Elimelekh’s departure – whether because he was deserting, or simply because he was leaving the Land of Israel – did not deserve honor.

³⁸ Possibly this is intended to make Naomi blameless for leaving Israel. But in that case, why say that the sons were secondary to “them”, rather than to “her”, especially as they are “his sons”, not “their sons”?

³⁹ Note that the decision to “interpret names” in Megillat Rut is well-grounded textually in Naomi’s pun on her name at the end of Chapter 1.

“Kingship will come to me” conveys almost the exact opposite sense of my translation, “MyG-disKing”. Rabbinic interpretations often work with a particular kind of irony in which true knowledge of the future misleads because someone mistakes a statement about their larger self – which includes their heirs – for a statement about their smaller, individual self. See for example Potiphar’s wife, who “knew” that she and Joseph would share descendants, but did not realize that he would marry her daughter.

The larger import of Rut Rabbah’s translation is that Elimelekh is seduced into arrogance by his royal self-awareness – he feels that he can leave his community without concern for his standing. In the end his descendants become king only through the peculiar mechanism of yibum – David is not his genetic descendant. My translation, by contrast, uses Elimelekh’s name as a marker of the period of Judges, and his death signals a transition to the human monarchy. In a thearchy, perhaps human beings feel less responsible for the fate of their fellows, and so Elimelekh left during the famine without consciousness of guilt.

⁴⁰ I prefer connecting Machlon to **מחלה**

⁴¹ This description of the ill-fated sons seems out of place.

Said Rabbi Pinchas: Bearing that same crown with which Efrayim was crowned by our forefather Yaakov at the time of his death.

Yaakov said to him: Efrayim my son – The head of the tribe, the head of the Yeshiva, the best and best-regarded of my sons will be called by your name: Elkanah, David, Yorav’am, Machlon and Kilyon.⁴²

13

They came to the fields of BornfromFather⁴³ and they were there

Originally they came to the cities, but found them openly licentious, afterward they went to the villages but found them pressed for water, so they went back to the cities.⁴⁴

14

MyGodisKing, husband of Pleasance, died

When a man dies, who feels the lack? His wife.⁴⁵

15

so there remained she and her two sons

Said R. Chanina son of Rabbi Abahu: “She became leftovers of consolation (alt: flour-offerings).⁴⁶

16

They married BornfromFather women

A beraita in the name of Rabbi Meir:

They did not convert them, nor did they immerse them, and they did not allow the law to originate [alt: there was no law to originate] and they were not punished for it [alt: for them]:

“Ammonite” – not Ammonitess;

“Moabite” – not Moabites.⁴⁷

17

the name of the first was Backoftheneck

because she turned the back of her neck to her mother in law.⁴⁸

18

and the name of the second was Companionship

⁴² It is nothing short of astonishing to see Yorov’am on the list of “best and best-regarded” of Yaakov’s descendants, and therefore very difficult to evaluate what this is intended to teach us about Machlon and Kilyon.

⁴³ Translated as “ChildofIncest” in the Book of Rut Translation

⁴⁴ Note that “fields” = cities; this is argued midrashically in a section I have left out. The complicated narrative solves the oddity of “they were there” by inserting a period in which they were not, but clearly the explanations of why they originally left, and then returned, are imports from reality rather than emergent from the text. One might argue that this is not an attempt at interpretation, but rather a use of the text as an excuse to attack city morality; I prefer to see it as an attempt to use common knowledge to fill an apparent gap.

⁴⁵ Therefore the text describes him as Naomi’s husband, not as his sons’ father.

⁴⁶ שירי מנחות is a common rabbinic phrase, but I don’t understand what the analogy adds.

⁴⁷ This is most mysterious; if the wives were not converted, why were they not punished? It seems unlikely that this is making the technical halakhic argument is that by not converting them, they avoided violating Devarim 23:4 and instead violated a lesser prohibition of promiscuous intercourse with Gentiles. However – any interpretation will need to explain why Machlon and Kilyon died - I don’t think deaths “just happen” in the context of Rut – and it would be troubling to attribute their deaths to the sin of marrying Rut and Orpah, when it is Rut’s relationship to one of them which generates all the positive outcomes of the narrative.

⁴⁸ Harsh but obvious

Translate instead “Agreement”, because she “saw”, i.e. agreed with, the words of her mother in law.⁴⁹

19

R. Bibi in the name of R. Reuven:

Rut and Orpah were daughters of Eglon (King of Moav, killed by Ehud).⁵⁰

This is the significance of “. . . Ehud said: I have a word of G-d to you. He rose from the throne”.

Said The Holy Blessed One: You rose from your seat and took three steps for the sake of My honor – By your life, I will raise up from you a son who will sit on My throne, namely Shlomoh, of whom Scripture writes: “Shlomoh sat on the throne of Hashem.”

20

Said R. Yudan:

This is an argument a fortiori:

Eglon was a descendant of Balak,

and because of the seven altars that he (Balak) built (to G-d) for evil purposes, he merited siring Rut, so one who builds an altar for good purposes, how much more so!⁵¹

21

R. Yudan bar Simon said: Whenever it says כעשר, או, כעשרים, או, כארבעים – it can mean more or less.⁵²

22

Rabbi Chanina and Rabbi Yehoshua son of Rabbi Avin and Rabbi Zecharyah son in law of Rabbi Levi in the name of Rabbi Levi: The Master of Mercy never initially takes repayment by taking life.

...

This was true in the case of Machlon and Kilyon as well; initially their horses, donkeys, and camels died, and (only) afterward **The two of them also died, Disease and Devastation.**⁵³

23

so the woman remained from her two sons and from her husband

Said Rabbi Chanina in the name of Rabbi Abahu:

She became a remainder of a remainder.⁵⁴

24

She arose, she and her daughters-in-law - she returned from the fields of BornfromFather, for she had heard in the field of BornfromFather that G-d had recalled His nation to give them bread.

From whom did she hear?

From the peddlers circulating in the city.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ I prefer the derivation from רעות

⁵⁰ The psychologically fascinating claim here is that Rut and Orpah married into the nation whose hero had killed their father.

⁵¹ R. Yudan does not seek to justify the connection of Rut to Eglon – he assumes it. It therefore seems possible to me that the connection to Eglon was an oral tradition, which the previous paragraph added a textual connection for.

⁵² I translated “nearly”, but on further reflection, “around” is probably more correct. There is a halakhic advantage in assuming that they were not actually married for 10 years, but I don’t have any evidence for limiting the meaning to “nearly”.

⁵³ This is textually grounded in גג, also – one could take this to mean “in addition to Elimelekh”, but as we already learned of Elimelekh’s death, the word is unnecessary, and גג is often taken this way in מדרש הלכה (at least מדרש הלכה with an Akivan literary sensibility, which does not see idiom as an excuse for inefficiency).

⁵⁴ See note 15.

⁵⁵ Torah Temimah suggests that two questions are addressed here:

a) Where would she have heard, if not where she was, i.e. in שדה מואב?

25

She went out of the place where she had been there, and her two daughters-in-law with her

Was she the only one who left there? Did not some camels leave, and some donkeys leave, and yet you write “and *she* left”!?

R. Azaria in the name of R. Yuda son of Simon, R. Chanin in the name of R. Shmuel son of R. Yitzchak: The greatest (person) of the city is its radiance, its glory, and its praise. If s/he turns elsewhere, its radiance, its glory, and its praise have turned elsewhere.⁵⁶

26

and they went on the way to return to the land of Gratitude to G-d

Said Rabbi Yochanan: They transgressed the line of the Torah and travelled on Yom Tov.

Alternatively:

The roadway narrowed for them, so that they walked alone.

Alternatively:

They walked barefoot, and their bodies would ?crumble?

Alternatively:

They were engaged in the topic of the laws of conversion.⁵⁷

27

Pleasant said to her two daughters-in-law: “Go, return, each wife to her mother’s house!

Read instead of *imah*= mother, *ummah*=nation.⁵⁸

28

May G-d do kindness with you

R. Chanina the son of R. Acha: The pronunciation is *יעש*, but is written *יעשה*.⁵⁹

29

as you have done with the dead

by taking care of their burial shrouds

b) Why specifically peddlers?

His ingenious answer is that on Bava Kamma 82a we learn that Ezra decreed that peddlers should circulate with cosmetics in the cities, but that the commentators note that this decree is suspended during famine, when it might seem frivolous. The return of peddlers therefore indicated the end of the famine. Perhaps the Jewish community fulfilled this decree even in Moav, or perhaps Ezra simply codified a widespread Near Eastern practice.

I wonder if another problem being addressed here isn't that Naomi, so far as we know, has no contact with any Jewish community in Moav, and indeed Elimelech went to Moav to escape the Jewish poor – so she could have heard only from itinerants.

⁵⁶ I don't understand the argument. Why should we assume that the women had animals with them? Why is the singular problematic because of the missing animals, and not because of the present daughters-in-law?

⁵⁷ a. Torah Temimah suggests that as they seem to have arrived on the day of the Omer-harvesting, they likely travelled the day before, which is the Yom Tov of Pesach, and that furthermore that “**they went on the way**” suggests they did so without stopping. He further argues that they did so to correct for their husbands' sin in leaving Israel, and leaves open the possibility that they acted correctly, if perhaps illegally, in doing so.

I do not find his textual argument compelling, nor do I see how returning to Israel following a famine could correct for the sin of leaving during a famine. I am more interested in why Rav Yochanan thinks this happened while Orpah was still with them.

b. The textual argument, that “they” means “only they” is weak. I think the underlying problem this interpretation tries to solve is how any number of unmarried women could have travelled on the roadway without being attacked.

c. The textual argument seems to be that “**they went (directly) on the way**”, but how often does Tanakh mention people putting on their shoes?!

d. I don't see the textual argument, but the claim that conversion was the topic of conversation all along sheds light on Orpah's departure.

⁵⁸ Perhaps the social convention was that widows returned to their fathers' houses, not their mothers'

⁵⁹ This might be simply a textual note, but as such *qeri ukhetiv*'s are often interpreted elsewhere in *Rut Rabbah*, I wonder if something has been lost from the text here.

and with me!

by foregoing their ketubah-money for her sake.⁶⁰

30

May G-d grant you that you find rest

Said R. Chanina said R. Acha: It is written ומצאן (but pronounced ומצאנה). This foreshadows that one would find rest, but one would not.⁶¹

31

each wife in the home of her husband. She kissed them. They raised their voices and cried, saying to her: “But we will return with you to your people!”

Pleasance said: “Return, my daughters! Why would you go with me? Do I yet have sons in my entrails, who will become husbands to you?”

Does a man perform yibum with the wife of a brother who was dead before he was born?⁶²

32

Return, my daughters! Go!

R. Shmuel bar Chiyya son of R. Yudan said in the name of R. Chanina:

It writes שבונה three times here, parallel to the three times one pushes off a (potential) convert, but if he persists beyond that, we accept him.

Said R. Yitzchak: “A convert must not lay down outside” – A person should always push (converts) away with the left hand and draw (them) near with the right.⁶³

33

For I have aged past becoming wife to a man. If I were to say: ‘I have something to look forward to!’, even if I became wife to a man tonight, and even if I bore sons,

Is it the case that I became wife to a man tonight, and bore sons?⁶⁴

34

would you wait expectantly for them, until they grew up?

Is it possible that you would sit fallow until they grew up?

Would you chain yourselves up for their sakes, not becoming wife to a man?

Is it possible that you would sit fallow and chained, not becoming wife to a man?

Don’t, my daughters!

Translate instead “Alas, my daughters!”

For I have been very bitter for your sakes, since the hand of G-d went out against me.”

for your sakes (rather than “bitter because of you” or “bitterer than you”)

since the hand of G-d went out against me.”

and against my husband and my sons.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ The textual argument seems to be that “with the dead” implies after their deaths; I’m not compelled. However, it is true that we have seen no prior instances of chesed with Naomi, and so have to simply assume them.

⁶¹ Note the apparent assumption that Orpah did not find rest in remarriage.

⁶² Naomi meant that even if she were pregnant, her new son would not be able to marry Rut and Orpah, as yibum is permitted only with the wife of a brother who was alive simultaneously with you. See Mishnah Yebamot 1:1. She did not mean to indicate that there were limits to Rut and Orpah’s endurance.

⁶³ I think Naomi’s references to “her daughters” are the parallel to “drawing near with the right”. Note that Orpah left anyway – is this regrettable?

⁶⁴ I think this comment is intended to prevent one from misreading Naomi as speaking in the past tense: “For I have said that I have hope etc.”

⁶⁵ a-b. I’m not sure whether this comment suggests that it would be psychologically untenable, or practically useless.

c. I think this is intended to improve the transition to the next phrase.

d. This comment I find simply incomprehensible as an interpretation of this verse.

35

Said R. Yehoshua:

Everywhere Scripture writes “the hand of Hashem” it refers to a plague.⁶⁶

36

They raised their voices and cried more

It writes ותשנה (although it is pronounced ותשא)

(This teaches that) they weakened, as they were going and crying.⁶⁷

37

Rabbi Berakhyah said in the name of R. Yitzchak:

Orpah walked 40 paces after her mother in law, and so (the undoing of her children) was delayed for forty days, as Scripture writes: “The Philistine approached early and evening, and he stationed himself for forty days”.

Rabbi Yudan in the name of Rabbi Yitzchak:

Orpah walked four *milin* behind her mother in law, and (as a result) four powerful men arose from her, as Scripture says: “Those four were born to Horpah in Gath”.⁶⁸

38

Said Rabbi Yitzchak:

All that night that Orpah separated from her mother in law she was abused by a posse of one hundred people – this is the meaning of “He was speaking with them when behold, the champion *mima’arakhot*” – it is written *mima’arot*, meaning from the one hundred foreskins that abused her (*nit’aru bah*) all that night.

Rabbi Tanchuma said:

She was also abused by a dog, as Scripture writes: “The Philistine said to David: Am I a dog?”⁶⁹

39

BackoftheNeck kissed her mother in law, but Companionship stuck to her. She said: “Here, your sister in-law has returned to her people and to her gods;

When she returned to her people, she returned to her gods.⁷⁰

40

return, following your sister in-law!” Companionship said: “Don’t press me to abandon you, to return from following you.

⁶⁶ But here it cannot, as Naomi is still alive!? I don’t understand this comment of R. Yehoshua.

⁶⁷ I don’t understand why the orthography generates the conclusion that they weakened.

⁶⁸ Torah Temimah cites a version in which Orpah sheds four tears, and suggests that “cried more” suggests at least twice, and each time with both eyes – thus four. His explanation cannot be correct, as it explains neither the four nor the forty in our text. But I do not have a compelling alternative.

⁶⁹ Note that both this and the preceding paragraph assume that Golyat descended from Orpah – I think this was considered established.

There is an element of the grotesque here, but I think the point that women in that society lived in constant danger is a derivation of the location in the time of Judges, which is epitomized by the story of the Concubine of Giv’ah, which in turn characterizes Israel as the recreation of Sodom. This will throw Rut’s safety in Boaz’s field and silo into sharp relief.

⁷⁰ There is of course no explicit mention of religion here.

Rut said to Naomi: “Do not plead with me; do not continue your pressing⁷¹ **to abandon you, to return from following you**; regardless, my intent is to convert, but better through you than through someone else.

41

Once Naomi heard this, she began arranging before her matters of the laws of conversion. She said to her: “My daughter, it is not the way of Israel to go either to theater –houses or to circus-houses, rather to synagogues and study halls. And it is not the way of Israel to travel more than two thousand cubits on Shabbat.”

Rut replied: “**For wheresoever you go, I will go.**”

(Naomi continued:) “And it is not the way of Israel to lie down except in a house that has a mezuzah.” Rut said to her: “**And howsoever you lodge, I will lodge. Your people is my people**” - this referred to punishments and cautions – “**and your G-d is my G-d**” – so I nullify my idols.

42

. . . Howsoever you die, I will die

There are four types of capital punishment in Jewish law: ‘Burning’, ‘stoning’, ‘decapitation’, and ‘strangulation’.

And there I will be buried

This refers to the two burial areas set aside for the courts, one for those stoned or burned, the other for those decapitated or strangled.

43

May G-d do thus to me, and yet more!

44

Naomi said to her: “My daughter, everything you can heap up in terms of mitzvot and good deeds in this world, but in the Coming World, **if death could separate between me and you.**”

45

So she ceased to speak to her

Said Rabbi Abahu: Come see how precious converts are before The Holy Blessed One – once she made up her mind to convert, Scripture equated her with Naomi.

46

The two of them went until they came to BreadHome. It was when they came to BreadHome

Said R. Shmuel bar Nachman: Those days were the days of the Omer-harvest, as the Mishnah there teaches: “All the cities near there would congregate here, so that it would be harvested with great hubbub.”

Some say: Ivtzan was marrying off his daughters, and everyone came to do *chesed*.

R. Tanchuma in the name of R. Azaria, and R. Menachama in the name of R. Yehoshua ben Avin: Scripture writes “Hashem G-d of Hosts – who is like you . . .” – who produces things in their proper time . . .

Some say: Boaz’s wife died on that day, and all the cities congregated to do *chesed*, and while all her people were engaged with doing *chesed*, Rut entered with Naomi, so that one was exiting and the other entering.

47

the whole city went into uproar around them, saying: “Is this Pleasance?”

They said: Is this she whose deeds were pleasing and pleasant?

⁷¹ Torah Temimah translates: “Do not bear sin because of me (i.e., don’t drive me away from Judaism); Don’t receive punishment for my sake.”

In the past she would be covered with her colored and downy clothes, and now she is covered in rags! In the past her face would be flushed with food and drink, and now her face is sallow with hunger! In the past she would travel in her covered litter, and now she is travelling barefoot!

She said to them: “Don’t call me Pleasance! Call me Bitterness

48

Bar Kappara said:

Analogize this to a yoke-broken cow that was standing in the market.

They said to the owner: What is the nature of that cow?

He said: It is yoke-broken, it makes even furrows.

They said: If it is yoke-broken, if it makes even furrows, what are these cudgel-marks on it? So too – “If I am Pleasance, why has TheSufficient caused much bitterness for me?”

49

I went full

Full with children

Full with possessions

Alternatively:

I was pregnant.

50

but G-d has returned me empty; why would you call me Pleasance, when G-d has afflicted me, and TheSufficient has caused me evil?”

The Attribute of Justice afflicted me

Alternatively:

Testified against me

Alternatively:

He seems to have no concerns other than me.

51

So Pleasance returned, and Companionship the BornfromFather woman her daughter in-law with her, who returned from the fields of BornfromFather,

“That’s the one who returned from the fields of BornfromFather”!

52

and they came to BreadHome at the beginning of the barley harvest.

CHAPTER 2

53

Now Pleasance had someone known to her husband

a relative.

54

a man of mastery and valor

in 3:11 it says “that you are a woman of valor”.

Said Rabbi Abahu: If a giant marries a giant, to what do they give birth? A master.

Boaz married Rut, who do they raise up? “one knowing how to play music , of mastery and valor”.

55

from the family of MyGodisKing

The wicked precede their names . . . but the righteous precede their names . . .

An attack question: “Rivkah had a brother, whose name was Laban”!?

56

Companionship the BornfromFather woman said to Pleasance: “I will go, please, to the field, and I will glean among the stalks, following he {He} in whose eyes I will find favor. She said to her: “Go, my daughter”.

R. Yanna said: She was forty years old, as one does not call someone a daughter unless she is forty years old.

57

She went; she came; she gleaned in the field following the harvesters

She had just left, and you say she came?

R. Yudan son of R. Simon said: ? ... ?

58

And it just so happened to her

Said R. Yochanan: Whoever would see her would ejaculate.

59

that the portion of the field belonged to ArrivingStrength who was from the family of MyGodisKing.

Here ArrivingStrength came from BreadHome -He said to the harvesters: “G-d be with you!”

They said to him: “May G-d bless you!”

R. Tanchuma in the name of R. Avin, R. Chuna in the name of R. Yehudah son of R. Simon, and R. Shmuel bar Nachman in the name of R. Yonatan, and Rabbis in the name of R. Yehoshua ben Levi say:

Three things were decreed by a human court and affirmed by the Heavenly Court. They are: Greeting using the Divine Name . . .

R. Azaria in the name of R. Yehudah son of R. Simon said: It was in the days when the judges judged when Boaz and his court agreed to greeting using the Divine Name . . .

60

ArrivingStrength said to his lad who was overseeing the harvesters:

Over how many was he appointed?

R. El'azar bar Meryon said: Over forty two.

That number is sustainable, as is less than that, but more than that can't be sustained and he wouldn't be aware of what was happening.

61

“To whom does this lass belong?”

He didn't know her, but when he saw her pleasing and pleasant, he began asking about her. All the women bend when they collect, but she sits when she collects:

All the woman take off their clothes, but she ties them around her;

All the women play with the harvesters, but she conceals herself;

All the women collect among the sheaves, but she collects from the ownerless.

62

The lad who was overseeing the harvesters replied, saying: “She is a BornfromFather lass who returned with Pleasance from the field of BornfromFather

She is a Moabite lass, and you say that her deeds are pleasant and pleasing!! Rather, her mistress tamed her.

63

She said: ‘I will glean, please, and collect among the sheaves following the harvesters.’ She came and (I cannot translate either version).

64

ArrivingStrength said to Companionship: “Are you listening, my daughter? Don’t go to glean in another field;

This is intended symbolically – do not go have other gods before Me.

65

don’t even pass from this (place)

the word *הר* refers to the Biblical verse “זה קלי ואמרתו”, said by the Jews when they tangibly experienced G-d after the Reed Sea split. Rut is told not to stray from that *הר* experience.

66

and stick so, with my lasses

These are the righteous, who are called “lasses” . . .

67

Your eyes should be on the field they are harvesting, and you should follow them

“Your eyes” – this refers to the Sanhedrin.

68

Have I not commanded the lads so they won’t touch you?

Not to push you away.

69

When you become thirsty, go to the containers

These are the righteous, who are called *keilim*.

From where do we know that the righteous are called *keilim*?

R. Chaninah and R. Yonatan say: “How have the masterful fallen, and the *keilim* of war lost.”

70

and drink from what the lads will draw.”

This refers to the wellhouse (in the Temple).

71

She fell on her face and bowed to the ground, saying to him: “Why have I found favor in your eyes that you give me this recognition when I am a foreigner?”

This teaches that she prophesied about herself that he would eventually recognize her ‘in the way of all the land’.

72

ArrivingStrength replied, saying to her: “I have certainly been told

Twice – once in the house, and once in the field.

73

everything that you did for your mother in-law after the death of your husband;

not to mention while your husband was alive.

74

that you left your father and your mother your actual father and your actual mother **and your birthland;**

this refers to your province.

Alternatively:

that you left your father and your mother

this refers to your idols, as Scripture writes “who say to wood ‘you are my father’, and to rock “you birthed me””.

and your birthland;

this refers to your neighborhood.

75

that you went to a people which you had not known yesterday or the day before

for had you come the day before yesterday, we would not have accepted you, as the law had not yet been accepted that “Ammonite” – not Ammonitess; “Moabite” – not Moabites.

76

May G-d repay you in full for all your works and may your reward be complete from G-d the God of Israel under Whose wings you have come to shelter.”

She said: “May I find favor in your eyes, my lord {Lord}, because you have comforted me, and because you have spoken to your maidservant’s heart when I could not be as one of your maidservants.”

He said to her: Heaven forfend, you are not from among the handmaidens (*amahot*) but rather from among the foremothers (*imahot*).

ArrivingStrength said to her when it came time to eat: “Approach, come up here; you’ll eat from the bread and dip your slice in the vinegar”. She sat beside the harvesters; he held roast grains out to her; she ate and was sated and left over.

77

Approach, come up here

Draw near to here.

78

you’ll eat from the bread

the bread of the harvesters.

79

and dip your slice in the vinegar.

80

She sat beside the harvesters

literally beside them.

81

he held roast grains out to her;

in the small hollow (*kalil*) between his two fingers

82

she ate and was sated and left over.

Said Rabbi Yitzchak: It seems that a blessing suffused the intestines of that righteous woman.

83

Said Rabbi Yitzchak bat Meryon:

Scripture came to teach you that if a person will do a mitzvah, he should do it wholeheartedly

...

as if Boaz had known that The Holy Blessed One would be writing “He held roast grains out to her”, he would have fed her fatted calves.

She got up to glean. ArrivingStrength ordered his lads, saying: “Even if she gleans among the sheaves you must not cause her shame, Indeed, you must even spill for her out of the bundles; you must leave them, and she will glean, and you must not express anger at her.”

84

She gleaned in the field until evening; she beat out the grain that she had gleaned and it was nearly an eiphah of barley.

How much is an Eiphah: Three sa'ah, as a Mishnah teaches: The eiphah = three sa'ah.

85

She picked them up and came to the city. Her mother in-law saw what she had gleaned; She took out and gave to her what she had left over from her satiety.

She left over from the blessing a parallel to the good he had given her.

86

“Where {eiphah} have you gleaned today, and where have you done this? May he (He) who recognized you be blessed!” She told her mother in-law what she had done with him,

A beraita in the name of R. Yehoshua:

More than what the householder does for the poor man, the poor man does for the householder, as when

Rut said to Naomi, **saying: “The name of the man whom I did (this) with today [is]**

ArrivingStrength.” - it does not say ‘who did with me’, but rather “whom I did this with today” – I did many deeds and favors for the sake of the portion he gave me.

87

Pleasant said to her daughter in-law: “Blessed is he to G-d who has not left off his kindness with the living

He feeds and sustains the living

and with the dead

that you took care of their shrouds.

88

Pleasant said to her: “The man is a relative of ours; he is among our redeemers {from our Redeemer}.”

Said R. Shmuel bar Nachman: Boaz was the greatest of his generation, and this woman makes of him her relative.

89

Companionship the BornfromFather woman said: “He even said to me: ‘You must stick with my lads Said R. Chanan bar Levi: She was a genuine Moabite! Boaz said **and stick so with my lasses**, whereas she said **stick with my lads**.

Naomi as well spoke with Divine inspiration,

Pleasant said to her daughter in-law Companionship: “It is well, my daughter, if you go out with his lasses, so that they will not harass you in another field.” She stuck to the lasses of ArrivingStrength, gleaned until the end of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest, but she lived with her mother in-law.

90

Said R. Shmuel bar Nachman: From the beginning of the barley harvest until the close of the wheat harvest are three months.

CHAPTER 3

91

Pleasant her mother in-law said to her: “My daughter! Shall I not seek for you a resting place where it will go well with you? Now—is it not ArrivingStrength the one who knows us

whose lasses you were with? Here – he is winnowing the barley silo tonight. You must wash
from your idolatry
and anoint
with mitzvot and good deeds.

92
and place your gown on you
Was she naked?! Rather, this refers to her Shabbat clothes.

93
and go down to the silo.
It is written “eyoradti” (first person) even though it is read “veyoradt” (second person feminine singular).
She said to her: My merit will go down with you.
**Don’t make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking!
But when he lies down then you will know the place where he lies down and you will come
and uncover his legs, and lie down, and he will tell you what you must do.”**

94
She said to her: “Everything which you will say to me I will do.”
“to me” is read but not written.
Rut said to Naomi: This generation is steeped in licentiousness; lest a dog will come and couple with me?
But nonetheless **“Everything which you will say to me I will do”** – it is my responsibility to make it work out.
She went down to the silo and she did in accordance with everything that her mother in-law had commanded her.

95
Arriving Strength ate and drank, and his heart was cheered.
Why was his heart cheered (made *tov*)?
Because he made a blessing over his food, saying “Who is *tov* and causes *tov* to all”.
Alternatively:
He ate a sweet after his meal, which accustoms the tongue to Torah.
Alternatively:
He was seeking a wife.
Alternatively:
He was engaged with Torah.

96
He came to sleep at the edge of the grainheap. She came stealthily, uncovered his legs and lay down. Rabbi Yehudah the Nasi asked in the presence of R. Pinchas, and R. Menachamyah in the name of R. Yehudah son of R. Simon: Boaz was the greatest of his generation, and you say **He came to sleep at the edge of the grainheap?!**
He said to him: Because that generation was steeped in licentiousness, and they would pay prostitutes from the silos . . . but it is not the way of the righteous to do this. Furthermore, the righteous are distant from robbery, and therefore their money is dear to them.

97
It was in the middle of the night and the man became terrified and shocked – She wrapped around him like lichen.
He said to her: Who are you, A succubus or a woman?
She said to him: A woman.
He began feeling her hair. He said: “Succubi have no hair”.
He said to her: Available or married?

She said: Available.
He said to her:
Tehorah or *temeiah*?
She replied: *Tehorah*.

98

Here was a woman – the most *tahor* of women! - **sleeping at his feet!**

99

He said: “Who are you?”

She replied: “I am Companionship your handmaiden and you must spread your wing over your handmaiden

Said R. Berakhyah: Cursed are the wicked. There it writes “She grabbed him by his garment, saying ‘Lie with me’ – like a beast – but here “you must spread your wing over your handmaiden”.

for you are a redeemer.”

100

He said: “Blessed are you to G-d, my daughter!

It was more likely that he would curse her, but Hashem put in his heart to bless her.

101

Your last kindness has exceeded your first, to not go follow the young men, whether rich or poor. Said R. Shmuel son of R. Yitzchak: A woman prefers a poor lad to a rich old man.

102

Now my daughter, don’t be afraid – Everything which you say, I will do for you

What you are asking, I will do.

103

as all those at the gate of my people know that you are a woman of valor.

104

But know – while it is true, while I am yet (*im*) a redeemer, but there is also a redeemer more closely related than I.

“*im*” is written but not read.

He said to her: If I redeem you, there is a closer redeemer, and he will be angry because he is closer.

Rather, if he redeems you – he will redeem; and if not – **I am a redeemer** – I will redeem you myself.

105

Lodge for the night

Tonight you lodge without a husband, but there will be no other night that you lodge without a husband.

106

and when it is morning if that good man will redeem you, well,

If he will redeem you – good

107

he will redeem you,

but if he does not desire to redeem you, then by the Living G-d I will redeem you!

Said R. Yosef: Three had their evil inclination come to overpower them, but they were alerted to it and swore to it (not to give in). They are: Yosef, David, and Boaz.

Said R. Yudan: All that night his evil inclination challenge him, saying: You are available and seeking a wife, and she is available and seeking a husband – arise and mate with her, and she will be your wife! He swore of his evil inclination, saying: “By the living G-d! if I touch her.

and to the woman he said:
Lie down until morning.”

108

She lay down at his feet until morning, when she arose before (*b'terem*) a man could recognize his companion.

It is written *b'terom*, with an extra *vav* – this teacher that she spent six hours sleeping at his feet, and yet he did not touch her.

109

He said: Let it not be known that the woman came to the silo.

To whom did he say this?

R. Meir said: To his servant.

Said Rav Huna and R. Yirmiyah in the name of R. Shmuel son of R. Yitzchak:

All that night Boaz was prostrated, saying: Master of the universe, it is revealed and known before You that I did not touch her. May it be Your will before You, Hashem my G-d and the G-d of my fathers, that **it not be known that the woman came to the silo**, so that the Name of Heaven not be desecrated through me.

110

He said: “Bring (*havi*) the shawl which is on you, and grasp it!”

It is written ? . This teaches that he spoke with her using the masculine, so that no one would perceive her.

She grasped it.

This teaches that she girded her loins like a male.

111

He measured out six of barley Said R. Simon: Bar Kappara taught publicly in Tzipori: Was it standard for her to marry with six sa'ah, or standard for a king to marry with six sa'ah?

Said R. Yudan son of R. Simon: In the merit of these six, six came forth: David, Chizkiyah, Yoshiyah, Daniel, Chananiah Mishael and Azariah, and the Messianic King.

112

and he came to the city.

Should it not have said “and she came to the city” – why “and he came”?

This teaches that he walked after her to prevent her from being harassed by one of the lads.

113

She came to her mother in-law, who said: “Who are you, my daughter?”

Did Naomi not recognize her?

Rather, she said to her: “Are you available or married?”

Rut said to her: “Available”.

114

She told her everything the man had done for her. She said; “These six of barley he gave to me, because he said to me: ‘You must not come emptyhanded to your mother in-law’”.

Said Rabbi Alexander: (The issue with “emptyhanded” wasn't that she would leave Boaz without anything, but rather that she would come to Naomi without anything).

115

She said: “Sit, my daughter, until you know how the matter will fall out

R. Chuna and R. Yirmiyah in the name of R. Shmuel bar Yitzchak: The yes of the righteous means yes, and their no means no.

for the man will not quiet unless he finishes the matter today.

CHAPTER 4

116

ArrivingStrength went up to the gate and sat there. Here the redeemer is passing, of whom ArrivingStrength had spoken –

Had he been behind the gate this whole time?

Said R. Shmuel bar Nachman: Even if he had been at the end of the world, Scripture would have lifted him and brought him, so that that righteous one would not sit in suffering in his place.

Said R. Berakhyah: Thus two greats taught publicly, namely R. Eliezer and R. Yehoshua:

R. Eliezer says: Boaz did his, and Rut did hers, and Naomi did hers – Said The Holy Blessed One: It is on Me to do Mine.

117

He said: “Turn aside, sit here, Mr. Dumbstruck! (*ploni almoni*) ”

R. Yehoshua ben Levi said: Ploni Almoni was his name:

R. Shmuel bar Nachman said: He was mute (*ilem*) in words of Torah.

He said: The earlier ones died only because they took her, and I will go take her? Certainly not! I will not mingle rejected/invalid ones with my children.

He did not know that the law had already been originated: “Ammonite” – not Ammonitess; “Moabite” – not Moabitess.

He turned aside and sat.

118

He took ten men from among the elders of the city and said: “Sit here!” They sat.

He said to the redeemer: “The portion of field belonging to our brother, to MyGodisKing, was sold by Pleasance, who has returned from the field of BornfromFather. So I said: “I will uncover your ear, saying: ‘Acquire’, opposite those seated, and opposite the elders of my people. If you will redeem, then redeem!

This he said to the redeemer.

But if he will not redeem, tell me,

This he said to the court.

119

so that I will know this, as there is no one but you to redeem,

Let you say: I have a wife, I have children – I will bring her into my house with the intention of not coupling with her.

and I follow you.”

He said: “I will redeem.”

When the redeemer heard his, he said: “Certainly Rut has gone from me”.

120

ArrivingStrength said: “On the day that you acquire the field from the hand of Pleasance, from Companionship of BornfromFather wife of the dead, you have acquired (*kanita*) the obligation to reestablish the name of the deceased over his legacy.”

It is written *kaniti*.

The redeemer said:

“I cannot redeem this for myself, lest I destroy my legacy. You, redeem for yourself my redemption, for I cannot redeem.”

121

This was the previous custom in Israel in redemptions and exchanges to establish any matter:

A man would remove his shoe and give it to his companion – This was the form of certification in Israel.

The redeemer said to ArrivingStrength: “Acquire it for yourself!”, and he removed his shoe.

Whose shoe?

Rav and Levi: One said: Boaz’s shoe; one said: The redeemer’s shoe.

Said R. Shmuel bar Nachman: It seems reasonable that it was Boaz’s shoe, as it is the way of the buyer to give a surety.

ArrivingStrength said to the elders and all the people: “You are witnesses today! That I have acquired all that belonged to MyGodisKing and all that belonged to Completion and Hope from the hand of Pleasance. Also – Companionship of BornfromFather Wife of Hope I have acquired for myself as wife to reestablish the name of the dead over his legacy, so that the name of the deceased will not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his place. You are witnesses today!”

All the people at the gate, and the elders, said: “We are witnesses! May God grant that the woman who is coming to your house be like Rachel and Leah, the two of whom built the House of Israel! Do valor in Fruitful, and proclaim your name in BreadHome. May your house be like that of Peretz, whom Tamar bore for Gratitude to G-d, via the seed that G-d will grant you from this lass”.

122

ArrivingStrength took Companionship and she became his wife. She had no womb, and The Holy Blessed One formed her a womb.

He came in to her and G-d granted her pregnancy and she bore a son.

The women said to Pleasance: “Blessed be G-d who today ensured your line of redeemers will not end. And may his name be proclaimed in Israel. May he be for you a restorer of spirit, and sustenance for your hoary old age, as your daughter in-law who has loved you bore him, and she is better for you than seven sons.”

Pleasance took the child and placed him in her lap and was a foster-parent for him.

The neighbors proclaimed his name, saying “A son has been born to Pleasance”, and they called his name “Service” – He was the father of Yishai, the father of David.

123

And these

Said R. Abba: Wherever it says “these”, it distinguishes them from those mentioned earlier; whenever it says “and these”, it adds them to those mentioned earlier.

So here: Just as the ones just mentioned were righteous, so too those to be listed now were righteous.

124

are the generations (*toldot*) of Peretz:

Said R. Shmuel bar Nachman: All *toldot* in Torah are written with only one *vav*, except for two: “These are the *toldot* of the heavens and earth”, and this one . . .

**Peretz sired Chetzron
and Chetzron sired Rom
and Rom sired Aminadav
and Aminadav sired Nachshon
and Nachshon sired Salmah
and Salmon sired ArrivingStrength,
and ArrivingStrength sired Service
and Service sired Yishai
and Yishai sired David.**

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Taking Initiative: Rut's Place Among the Mothers of Tanach

by Dina Kritz

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Towards the end of Megillat Rut, the people of Bet Lechem bless Boaz that his new wife should be like some of the women at the beginning of Jewish history.

וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָל-הָעָם אֲשֶׁר-בְּשַׁעַר הַדְּזִקְנִים עֵדִים יִתֵּן ה' אֶת-הָאִשָּׁה הַבָּאָה אֶל-בֵּיתְךָ כְּרַחֵל וְכִלְאָה אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ שְׂתֵיהֶם אֶת-בַּיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל...
וְיִהְיֶה בֵּיתְךָ כְּבַיִת פְּרָצָה אֲשֶׁר-יָלְדָה תָמָר לַיהוּדָה מִן-הַזָּרַע אֲשֶׁר יִתֵּן ה' לָךְ מִן-הַנְּעֻרָה הַזֹּאת:

All the people at the gate and the elders answered, "We are witnesses. May G-d make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built up the House of Israel. And may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah—through the offspring which G-d will give you by this young woman."

What's so special about these three women, Rachel, Leah, and Tamar, that the city hoped Rut would be like them? Further, is it a blessing to be compared to three women who faced trying times?

Perhaps the people saw something in Rut's actions and journey which reminded them of their foremothers. After all, they too left their father's home in another land. When Yaacov informed them that he wanted to return to Canaan, both because he felt a growing distance between himself and Lavan and because he had received a vision from G-d telling him to return, they readily agreed, stating that they too felt unwanted in Lavan's home, and ended their response, "Now, do everything that G-d has told you to do." They wanted Yaacov to listen his deity and they were simultaneously done with living in a home in which they barely counted. They packed up and left their father, their people, and their culture (and, presumably, their religious beliefs) to follow a person they loved to a foreign land, just as Rut would do hundreds of years later.

The Iggeret Shmuel writes that because the elders recognized a similarity between Rut and the two mothers, they blessed Boaz that "all that Rachel and Leah had built, Rut should also merit to build," i.e., the Jewish people. They blessed Boaz that Rut's entire life and legacy should echo Rachel and Leah's, not only her entry into the land and nation.

Here is an explanation for the first part of the blessing. Additionally, it's wonderful to tell a woman who has just become Jewish that she will hopefully become just like the matriarchs. But why does the Megillah mention Tamar? There is no reason for the blessing not to read "may your house be like the house of Peretz the son of Yehuda." And it seems strange to hope that the birth of Boaz and Rut's children will be like the birth of Yehuda and Tamar's children, who were conceived under very uncomfortable circumstances.

However, the commentators suggest that Tamar's actions are the very reason for her appearance here. The previous night, Rut had come to Boaz's threshing floor, laid at his feet, and asked him to fulfill his role as the family redeemer (and give her a child). Several commentators even propose that the elders mentioned Tamar to a worried Boaz as proof that Rut's actions were praiseworthy, and not shameful or improper. As the Gishmei Bracha writes:

“אשר ילדה תמר ליהודה”:
יתכן דהעלו עתה לפני בועז את זיכרון תמר ויהודה
כדי לחזק רוחו,
כי אולי צר לו על האופן הבלתי נימוסי שנתקרבה רות אליו.
זכרו לו את תמר, שגם היא נתקרבה ליהודה באופן בלתי נימוסי,
אך מפני שהיתה כוונתה לשמים היה זרעה קודש וברכה לבית ישראל,
וכן יעלה ברות.

“Whom Tamar bore to Yehuda”:

It's possible that [the witnesses and the elders] reminded Boaz of Tamar and Yehuda at this moment to encourage him [literally, to strengthen his spirit],

because perhaps he was concerned about the manner in which Rut had come to him. They reminded him of Tamar, who had also come to Yehuda in unusual/irreligious manner, but because she had had proper intentions, her descendants brought holiness and blessing to Israel, and so too should Rut's descendants.

Perhaps, as Ralbag writes, they saw a similarity between Tamar's and Rut's lives, just as they had seen a similarity between Rut's journey and Rachel and Leah's journey.

“ויהי ביתך כבית פרץ”
ברכוהו בברכת אביהם פרץ
שבא מתמר לסבה מתדמה לזו:
“*May your house be like the house of Peretz*”:
*They blessed him with the blessing of their father Peretz,
who had been born from Tamar for a similar reason.*

I'm not certain whether Ralbag means a similar situation or a similar reason when he uses the word סבה. I would like to interpret his interpretation as a sign that the people of Bet Lechem saw what Tamar and Rut both believed they had to do. In each case, a woman who was stuck, without a husband or child, took initiative. Tamar decided to stop waiting for the day Yehuda might marry her to Shelah, and Rut decided to go to the field to glean, and then carefully chose her words when she followed Naomi's advice and went to ask Boaz to marry her.

Rachel and Leah also took initiative; albeit in a less problematic manner. In addition to actively choosing to follow Yaacov, Rachel tried to become pregnant and Leah strove to build a relationship with her husband (and her call to Yaacov to come into her tent one night seems to have produced her three youngest children). Perhaps the people thought it appropriate to compare Rut to Rachel, Leah, and Tamar because they had created Bnei Yisrael through active decisions: Rachel and Leah left their home to allow Yaacov and his sons to start off in Canaan, and Tamar acted (and risked her life) to give birth to the David's ancestor, and Rut continued Peretz's line.

I do not believe that the point of Megillat Rut or the point of reading it on Shavuot is to portray active women in Jewish history, but I do believe that it's an important point to keep in mind. As we read the Megillah, and as we accept the Torah once again, we should follow the example of these four women and choose to take initiative, not only in marriage but in all aspects of life. Judaism is a religion which requires active participation, and we should be like Rut, who actively brought about her marriage to Boaz but also actively chose to leave the past behind and become part of our nation.

Dina Kritz (SBM '15) is an SAR Beit Midrash Fellow.