

## **Chapter Four: Text and Literary Context: Structuralist and Reader-Response Literary Approaches**

### **Introducing the Literary Approach**

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## Introducing the Literary Approach

In recent years it has become increasingly popular to treat the Tanakh as literature rather than as a document about ancient myth and history and therefore to use tools derived from literary analysis to examine any great classical literary text. Robert Alter was a pathbreaker here in his 1981 book "The Art of Biblical Narrative" using the tools of literary criticism and analysis which he had previously used, as a professor of literature, to treat works of fiction, but also identifying the unique literary canons of the Bible. The results were clearly illuminating and enabled insights from new angles of vision.

The whole idea of relating to the Tanakh as literature raises significant issues for both the historian and the believer in Divine revelation. Firstly, there is less place for historical analysis when using a literary approach. The historical process of producing the text becomes "beside the point" when looking literarily at the historically canonized classic.

A great historian of the Biblical text, Richard Friedman makes an interesting claim in his popular book "Who wrote the Bible" on the idea of the Documentary Hypothesis on the different strands of the text of the Torah. Together with all historical analysts of the Torah text, he sees the existing text as a product of numerous redactions, but in his conclusion he praises the final product and stresses that historical analysis should not prevent us from enjoying the finished text and relating to it essentially as a seamless garment, made of one cloth.

*We can read a page of the Bible and know that three or even four persons, all artists, all writing from their own experience, in their own historical moments, separated by centuries, contributed to composing that page. And, **at the same time**, we can read the page as it is, to enjoy the story, to learn from it, to find out how others interpreted it over the millennia. For those of us who read the Bible as literature, this new knowledge should bring a new acquaintance with the individuals who wrote it, a new path to evaluating their artistry and a new admiration for the book's final beauty and complexity.*

Friedman's view may be a little disingenuous. Literary analysis takes the text as a whole cloth and changes totally the angle of vision into the text from what might be called a more vertical point of view (referred to technically as diachronic - through time) to an essentially horizontal (synchronic) approach which ignores the dimension of time. From that point of view, the approach to the text becomes more akin to the traditional approach: from another point of view however, the approach is totally untraditional. It is to this that we now turn.

To a large degree, relating to the text as literature suspends theological belief in the Divine origin of the text. In the historical approach the questions of the authorship of the text and the way it was preserved tends to clash directly with the belief in a God given Sinaitic Torah. However Robert Alter and his school see the text in terms of its own inner world whose meaning is determined either by its internal inter-textual structure, by the relationship of parts to its whole, or by its production in a dialogue between the reader and the text presented. The analysis of text and character disregards issues of divine or human authorship. However the text was written, its analysis is the same. We may for convenience still talk of "the author" but in this method does not ask who in fact the authors are in their historical context.

Some religious readers may also find the bracketing of the Author problematic. Does the literary value of text without its Divine authority or its historical veracity still capture the importance of the Torah as Divine Revelation which is how it became a classic, a canon of our identity? The decision to use neutral or essentially secular set of tools and assumptions to examine a text considered holy is controversial and for many it must prove hard, even unthinkable. Whatever the overall opinion regarding the divinity of the text, **at the time of analysis**, the text is essentially desacralised, or at least, the divine aspect of the text and its truth claim is put to the side. On the other hand, it is possible to claim that the enterprise of minute literary analysis is not totally unlike the work of the classic masters of midrash and commentary wearing their philological hats. It assumes as does the midrash that "the Torah was given in the language of human beings." It assumes that every word is significant in conveying meaning that is trans-temporal, perennially truthful. It values the overall unity and intentionality of the Tanakh.

## #1 -Three Schools of Literary Approach to the Tanakh

Let us define for a moment what we mean by the phrase "the literary approach to the Tanakh". It assesses a text as a whole, as a finished product, and then applies the tools of literary analysis and literary criticism. But let us be a little more precise. We must differentiate between **three literary approaches**.<sup>1</sup> The differences are broad and each approach embodies within it a number of nuances, but for our purposes here, a division into three different categories will suffice.

### **A STRUCTURALIST APPROACH:**

As its name implies this approach analyses the structure of the text, trying to dig into the contours of the text to see how it has been organized. How has language been used? Are there key words that characterize sections of the text? What are the major themes and motifs of the text? Are there reflections of other parallel texts that the author has employed in order to "weight" the text? Can the whole text under discussion be seen as one text or does it need to be divided down into smaller units? If so, what, if anything, connects the smaller units to create the sense of the larger story? In what ways are stories introduced and concluded? What is the relation between the introduction and the conclusion?

Structuralism is also called **New Criticism**. It isolates the text and its meaning from the subjective analysis of the author and the reader. Historical relevance of the past to the present is rejected in favor of the search for an objective truth conveyed in the literary medium. The medium is the message and there are accepted tools of analysis and methods to determine a correct understanding of the text's message. Bible has its own unique stylistic tools as well as general Western ones depending on the genre. Meaning is a result of the dialectic of part and whole. Truth is not correspondence with a reality beyond the text - in history or philosophy or dogma or personal relevance and faith, but internally in the aesthetic coherence.

Nehama Leibowitz taught in the school of New Criticism along with Professor Meir Weiss, *Hamikra Kifshuto*. Therefore she always demanded students read the text on their own first in direct relation to the pshat without Rashi or other commentators. She required a survey reading of the whole chapter dividing it into scenes and then summarizing its overall theme with a title. Then meaning is the result of dialectic of whole and part both on the level of whole chapter and on level of the word and the whole sentence. Word order, word choice (including terms for the characters) were treated as intentional acts of the Torah that convey meaning. The form is the most significant medium of the message, hence her strong rejection of Abraham Ibn Ezra's principle that the same ideas can be conveyed with alternative words, just as the soul is independent of the body. There are for Nehama no superfluous words.

Nehama who rejected historical contextualization the Divine Torah chose New Criticism because it speaks of an eternal meaning of the classic without regard to authorial intention determined by historical context. The historical approach that emphasizes how different our era is from the era of the text is rejected by Nehama who finds that human nature is always the same and that truths about the Jewish people and the anti-Semitism they face are constants in history. Nehama who rejected the Documentary hypothesis preferred new criticism which finds internal coherence within the whole text as it comes to us. While Nehama found relevance in the Torah, she rejected an approach that sought relevance and that allowed multiple readings of the same text according

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to the subjective preferences of the interpreter. There is one best pshat reading and one must argue for one's own interpretation and explain why alternative ones must be rejected based on the objective literary structure of the Torah. The parshan begins not with his viewpoint but with the koshi of the text (*ma kasha l'Rashi?*)

## **Nehama's Method**

What does each detail add? What does each silence convey? What alternative behaviors did the character avoid? What typical modes of expression did the text neglect in favor of less standard ones?

The problem of reading texts is not primarily a fear that we will not understand but a fear lest we think too superficially that we have understood when we have missed the nuances and the kushiot. So we must defamiliarize ourselves especially with a story we think we already know.

Why do each commentator interpret differently and why didn't s/he take the path of the other commentator?

Although Nehama often seems to be classical New Criticism critique seeking an objective meaning of the pshat as taught by Meir Weiss, sometimes she speaks in favor of a Reader Response approach based on Ludwig Strauss whom she paraphrases: The completion of the artistic work is the reader drawing out the potential into the actual by absorbing it into his/her soul and giving life to the letter of the law. The text is like an architectural plan turned into a building by the builders, yet each building differs even if follows the same schematic model.

Nehama quotes the Netziv who calls Torah a *shira* = poem that is always ambiguous and pregnant with meanings that must be extracted.

Nehama's method was to empower her students to decide which interpretation they felt was most convincing. By giving them the right to choose among parshanim, the Torah would become beloved. Freedom of interpretation and love are inseparable. For Nehama even more than the right answer, the right pshat, the objective meaning of the text or even God's message and even more than the development of critical faculties to argue with reasons reason for the choosing a perush was the subjective and emotive process of choosing. Thus the Torah would become beloved of the students. The main point is to learn Torah, to search in it, to choose one perush and to reject others as long as the students involve themselves in its study from love (*la-asok b'divrei Torah*).

## **A READER RESPONSE APPROACH:**

In this approach, the author is assumed to have created the text with the express point of affecting the reader in certain ways. The reader brings a world of assumptions and associations to the text and the process of reading the text creates a series of interactions in the mind of the reader which is part of the creative process itself. The reader fills in the gaps in the text by

using assumptions drawn from his or her own world, and thus becomes an active participant in so-to-speak composing the story, turning the text from a skeletal scheme to a full-bodied creative product, just as performer turns Bach's notes into a living musical performance. Though a different reader-interpreter-performer will produce a different story for the same text.

In the narrative world of the Tanakh where language tends to be terse and spare, stories are told very often in what appears to be neutral language without announcing the villains or the heroes. (see Erich Auerbach, p.42) So the readers are asked to draw their own conclusions from the text. Analysis of the text often suggests that underneath the neutral language employed, the text has hinted and guided our construal of the narrative by the way the text is written. Thus, in this approach, the reader and his or her response become especially active participants in the process of reading a text. Whether responding to the author's hidden intentions or bringing a world of response and association, the reader is active in the creative process.

### **A PERSONALISATION APPROACH:**

In this approach, the central question of the reader is to find ways in which the text speaks existentially to him or her. Torah as a classic, as a revelatory religious book of guidance and as a national book of identity formation asks its readers to go on a search for personal meaning that speaks to the world and the world-view of the reader, regardless of what the historic author may have intended or even what the objective structure requires. This approach encourages multiple points of entry regarding the text, and is capable of taking small details in the text out of context and recontextualizing them into our living context as readers in search of meaning.

On one level this is a variant or an extension of the reader response approach mentioned above, but on another level this actually goes much further afield, and can thus be seen as a separate approach. The search for meaning recalls the rabbi writing a derasha/ sermon on the Torah reading of a particular week so that it will speak to the Bar Mitzvah family's special needs this week. In English literature teaching this is close to the Whole Language school that rejects the use of abstract analytic tools typical of the Structuralist /New Criticism approach. One responds to the text as whole from one's existential present. In this book we are treating it as a sufficiently different approach to warrant its own chapter and we will indeed deal with it in the next chapter.

## #2 -The Pros and Cons of Literary Approaches

What are the pedagogic pros and cons of this literary school of approaches to the text? Regarding Reader-Response and Personalization, the motivational advantages are clear because of its accessibility to the students interest in people. The Biblical stories are not presented as from a different world of language and values but as speaking to us and absorbing our own input and questions and imaginative gap-filling. So the narratives at least often become deeper and more engaging to the student. The characters become autonomous and three dimensional. Their motivations and states of mind can be minutely examined. As we strive to understand what is happening to them, we use our own experiences and insights and this serves to link us much more tightly to the characters and to the story itself. In a Biblical text whose narrative style is by definition terse and skeletal, a style moreover which tends to avoid the internal voices to which we are accustomed by omniscient narrators, there is great scope for the reader's imagination to fill in the gaps.

Personalization also helps students appreciate the classic midrashic texts. For the modern reader it has the advantage of skipping the classic minefield issue that confronts the reader of midrash. Did the Rabbis really believe the stories that they told derive from the Torah? When the Bible is read as literature and students discuss the actions and inner feelings of the characters, the question of pshat and of historic truth become less urgent. We accept the fact that we are trying to get "into" the story and understand possible scenarios. The scenarios are as persuasive as our understanding of human behavior can make them. But we accept that they are ultimately **our** scenarios. We can explore the text and engage the characters without acquiescing to rabbinic authority. The suppositions behind the reading are those of literature rather than history or theology.

Regarding the Structuralist approach the advantage is to bracket historical questions. Was there a miracle? It frees us from doing research into the ancient past, but it does offer us a new way to uncover hidden meaning embedded in the structures that as children reading the stories we missed. It provides an objective basis for making claims about the text's meaning which personalization does not. Not anything goes. Many students do not like the wide-open personalization approach and Structuralism is more their intellectual style.

On the side of the disadvantages, one must bring in the previously mentioned desacralisation. Many students want the Torah to be Divine or else it has no value. Many schools teach there is mitzvah to study Torah and yet the literary approach has no such notion. Historical truth of the Exodus cannot be "blown off" just by saying it teaches us about freedom as value. The broken myths cannot always be healed with aesthetics. All of the characters can be deeply examined in a literary approach. Nothing is "off limits". Characters can be, and are, criticized according to conventional human criteria. Theological and traditional suppositions about the virtues of certain characters are thrown aside and often overturned. We examine the characters not as untouchable larger than life archetypes, but as life size humans whose behavior is as virtuous or reprehensible as we are. Our revered patriarchs and matriarchs, for example, are revealed sometimes as petty or selfish, heartless and even evil. It can be argued that this is also the experience of traditional commentators who have not spared the same characters from reproach. But the literary approach tends to open up more opportunities for this kind of criticism since it brings the characters extremely close to the reader, slows down the analysis, and takes away any protective cloak of distance or tradition of the kind which, it may be argued has saved the reputation of more than one Biblical character.



Thus there are indeed pros and cons to the use of the literary approach. There is a price to be paid for the clear advantages that such a reading brings. It is up to each teacher to decide whether he or she is willing to pay that price. Let us now turn to some of the basic tools of the literary analyst in dealing with the Tanakhic text. We will begin our analysis with language and structure and will then go onto character although to a certain extent we will see that the two are intertwined.

### #3 - Modeling Structuralist and Reader-Response Teaching Techniques in a Prismatic Story: Hagar, Avram and Sarai (Genesis 16) <sup>2</sup>

The story that we will use prismatically in order to examine the literary approach is one of the most highly charged of the patriarchal stories in Bereshit, the first of the two stories of Avram, Sarai and Hagar (Gen. 16)<sup>3</sup>.

In our analysis of the story we will move between the structuralist approach and the reader response approach. We will open with a classic structuralist analysis focusing on the detailed use of language. We will then move towards reader response analyzing the development of characters and the gaps in the text. Finally we will return to the structuralist approach, this time focusing on the overall structure of the piece as a whole.

The story is a tight weave of changing relationships. Three characters are introduced and a problem emerges which will soon generate a destabilizing change in which the foreign servant turns into a pregnant second wife. In such a highly charged triangular relationship every move and hence every word of this sparse introduction adds nuances to the developing story. We will open our examination of the text by concentrating on the literary devices used by the author. Chief amongst these is the examination of the text to see how each detail adds something in a careful reading, so that the omission of details can actually deny us insights into the text. Rashi said אין מילה יתרה בתורה - "there is no superfluous word in the Torah" and we wish to agree with him, if from a different angle - a literary angle. We will use the same technique to analyze each of the three sentences but each verse will attempt to bring in new factors. After the third verse we will suggest an exercise that can be used several times in order to help students develop the sensitivity towards the text that we wish to examine.

#### "There are no Superfluous Words in the Torah" Examining the Words, Verse by Verse (Gen 16:1-2-3)

Let us take the first sentence of the text.

ושרי אשת אברם לא ילדה לו ולה שפחה מצרית ושמה הגר. (בראשית, ט"ז, א)

*Now Sarai, Avram's wife bore him no children and she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. (Gen.16:1)*

Technique: Let us examine the shortest possible way to write the essential information. It might be suggested that all of that information is contained if the sentence is shortened to

שרי לא ילדה ולה שפחה.

*Sarai bore no children and she had a maidservant.*

This would seem to include all the basic information such that the extra words that we have taken out appear superfluous.

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<sup>2</sup> We are deeply indebted to Ayala Paz for the first version of some of the analysis brought here.

<sup>3</sup> Since our aim here is to illustrate the technique, we will limit ourselves to Chapter 16 and not extend our analysis to the second story which appears in Chapter 21.

We have dropped the following pieces:

1. The opening ו, since it opens a new passage and therefore the "and" has no place.
2. The phrase אשת אברם, since we know that Sarai is Avram's wife.
3. The word לו applied to Avram. Is this not obvious? Who else would be relevant here?
4. The word מצרית: the origins of the girl seem irrelevant.
5. The final words וישמה הגר: Similarly her name seems irrelevant.

All these details could be seen to be superfluous with the basic story line being maintained in the shortened version of the sentence above. The pieces we have taken out could be seen to be local coloring that might add to the atmosphere of the story at best, but which have no real significance in the story line.

Let us now defend the inclusion of all these pieces by the author and suggest how each of these five "omissions" actually contributes something significant.

1. The opening ו serves to connect the new story with the previous section in which the promise of offspring is given again. The tension is heightened when the promise of offspring is juxtaposed by the use of the ו with the fact of Sarai's barrenness in her old age. The last time her barrenness was mentioned, (in chapter 11 v 30), there was no context to understand the meaning of the fact. Now, the barrenness comes against the background of the promise and serves to make us aware of her terrible frustration and confusion.

2. The phrase אשת אברם is not merely a descriptive phrase. Rather it serves to accentuate Sarai's standing and the source of her importance within the family. In a story which will deal largely with shifting issues of standing and class within the family of Avram, this emphasizes at the outset of the story, Sarai's positions within the family. It is against this reality that the tensions of the story will explode.

3. The significance of לו is once again relational. In a society in which a wife's status was largely dependent upon her child-bearing ability, the word לו emphasizes the tension between her barrenness and her role as wife to Avram. Possibly it comes to suggest the potential precariousness of her relationship with her husband, something that will become at the very least an under-the-surface theme in the story as it unfolds.

4 and 5. As is well known the Torah adds to a great deal of its social legislation the reasoning that the need to be considerate is linked back to the experience of slavery in Egypt. However we were treated, suggests the Torah, we know how to do it differently and we must bear our negative experience in mind as we turn it into a positive learning experience in our treatment of the unfortunate. And it is in addition noteworthy that typically, the stranger, the orphan and the widow are linked together as three vulnerable groups who can easily be abused. The stranger, the orphan and the widow - גר, יתום ואלמנה. The stranger - HaGer. The stranger - Hagar. The experts still argue about the probable etymology of the name Hagar. The majority opinion at the moment is that it means something like "wandering" or "fleeing". However, one can certainly suggest that whatever the possible roots of the name, its use here is extremely purposeful and is intended to

ring in the ears of its Hebrew listeners with all the associations of *Ger*, the stranger. We might suggest that the intention is to remind the reader/listener that when we talk about the woman called Hagar, we are talking about a stranger in the land, a גר, and a stranger, it must always be remembered has rights. In addition, since the very first thing we hear about Hagar after the opening noun שפחה is that she comes from Egypt, it could be suggested that this is an extra hint to the reader/listener that there is a theme of bad and good treatment that is about to be addressed, and so some serious listening needs to be done. Seen in this light, both her name and her origin can be suggested to have brought up a whole host of associations for the listener/reader and would have led him or her to bring a range of sensibilities to the listening or reading experience.

Thus all of these seemingly superfluous details can be seen to play a part in building up the tension in the story. In a dramatic story told in so few words, the teller would be aware of the need to give each detail maximum power in order to make a great impact on the audience.

### **Gen. 16:2 - "There are no Superfluous Words in the Torah"** **Examining the Words, Verse by Verse**

Let us look at the second verse of the story and see what we can learn from it.

(בראשית ט"ז, ב) ... ותאמר שרי אל אברם הנה נא עצרני ה' מלדת בא נא אל שפחתי אולי אבנה ממנה ...  
*And Sarai said to Avram, Look now, God has stopped me from giving birth. I pray you, come[  
in]to my maid-servant. Perhaps I will be built up through her.*

Let us start by stating Sarai's suggestion to Avram in its simplest and shortest form.

בא אל שפחתי ואבנה ממנה

*Come [in] to my maidservant and I will be built up through her.*

We have dropped the following pieces:

1. The opening words of Sarai, הנה נא, which don't appear to add anything.
2. The phrase עצרני ה' מלדת which appears declarative. It is clear that in the society of the Tanakh, responsibility would be seen as God's.
3. The words אולי and נא which appear merely decorative.

The basic unadorned sense of the sentence can be gained without the use of these words. Following the idea that all words have meaning, let us now examine what extra ideas we can understand from the use of these words.

1. The meaning of this phrase can be suggested by derivation from other scenes where the same formula is used. Look for example at Genesis 12:11 (Avram and Sarai in Egypt) or Shoftim 19:9 (the concubine in Gibeah) where exactly the same phrase is used. In all three contexts it comes before the description of a situation which demands a course of action. Therefore, it can be suggested that its literary use is to alert the audience to the fact that an action scene is about to develop which will push the story along. It is there to prepare the audience and cause anticipation.

2. The theological formula is interesting here in that it avoids any suggestion of blame on the part of one of the two partners. It can be suggested that in a story where the status of the characters is so important, and where Sarai is about to do something which unquestionably involves a fair amount of humiliation on her part, she would be anxious to avoid extra loss of status by the acceptance of responsibility. Similarly, since she is about to ask Avram to do an action which is to say the least controversial, but where his compliance is essential to the success of her plan, she would be careful not to throw any responsibility at him, thus causing potential resentment which could spoil the plan.

3. The words *אולי* and *נא* are interesting. They suggest a certain reserve or hesitation or perhaps subservience on Sarai's part. They clearly indicate that Sarai's approach to Avram is put in the most careful terms. It is a delicate matter and Sarai is clearly aware of the delicacy of the matter. She needs Avram's compliance and she sounds a little uncertain of herself, and here we see her at her most deferential.

### **Gen. 16:3 - "There are no Superfluous Words in the Torah"** **Examining the Words, Verse by Verse**

Let us turn now to verse three and examine the words there, performing the same exercise that we have already done in the case of the first two verses. It should be easier and clearer the third time around.

(בראשית ותקח שרי אשת אברם את הגר המצרית שפחתה מקץ עשר שנים לשבת אברם בארץ כנען ותתן אותה לאברם אישה לו לאשה. ... ט"ז, ג)

*And Sarai, Avram's wife took Hagar, her maid, the Egyptian, after Avram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband for a wife.*

Let us examine the shortest possible way to write the essential information. It might be suggested that all of that information is contained if the sentence is shortened to

ותקח שרי את הגר ותתן אותה לאברם

What has been taken out and why?

1. אשת אברם - we all ready know this and we have in any case been told the exact same information in verse one.
2. המצרית שפחתה - irrelevant. Adds nothing.
3. מקץ עשר שנים לשבת אברם בארץ כנען. Irrelevant.
4. אישה [איש שלה]. Once again repetition.
5. לאשה - is this not obvious?

The answer by now is clear. The details are there to emphasize a number of subtexts. The reasons that we suggest for their presence are:

1. To indicate the centrality of Sarai. Whatever happens next, Sarai will continue to be number one. This is important both in terms of status and law. We have already talked from Near East documents as to how such a procedure is common. The new wife does not displace the existing one.
2. Presumably one of two reasons. If the author is pro-Hagar, the phrase comes to remind the listeners to be sensitive to strangers as we suggested earlier. If the author's sympathies are with Sarai, the intention is probably to remind the listeners of Hagar's lowly status and thus strengthen the case for Sarai's right to do what she
3. Presumably to strengthen the effect of the idea how long the two have been waiting for the fulfillment of the promise. Maybe, in that light, it serves to explain and vindicate Sarai from any charge of acting badly. Also, the use of the name Avram serves to suggest perhaps that he is the significant factor in the passing down of the heritage.
4. The same as 1.
5. From a purely literary point of view, we can suggest that it might be there to focus extra attention on the relationship between Sarai and Hagar. *Both are now wives* (which might hint at later tension), or *both are now wives* (but Sarai is the real wife and "don't you forget it" - addressed both to the audience and to the character of Hagar)! The juxtaposition of the two words אישה and אשה at the end of the sentence makes it likely that the reason is the last one, since the similarity in the two words, especially for a listening audience rather than a reading one, would force attention to those very words.

## **#4 - Structuralist TECHNIQUE: "There are no Superfluous Words in the Torah"- The Sense Behind the Words**

This exercise can be used with any of the preceding three verses or any other verse in the narrative sections of the Torah.

- Write the whole sentence (in Hebrew) on the board, making sure that the meaning of all words is clear.
- Explain to the group that they are part of a project to write the Torah in half of its length. Out of the eleven words of the story, their challenge is to strike out at least five and a half! Singly or in pairs, ask all the students to write the sentence in the shortest possible terms without damaging the information that the sentence comes to convey.
- Together strike out any words that are seen to be superfluous and discuss whether all agree to the unnecessary character of the words chosen.
- When there is a list of words that have been chosen as relatively superfluous, turn the question around and tell them that they are part of a team that has been chosen to respond to the above initiative by justifying the suggested exclusions from the biblical text. Their task now, singly or in pairs, is to put forward potential reasons why those same omitted phrases are necessary.
- Pool the ideas, and supplement them if necessary with some of the ideas that we have brought above in the context of each of the three verses regarding the importance of the words and phrases.
- Finish by discussing the traditional idea that every word and letter counts. Does this make sense from a modern literary point of view too?

## #5 - Reader Response: Avram's Reaction (Gen. 16:2) CHOOSING A BEHAVIOR FROM ALTERNATIVES

To understand why the Torah or a character chose a particular reaction to a situation, it is helpful to multiply alternatives that the text could have said but did not. This technique in midrash halacha is called "*yachol lomar*" - "the text could have reasonably been formulated in the following way, but "*Talmud lomar*" - but it was formulated in another way to make a particular point.

*(And Avram listened to the voice of Sarai):* וישמע אברם לקול שרֵי.

Even in a biblical text that studiously avoids direct explanation of emotional feelings or inner voices regarding those feelings, this is short and strangely abrupt. Just four words to indicate what must have been a complex reaction by Avram. This is the sort of gap in the text that has allowed the midrashic masters to celebrate with a wealth of possibility. We will not enter into the world of midrash at this point, but in keeping with our literary approach, we will invite the students to suggest their own understandings of the text.

Firstly, let us consider the possible reactions that Avram could have chosen in the circumstances. Here are eleven possibilities.

1. To refuse politely.
2. To tell Sarai off for a most ridiculous idea.
3. To become angry with her either for her lack of faith or because the idea is humiliating to her or to both of them.
4. To comfort Sarai in the way that Elkana comforts Chana, saying that she has a good life and she should not be bothered by the absence of a child.
5. To strengthen Sarai's faith that God would provide her with a child.
6. To propose that the two of them turn to God and ask for a child for Sarai.
7. To suggest that the two of them should think about it some more and talk again tomorrow.
8. To accept the offer on principle but to delay or postpone acting on it.
9. To agree with the suggestion showing his pleasure.
10. To agree with the suggestion without showing any pleasure.
11. To agree with the suggestion while showing displeasure.



## Reader Response: TECHNIQUE – Many Ways to Fill the Gap: Character's Motivational Repertoire - A Reasonable Reaction?

- Before looking at the text, ask the students to suggest as many possible reactions as possible that Avram could have had to Sarai's offer. Add to the list that they come out with any extra suggestions from the above list that they have not mentioned.
- Let the class copy down all the suggestions, numbered, and then divide the class up into small groups. They have to eliminate the three least reasonable suggestions in their opinion, and then explain their choices to the entire group. Let them do the exercise twice, each time taking three items off the list (if the total number of items is eleven - if it is more, take off enough items to take the total number down to five).
- Take all the least popular or reasonable items off the list (i.e. those that have been chosen a number of times in the two rounds) and leave a group of no more than five or six items on the board. These represent the most likely or reasonable reactions of Avram in the opinion of the group.
- Now divide the class up into groups according to the number of reactions that are left. Give each group one of the reactions. Let each group create a dramatic sketch which has the three characters involved in showing their particular reaction, and let them perform them one after another.
- Now go to the text וישמע אברם לקול שרי. Ask the students why they think the description in the text is so short. This gives an opportunity to explain that the Torah rarely shows emotion or inner feeling. Explain that this gives us an opportunity to go underneath the text and think things out for ourselves.
- Ask them which possibilities from the original list are now left open after they know that Avram has listened to Sarai's voice in the text? (9 or 10 in our list with a possible 8 or 11). Are these the same ones that the group chose?
- Now discuss: looking at the four words of the text, and thinking of their understanding of the situation, which of these last remaining possibilities do they think most fits the situation as it is reported. Why?

## Reader Response: Emotional Dynamics and Conflicting Points of View – Analysis: Phrase by Phrase

The Tanakh often refrains from inserting the omniscient narrator's explicit moral judgment on who is at fault. Rather each character's point of view is implied and as readers we must try to see things from their point of view. Then and only then will communication and empathy and perhaps reconciliation be possible.

### Hagar Enters and the Plot Thickens ( Gen. 16: 4-6)

Let us now continue to analyze a little more deeply, the next three verses of the story, using now not the word by word analysis that we employed in the first three verses, but an analysis of the emotional dynamics that are suggested when we do a slow and deep reading of the text. We will follow this with an exercise that attempts to access some of these dynamics for the student.

ויבא אל הגר ותהר ותרא כי הרתה ותקל גבירתה בעיניה. ותאמר שרי אל אברם, חמסי עליך, אנכי נתתי שפחתי בחיקך ותרא כי הרתה ואקל (בראשית ט"ז), בעיניה. ישפט ה' ביני וביניך. ויאמר אברם אל שרי, הנה שפחתך בידך, עשי לה הטוב בעיניך. ותענה שרי ותברכה מפניה. ... (1-7)

*And he went into Hagar and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes. And Sarai said to Avram, you are responsible for my suffering: I have given my maid into your lap and when she saw that she had conceived I was despised in her eyes. May the Lord judge between me and you. But Avram said to Sarai, look, your maid is in your hand, do with her as you think best. And when Sarai mistreated her she fled from her.*

These three verses are full of some extremely highly charged emotional dialogue between the three characters. Some of the dialogue surfaces in words and phrases spoken by one character to another but most of it is indicated in the form of dynamic tensions below the surface. At almost every turn, the passions and feelings between the characters shift and flow and we, the listeners or readers are tossed this way and that from phrase to phrase in a maelstrom of feeling till we get to the concluding action of this part with Hagar's escape at the end of verse six. Here are some suggestions regarding the dynamics that lie underneath the surface of these charged moments.

#### 1. *And he went in to Hagar and she conceived.*

This once again is described in the tersest phrase. This central occurrence, around which the whole story hinges is told in such brevity that we are tempted to think that the occurrence was of interest to the narrator mainly because it provided the opportunity to indicate the shifts in relationships that lay at the heart of this story.

For Sarai, this meant victory, but inside of her she must have been aware that on one level at least, it indicated her failure and her downfall as a woman. She had failed where another woman had succeeded, and despite the fact that things had gone according to plan, she must have felt a measure of humiliation especially at the apparent ease of the conception. What woman would be able to withstand such feelings? This, we might suggest, hurt Sarai in her most vulnerable place as a woman. In a society where, as we indicated earlier, a woman's value was largely measured by her ability to bring children, this must in one way be a bitter blow. But think of the ambivalence. Sarai wanted the child. The price was agreeing to let her husband sleep with another woman. She presumably would not want to see a protracted

relationship developing over years with them sleeping together without a resulting pregnancy, but on the other hand, did it have to come quite so soon?

2. *Her mistress was despised in her eyes.*

Sarai's vulnerability must have been stretched to the limit by the pregnancy itself, but the worst of her fears must have been realized when Hagar began to flaunt her own womanly superiority. She, the lowly slave girl, a mere vessel in the eyes of her mistress, had succeeded very quickly where Sarai had failed for years. Can we blame Hagar for reacting like this? Remember that Sarai had not even pronounced her name when giving her to Avram. A slave girl far from her Egyptian home, she had suffered loneliness, isolation from her family and friends and, it seems, humiliation at the hands of her mistress. Now, unbelievably, a chance had presented itself to revenge herself on that same mistress, to hit her in the one spot where Hagar, as a woman would know that Sarai was most vulnerable. Can we blame her for humiliating Sarai?

The sensitivity and potential problematics of the situation were clear. We have mentioned earlier the more or less exact same problem after the birth being foreseen in an impersonal law in the Hammurabi code.

*If a man marries a priestess [who is not allowed to have children] and she gave a female slave to her husband and she [the slave] has then borne children, if later that female slave has claimed equality with her mistress because she has borne children, her mistress may not sell her, but she may mark her with the slave mark and count her among the slaves. If she did not bear children, her mistress may sell her.*

A society that allows and normalizes the idea of the surrogate mother, must be aware of the chance that explosive emotions will rise to the surface at the time of pregnancy and birth. We have examples of this in today's world. Agreements between surrogate mother and the couple with whom the agreement has been made are broken because of the emotional power of birth and what it does to all of the partners. And in the ancient world, as here, when one of the partners to the agreement is a slave and the other her mistress, how could it not be potentially problematic?

3. *You are responsible for my suffering.*

The response of Sarai breaks out at Avram. Why? Maybe because as the husband of Hagar, he has now the legal responsibility and control over her. Maybe in elevating Hagar to the status of wife, Sarai has inadvertently put her out of reach. Hagar is no longer in her power. Or maybe, she now suspects Avram of having sexually enjoyed his time with Hagar (the word *היק* with its sexual connotations might suggest something of the sort), and she sees this as a breach of his loyalty to her and her unwritten bargain with him. Or possibly, in her blind frustration she lashes out at the person with whom this controlled woman is most comfortable at expressing her emotions for many years. Maybe a woman who keeps herself in check all the time before the world - unlike Rachel for example - explodes, when she needs to, only in the safest place, before her husband, where it will not necessarily exact too high a price.

4. *Do with her as you think best.*

How did Abram respond to Sarai's outburst towards him? We do not know, but these are the next words that he utters in the text. It is a complete non sequitur. She has not asked

him to do anything. She has simply vented her frustration. The natural thing for him to do in some way or another would be to respond to her outburst. Either he could try and assuage her pain (a la Elkanah) or he could protest and rebut her, or put her in her place. But he does none of these things. He simply tells her to do whatever she wants and seemingly washes his hands of the whole affair! And it is not as though he has not been involved until now. He has been central to the creation of the emotional turmoil and now he appears to take no responsibility for the situation that has developed.

Perhaps this is evidence of the typical man from Mars who responds to an emotional plea by suggesting a plan of action rather than spending time empathizing with the pain before proceeding onwards. But if so, the action that he suggests is such that it very much gets him off the hook of potential involvement in an unpleasant scene. He could have spoken to Hagar himself. Indeed he is the ideal intercessor to explain one woman's feelings to another. Or perhaps there is something dislocated in this relationship. This is the second time that he has not responded as we might have expected an involved and committed family man to have responded. This Avram is passive and non-responsive. He does not want involvement or at least that is what appears from his reactions in the story. Maybe he doesn't care. Maybe he is so involved in his own spiritual experiments that he has not time for the apparent trivialities of human relationships. Maybe he believes in strict spheres of influence and he has no wish or intention to get involved with mere domestic quarrels. Or maybe there is another possibility. Sarai is the power in the relationship and he basically goes ahead with whatever she wants. That interpretation sounds unlikely in the light of the Akedah story, but it cannot be totally discounted.

5. *Sarai mistreated her.*

Has Avram failed Sarai by not coming to her aid more directly, or has he played right into her hands? Is the sole responsibility that she now has for deciding on the outcome, the situation she would choose or would she prefer to be working it out together with Avram, and perhaps through Avram. From one point of view, she is probably happy. She has gained her control back over the situation. Legally she had been restricted since Hagar had become Avram's wife and thus his responsibility. Now that obstacle, at least, has been removed. We have suggested previously that she is a woman who likes to be - or perhaps needs to be in control. She is usually not ruled by her emotions but is free coolly to plan a strategy for living. From that point of view she is back on home turf. On the other hand, this is seemingly a new situation. She is in control but not in the normal situation where she governs her own feelings. Here, her feelings are in control of her, and yet she has the power to pull the strings and to make decisions, not just for herself but for the woman she now presumably hates.

Should she have mistreated Hagar? The word *וַתַּעַב* is not particularly clear. It seems that it can cover a continuum of meanings. If "mistreat" is intended, it sounds on the face of it, mild enough. If it is a meaning closer to "torture", then a quite different meaning is implied. Another thing: was it mistreatment in the subjective interpretation of Hagar (which could include simply treating her as she had been treated previously, disregarding her temporary higher status) or was it objective treatment according to anyone's standards, in the which case it must have been a double blow for the girl who had presumably seen herself rising to high station?

Can we understand the "mistreatment"? In many ways, perhaps, yes. Humiliation, insult, and power make a heady brew indeed and many good and even saintly people have succumbed to

their worst sides in far less difficult circumstances. Sarai has been humiliated in her most vulnerable place by a young woman (a girl?) over whom, up till recently, she had had absolute rights and absolute control. She is old and perhaps wants nothing more than to retain her favoured status in Avram's family until her death. Now all this is threatened. She is undone by the plan and the person that was meant to build her up (אבנה ממנה).

Without knowing the precise details of ותענה, it is difficult to evaluate the story here. What is clear is that we have a tangle of characters living at the top of their emotions.

6. *She fled from her.*

And it could be that Sarai was not upset about it. It could be, in fact, that in greater control than we have supposed up till now, Sarai deliberately taunts Hagar to breaking-point. After all, what woman wants to have her rival, who reminds her of her deepest humiliation, taunting her continually through her very presence, if not through more active means? Hagar's escape might well have suited Sarai very well.

In theory at least, it must have suited Hagar as well. She had had her taste of relative freedom in her new wifely status and now she was, in what is perhaps the best scenario from her point of view, back to her previous status. That probably was unbearable for now. Tasks which she had done perhaps for years, words that she had simply accepted as her lot in life, now seemed unbearable. She had seen her promised land and been unable to step inside and enjoy it.

It was an extreme act to escape, of course, and dangerous too. But maybe for Hagar it was an attempt to regain the freedom that she had lost? Maybe it was a desperate bid to stop her future slipping through her hands? Maybe it was a chance to take control of her own destiny. Maybe there are even parallels between this act and Sarai's desperate act at the beginning of the story. Two cases of women who sense something they value slipping away and decide on extreme action to help them retain or regain what it is they fear to lose, or what they hope to get back?

## TECHNIQUE: Emotional Dynamics

- Read through the three verses all together, to understand the basic narrative structure.
- Divide the class up into three sections, a Hagar section, a Sarai section and an Avram section. The whole class is given the six phrases and asked to do two things by themselves. Firstly, each person must try to give some kind of general analysis regarding what is happening at each of these pregnant moments (on the lines above but shorter). Secondly, each person has to write a first person piece reflecting their character's feelings at each one of the six emotional "stations" mentioned.
- Now in class, you should take the moments one by one (if there are too many you can leave one or more out totally or partially) and start by analyzing the moment emotionally with the help of the third person accounts. Then after a specific moment has been analyzed and discussed, divide the class into threes (the same three people together each time) with one representative for each character. Let each person explain to the other two people in the sub group, the emotional position of their character at each of these major junctures, and when they have all heard the position, they must prepare a "frozen tableau" representing the moment.
- The frozen tableau should work as follows. They have to range themselves into a scene which represents the phrase but they are not meant to represent the moment physically but rather emotionally. In other words they are to represent the characters' relationship to each other at the moment in question. For example, in the first moment (*And he went in to Hagar and she conceived*) there is no simulation of the act of love but some kind of a statue in which presumably, in some way, Hagar and Avram stand together and Sarai is locked out of all intimacy or communication. Similarly, in the last moment (*She fled from her*), the idea is not to show a person physically fleeing but to show where each character stands towards the others in the moment. Sarai might be represented pushing Hagar away with one hand and restraining Avram from intervening with the other. Or maybe Avram is disinterested and has turned his back on the whole affair. This is a difficult technique to understand since it is emotional drama rather than physical drama representing an actual scene but it can be very rewarding since the students really have to analyze what they think is happening emotionally and find a creative way of representing it.
- When they have prepared their tableaux, each trio presents in turn, showing their statue with each figure explaining his or her physical position in the statue and what feelings it represents.
- A good and valuable thing to do, if the environment is supportive, is to ask at the end of each scene, whether any of the class have ever felt like the characters in the scene. One person relating to scene one, for example, might recall a moment like Hagar when she or he was suddenly lifted up into the centre of attention after years of feeling unwelcome, (Hagar) while another remembers a moment where he or she, who had been very much at the centre, suddenly felt left out and unwelcome, losing social status (Sarai).
- When you have done as many scenes as you want, close the activity with some reflections on the intensity of the piece, and how so much emotion was present in a

scene told briefly in only three verses! Perhaps suggest that reading the Tanakh means slowing down one's normal pace of reading by several thousand per cent! Maybe one can suggest that the prose of the Tanakh needs to be read like we normally read a poem!

## #6 - Structuralist Scenic View: A Playwright's Analysis

Let us now expand our horizons by continuing to the next part of the chapter. The chapter is composed of two episodes which are dovetailed together. The first part takes the story up to Hagar's flight, while verses seven to fourteen (out of the sixteen in the chapter) tell the story of Hagar's desert encounter with the angel.

As we move into the second part of the story we will start to examine the overall structure of the chapter from a literary point of view, adding in exercises that can help the students understand the idea of overall literary structure in a given piece of text.

### Case Study: Changing scenes, changing characters in Gen. 16: 7-14

*And an angel of the Lord found her by a fountain in the wilderness, by the fountain on the way to Shur. And he said, Hagar, Sarai's maid, where did you come from? And where will you go to? And she said, I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai. And the angel of the Lord said to her, Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her hand. And the angel of the Lord said to her, I will multiply your seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude. And the angel of the Lord said to her, Behold, you are with child, and shall bear a son, and shall call his name Ishmael because the Lord has heard your affliction. And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren. And she called the name of the Lord that spoke to her, You God see me: for she said, Have I also here looked after him that sees me? Therefore the well was called Be'er-Lahay-Ro'i: behold, it is between Qadesh and Bered.*

Genesis 16, 7-14

We now come to the second of the two narrative plot scenes, which constitutes the continuation of the story but in a very different way, and with a change of cast. If the first part of the story was populated by Sarai, Avram and a silent and fairly passive Hagar, in the second part, Hagar is an active participant together with an angel, a divine representative of God. The scene is also changed. Avram and Sarai's house and household was the location of the first scenes. Here, the location becomes the desert, the location so favored by the Tanakh for revelations and divine interventions.

Despite the difference between the two parts of the story, the connections between the two parts are clear. We see this both in terms of theme and language. Let us point out a number of connections between the two parts.

1. It will be seen that a major and significant word in the early dialogue between Hagar and the angel is the word גבירה used by Hagar in verse 8 and by the angel in verse 9. It is an important word because it defines the legal relationship of the main characters (as opposed to the emotional relationship). It appeared in an equally significant place (verse 4) in the first part of the story. All three places relate to the same basic issue, the tension between that legal relationship and the emotional relationship (tension, resentment, inferiority, superiority) that plays havoc with the legal one. There is a difference in context, however. If in the first part, despite the tension, the relationship has been basically accepted by both sides, here in part two, the relationship has been contested and ultimately thrown over



by Hagar's escape. The angel comes to restore the original relationship but this needs to be done because the equilibrium of the initial relationship has been destroyed.

2. The root-word שמע appears in both parts. In verse 2, וישמע אברם לקול שרי and in verse 11, there is a great emphasis on the same root with reference to the name Ishmael, since, we are told, כי שמע ה' אל עניך. In both cases, there is a similarity of context. The verb implies action as response to the words of a desperate woman. There is however, once again, a contrast between the two uses. Avram responds, but passively. He agrees, but does nothing. His action is merely in his not dismissing the idea and allowing Sarai to remain the active one as she puts her plan into practice. God's response is active. God's representative unfolds the plan.

3. The root-word ענה appears both in verse 6, ותענה שרי and verse 9, והתעני תחת ידיה. Both refer to the hardships of the situation of Hagar at the hands of Sarai. Whereas in the first instance, we understand the logic of Hagar's flight, here, we fail to understand, at least at first glance, the divine justification of that hardship. Nevertheless, the parallel is clear. However, the contrast between the two situations is also clear. Hagar, as an independent being, albeit legally still the property of Sarai, is no longer under the control of Sarai. She must be made or persuaded to return. She will not do it of her own volition. She is out of Sarai's power.

4. The word ותהר appears in verse 4 and once again, as הרה in verse 11. But the difference in the two uses is clear. In the first part of the story, Hagar appears as anonymous, passive and secondary. In the second part of the story, she has gained individuality and significance in her own right. Thus, if in the first part, the word appears without any significance to Hagar. There is no detail. The significance is clearly regarding Avram and Sarai. In the second instance, however, there is great significance for Hagar the woman, and a whole discussion ensues regarding the name of the child and the results of the birth.

5. In the first section, in verse 6, Sarai requests divine intervention ישפוט ה' ביני וביניך. God should clarify who is in the right. God should take Sarai's side and vindicate her, legitimizing her position. That indeed occurs in the second part of the story. The angel takes Sarai's side in the specific dispute, informing Hagar that she should go back. However, this is done in a way which while formally justifying Sarai, in fact uses a subtle form of irony to make it clear that things are not so simple. Hagar is promised a great future and receives a prophecy about her son. She is the one who has received the divine presence. It is as if the idea is that legally Sarai is correct but Hagar is the one who is honored.

Thus we see clearly that the second part of the story is from one point of view the direct continuation of the story. However, the relationships have all changed. Hagar has moved on. Her escape has moved her into a different position. She is now at the centre of the action, a full individual rather than the insignificant passive shadow figure that moved through the first part of the story. It's as if the text is saying: The same words might be used in both parts of the story, but the characters have changed. In part one, Sarai is active and Hagar passive. Now the opposite is true. Hagar is empowered. She is an individual. She is in charge of her own decisions.

## An Integrated Structure: Chapter 16 - One Story or Two?

- Let the students read the second part of the story, down to the end of verse fourteen. Tell them that there are scholars (there are) that believe that this second part of the story was not originally part of the story but that somehow it got stuck on to the "real story" as a Hagar tradition whose origin is the much more developed God, Hagar and desert story that appears in chapter 21. Their task is to try and prove that the story was composed as one integrated story, and that it needs to be read as one unit. Tell them that their work-tool is language.
- Discuss, all together, how words and language might help to "prove" the unity of the story. If the idea does not come from them, bring them towards the idea that texts have "key words" and that if these significant words appear throughout a story, it seems likely that the story was created as one unit. Remind them of what they have already learned earlier in the unit, namely that narrative language in the Tanakh is terse and very deliberate. Words used to tell a story in the original Hebrew, are not accidental or random. They are carefully chosen by master(ful) narrators or storytellers
- They need to look very carefully for words that appear in the two parts of the story and examine their context and use, comparing and contrasting these two textual characteristic.
- When they have done this, write up their conclusions and ask whether, in their opinion, the evidence is for one integrated story or one story with an almost random second part, fitted on by a later editor who had a Hagar tradition that needed to be placed somewhere.
- After doing this (presumably emphasizing the comparisons and similarities rather than the contrasts - the former are much easier to see), examine the contrasts as we have suggested them in the five points above. Examine how the story has developed and the characters shifted in the emphasis which the text gives them.
- Perhaps, in conclusion, ask the students to take the three central human characters and to try and represent in visual form, how each one has developed, positively or negatively, as the story has progressed to this point.

## Analyzing an Integrated Structure: Chapter 16 - One Story or Two?

Having read through the whole story and suggested that it needs to be seen as one literary unit, let us turn to the underlying structure of the whole chapter. We will suggest that there is an artistic structure that the author of the text has created which underlies the entire chapter. Let us enter by examining literary structure in general.

### THE FIRST STORY: PART TWO: Genesis 16: 7-16

One of the important skills it is good to develop is an understanding of the underlying structure of a narrative text. The assumption is that underlying each different unit or major episode of text, (usually a chapter or part of a chapter), there is an internal structure that can aid the student to study that text. There are some who prefer to examine this at the very beginning of a chapter but it is - despite being helpful and important - relatively dry and technical so it seems to us worthwhile getting students into the text before doing this analysis.

The usual division of a narrative text unit into sub-units, is relatively standard. It is composed of three parts:

1. Introduction or exposition. The role of this piece is to set the scene, introduce the characters and perhaps to indicate the theme before the action is set in motion. It sets the framework for the plot that is about to unfold. It is short.
2. The scenes of the plot. This part is usually divided into a number of different sections, separated off from each other, by shifts in location, character or occasionally genre (verse instead of prose etc.). This section represents the bulk of the text.
3. The summary. The role of this piece is to close the whole unit after the plot has drawn to a close, and to relate any other information that might be needed that comes after the end of the action, in order to understand the significance of what has been related up till now. Once again, this piece is short.

Since the central part represents the majority of the text and might be divided up into a number of constituent units, a text unit might be divided up into anything between three and five or six parts or even more. Let us now proceed to our chapter.

Our chapter represents one narrative unit. The previous chapter in Bereshit dealt with the "covenant of the pieces" and the next chapter deals with circumcision, so it is easy to identify it as a separate unit. Even a fairly cursory glance will reveal the internal division of the chapter according to the above threefold division.

1. Exposition. Verse one perfectly fills this role. It introduces us to the three human characters of the story and indicates the main theme - Sarai's barren status.
2. The central part runs from verse two to verse fourteen. This is the plot. The characters propel the action. However, if we go further and look at internal divisions, we see that there is indeed an internal division between two more or less equal scenes, differentiated from each other by characters and setting. We should note at this point, that very often although scenes can be differentiated from one another by such clear

objective criteria as characters and setting, very often there is a subtle internal dynamic that suggests that more than plot and character has changed between scene and scene. Characters or situations often develop from scene to scene quite subtly. We will see this later in our internal examination of the different scenes. For the moment, we concentrate on the more formal objective divisions. The point of division between scenes here is clearly at the end of verse six. At that point, both characters and setting change.

3. Summary. Verses fifteen and sixteen. This is, once again, straightforward. The characters have stopped their interaction. The narrator gives us some extra information felt to be significant and tidies up the story for us, before proceeding on to another chapter and another unit.

## Structuralist Exercise: Scenic Structure of a Short Story

- Explain the idea of narrative structure and organization of a text. Ask the students to read the whole chapter and to divide the chapter into its constituent units, explaining their division and showing the criteria for their choices, indicating too, the purpose of each of the three kinds of unit in reference to this specific chapter.
- To make it a little more interesting and memorable, suggest to the students that they have to make up a four line verse indicating the role and substance of each part. It could be in a given style, for example, mock Shakespearian.

For instance:

*Exposition's my name and to open's my fate,  
I present all the characters as if on a plate,  
There's Avram, Sarai, Hagar too  
About to present their devious plot to you!*

### Case Study of Sub-dividing

So far we have talked about the structure of a chapter or unit. Sometimes, however, the structure can be broken up even more and such is the case with the first of our two plot scenes, namely verses two to six. Once again, we can see the sub-division of a piece in a logical and coherent way, which works to move the plot along in a structured manner. It should be noted that it is not always possible to do this, but where it can be done, as here, it provides for a most interesting examination.

There are five pieces in this scene. The first two pieces and the last two pieces are each composed of two parts, a particular action and the reaction to that action. The third piece, however, represents a turning point in the scene which separates the first two verses from the last two. We suggest it looks like this.

#### Scene one

This represents the action. ותאמר שרי אל אברם הנה נא עצרני ה' מלדת בא נא אל שפחתי אולי אבנה ממנה . . .

This represents the reaction. וישמע אברם לקול שרי

#### scene two

(בראשית ותקח שרי אשת אברם את הגר המצרית שפחתה מקץ עשר שנים לשבת אברם בארץ כנען ותתן אותה לאברם אישה לו לאשה. . . ט"ז, ג)

This represents the action.

This represents the reaction. ויבא אל הגר ותהר

#### Scene three

This represents the turning point!

#### Scene four

This ותאמר שרי אל אברם, המסי עליך, אנכי נתתי שפחתי בחיקך ותרא כי הרתה ואקל בעיניה. ישפט ה' ביני וביניך. represents the action.

This ויאמר אברם אל שרי, הנה שפחתך בידך, עשי לה הטוב בעיניך. represents the reaction.

#### Scene five

This ותענה שרי represents the action.

This ותברח מפניה. represents the reaction.

Thus we see a very neat and symmetrical structure in the whole passage. Two action/ reaction pieces of action lie on both sides of the central turning point. Moreover there are additional parallels in the scene. The language of the first and the fourth piece is similar (the opening is identical). Both of these pieces represent a conversation between Avram and Sarai, which the latter initiates. Pieces two and four are also parallel, not in terms of language but in terms of theme. Both of these pieces are action pieces in which Sarai does something to Hagar.

However there is a major difference between the first two pieces and the last two pieces. The turning point has created an imbalance. The tone of Sarai, the consistent factor throughout the scene as a whole, changes strongly. In the first part her speech and action are measured and controlled, proceeding according to a pre-arranged plan. After the turning point, the control that she has exhibited vanishes. She behaves emotionally and impulsively. The plan has gone horribly wrong (in the turning point sentence).

We suggest here that we see a beautifully controlled and structured narrative scene in which the narrator has worked very carefully to create a miniature masterpiece of a scene. It is possible to miss the beautiful symmetry and balance on the one hand, and the development and imbalance on the other. But a careful examination can reveal true artistry at work. Examination of structure can definitely increase appreciation for the work in question.

#### EXERCISE: Searching for Sub-Structure!

- Explain to the students that there are scenes that divide up into neatly structured pieces, put together as if by a master craftsman. You are going to give them such a scene and they have to work out the structure underneath the text. Give them verses two to six, in Hebrew and English.
- To start with simply ask them to examine the text in pairs, and to see if they can find the logical structure underneath. If they cannot do it or they cannot understand the idea of structure or find it, tell them that the verses divide up into five subsections, not necessarily according to the idea of one verse per piece.
- Take their findings and respond to them. If no-one has found the structure suggested above, present it and go through the piece explaining how the structure underlies the piece and how the central piece in verse 4, ותרא כי הרתה ותקל גבירתה בעיניה, changes the balance of the whole scene.

- Ask them what they think of the analysis and how this influences their opinion of the writing of the scene.

## **Polyphonic Torah**

The fugue of Bach reflects a unique music sensitivity that plays two melodies at the same time that somehow harmonize but also diverge. Then Bach analyzes each part of the melody or "subject" as musical historians call it doing variations on the same melody at different pitches and voices (alto, soprano etc). However many listeners from different era have hard time hearing both melodies simultaneously, so good teacher must help them hear each line separately and then hear them in relationship.

In the a similar way many contemporary TV shows have simultaneous storylines as when two different detectives are pursuing two different cases and also their private lives have their own stories. When well planned, the stories all relate to one another around a theme like for example, parental responsibility for troubled child or miscommunication between spouses or infidelity. Each plays on a different variation of the themes and sometimes the detective is consciously processing his own private life issues while watching the same played out violently in his case.

So too Biblical stories as Yair Zakovitch shows can be understood in complex allusions to one another like David –Batsheva and David- Avigail or Leah-Rachel and Hannah-Penina. Or Lech L'cha of Gene 12 and Lech l'cha of Gen 22 or akedat Yishmael of Gen 21 and Akedat Yitzchak of Gen 22. Or parable of Nathan and David-Batsheva. Or Cain-Abel compared to Esav-Yaacov and Joseph and brothers.

The two parallel plots interpret one another both through similarities and differences. This keeps the mind of reader in full engagement trying to work the complex juxtaposition and their meanings.

## Structuralist Narrative Analysis: Exposition and Summary: Opening and Closing the Story

We have now come to the end of the story and before we leave it we suggest that we can squeeze further insights about the author's intentions by focusing on the exposition and the summary of the story. We will see here how the two parts relate to each other and illuminate the story and its themes.

As mentioned, the exposition is contained in verse one.

ושרי אשת אברם לא ילדה לו ולה שפחה מצרית ושמה הגר. (בראשית, ט"ז, א)

*Now Sarai, Avram's wife bore him no children and she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar.*

The summary is contained in verses 15 and 16.

*And Hagar bore Avram a son and Avram called his son's name, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. And Avram was eighty six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Avram.*

A comparison between the two verses brings forth a number of perspectives that the verses themselves, taken independently, do not yield. Separately, functioning as the opening and closing of the story, they give us information regarding the characters that is significant and important for understanding the story. However, when brought into a relationship with each other, the verses in their similarities and contrasts reveal fresh perspectives on what the story is telling us. We mention three points here.

1. The opening *Sarai, Avram's wife bore him no children* and the closing *Hagar bore Avram a son* both emphasize that the story is really about Avram and the issue of childbirth. Both women and their childbirth issues are related to Avram. In three of the four places where Avram is mentioned in the summary, the relationship with his son Ishmael is emphasized.
2. The opening *Sarai, Avram's wife bore him no children* shows us the problem that informs the whole story. The closing *Hagar bore Avram a son* shows that the problem has been solved. We see that the problem has been solved and the story's circle has now been closed.
3. Sarai is at the centre of the opening sentence and will remain at the centre till near the end of the story. But it is Hagar who is mentioned three times in the summary. Sarai is not mentioned at all. From her point of view it is a humiliating end to the story and she does not even merit a mention despite the fact that the whole thing stems from her initiative. Very graphically, the absence of Sarai from the summary of the story shows how the events have marginalized her. Her fears appear to have been realized. She has lost her position at the centre of the family. The very step which we have suggested was put into motion in order to ensure her continued centrality in the family, has, in fact, backfired.

### EXERCISE: Opening and Closing - Connecting Exposition and Summary



- Ask the students to write down what they think the aims of the exposition and the summary are. It seems certain that they will mention the two in isolation from each other. Make a full list of the things that they mention.
- Now suggest that there is another aim that can only be arrived at when they bring the two parts together and place them in relationship one to the other. Ask them to do so and to make a list of what they find when they compare and contrast the two parts with each other.
- Make a list of the points that they find. Ask them what it tells them about the meaning of the story. What is the story really about? What has happened to the story's three characters? How are they situated at the beginning and the end of the story? What does this tell us about what is happening to the characters in the story? Who is going up and who is going down?

## #7 - Structuralist - Type Scenes: Parallel Stories in Same Genre: The Power of Association

There is another subject that is worth examining in the current context, namely the use of parallel stories from the Torah or Tanakh the comparison of which can shed extra light on specific stories that are being examined. Sometimes, the use of motifs or language from other places in the Torah or the Tanakh can inject extra power into a specific text by borrowing the power of the parallel text and using it to tell a specific story in a way which will affect the readers who will remember the similar situation from the other story or stories. Examining parallels can reveal some of the craft of the author and can make us aware of these "coded" moments. This cannot be done with regard to every story, but it can often be done and it is worth "thinking outside the box" in this way to see if there are indeed parallel scenes, stories or uses of language that can help further illuminate the text under discussion.

The significance of these parallel scenes has been long debated by textual scholars. Historians of the text have suggested the idea that the recurrence of parallel scenes is often due to their origin in multiple sources which have often handed down different versions of the same scene. Whatever the virtues of such a thesis, literary scholars of the text have looked at the same phenomena from a very different point of view. One of the most interesting ways of viewing these recurring motifs comes from Robert Alter who developed the following idea.

*In biblical narrative more or less the same story often seems to be told two or three or more times about different characters, or sometimes even about the same character in different sets of circumstances...*

*I should like to propose that there is a series of recurrent narrative episodes attached to the careers of biblical heroes that are...dependent on the manipulation of a fixed constellation of predetermined motifs. Since biblical narrative characteristically catches its protagonists only at the critical and revealing points in their lives, the biblical type-scene occurs not in the rituals of daily existence but at the crucial juncture in the lives of the heroes, from conception and birth to betrothal to deathbed. Not every type-scene will occur for every major hero, though often the absence of a particular type-scene may itself be significant...*

*What I am suggesting is that the contemporary audiences of these tales, being perfectly familiar with the convention, took particular pleasure in seeing how in each instance the convention could be, through the narrator's art, both faithfully followed and renewed for the specific needs of the hero under consideration. In some cases, moreover, the biblical authors, counting on their audience's familiarity with the features and function of the type-scene, could merely allude to the type-scene or present a transfigured version of it...*

*Reading any body of literature involves a specialized mode of perception in which every culture trains its members from childhood. As modern readers of the Bible, we need to relearn something of this mode of perception that was second nature to the original audiences. Instead of relegating every perceived recurrence in the text to the limbo of duplicated sources or fixed folkloric archetypes, we may begin to see that the resurgence of certain pronounced patterns at certain narrative junctures was conventionally*

*anticipated, even counted on, and that against that ground of anticipation the biblical authors set words, motifs, themes, personages, and actions into an elaborate dance of significant innovation. For much of art lies in the shifting aperture between the shadowy fore-image in the anticipating mind of the observer and the realized revelatory image in the work itself, and that is what we must learn to perceive more finely in the Bible<sup>4</sup>.*

Alter here suggests that audiences would have been tuned in to the nuances in the way that specific familiar scenes were presented by a narrator and that part of the narrator's art lay in the slight manipulations of familiar language to create variations on familiar themes and scenes. If this is so, it suggests that part of the meaning of specific scenes can only be regained if we see the scenes in a comparative fashion against the backdrop of similar scenes in other biblical contexts. We will now employ Alter's idea to see what meaning we can gain from examining our story from this standpoint.

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<sup>4</sup> This is taken from Alter's pioneering work, "The Art of Biblical Narrative".

## **Structuralist – Parallel Stories in Same Genre: Case Study – Co-Wives (Sarai / Hagar, Rachel / Leah) and Chana /Peninah)**

Let us now take one of the central motifs of the first part of our story, namely the idea of Sarai as a barren woman and see what we can learn about the scene and the way that it is written by comparing it with two other scenes in the Tanakh where the motif of the barren woman is central. We will examine the barrenness of Rachel and of Chana, the mother of Samuel. What can we learn from the similarities and differences and how does a comparative reading help us to understand the story that we are here examining? Rachel's story can be found in Genesis ch. 30 vv. 1-8. Chana's story can be found in 1 Shmuel ch. 1 vv. 1-11.

We suggest three questions that should accompany our reading of the texts.

1. What is the emotional reaction of the woman in question to her barren state?
2. How does the woman in question react to her barrenness?
3. How does the woman in question treat the other characters in the scene?

### *1. What is the emotional reaction of the woman in question to her barren state?*

The comparison between the three women is instructive. Both Rachel and Chana exhibit deeply emotional behavior. Chana's deep grief is exacerbated by Penina's cruel exploitation of her plight. Rachel is clearly deeply hurt by her own situation to the point of desperation where she threatens death. She clearly feels that her life is not worth living without children. Her entire behavior is both impulsive and emotional. She complains to Ya'akov about her plight clearly implying (at least according to his reaction) that he is at fault. In addition, we find in the story of Rachel, a thick motif of jealousy for Leah. Her natural sadness has been boiled up to near madness by the sight of her fertile sister. She is the loved one and she it is who should reap the rewards and fruits of love. Instead, once again, she has to stand aside and see herself bested in this most vital of all female values by her unloved sister.

Chana is in a very different situation. She, like Rachel, knows that she is the favored wife (which perhaps explains Penina's behavior), but she never blames Elhana and we do not hear that she acts out of any jealousy towards Peninah. Elhana for his part tries to be supportive but his support is clumsy and fails to make an impression on Chana's grief. She is bitter of heart and weeps constantly.

Sarai's behavior is utterly different. We hear no hint of real emotion in the story (although there must have been some) until the continuation when she finds herself "despised" by Hagar. She acts coolly and with careful calculation according to a preconceived plan and as we have suggested, her whole way of speaking as she puts her request to Avram, speaks of such planning. She, unlike Rachel, does not imply blame for her husband. She, as we have seen, invokes God, and it is perhaps instructive that in the other two cases, God's responsibility is mentioned but not directly by the women themselves. In Rachel's case, Yaakov mentions it in his own defense and in Chana's case, it is the narrator who directly mentions it, although Chana clearly works under the supposition that she is in God's hands. The impression here is that Sarai is bereft of emotion here. She has a plan and she will carry it through in a considered and deliberate fashion. There is no room for spontaneity here. Too much emotion could upset things. She will get exactly what she wants.

## 2. *How does the woman in question react to her barrenness?*

All three women respond with an initiative of their own. Despite the fact that they all live in a society where, as we have seen, God is seen as having control over women's wombs, not one of the three women is prepared simply to sit back passively and let God act. The nearest to it is of course Chana who tries to avert God's judgment and to change her own fate by praying in the shrine at Shilo, and promising her future son to the service of God. But even so, the radical and non-conventional nature of her initiative is indicated by the fact of Eli's non-recognition of her action.

However, the other two stories appear, to our ears at least, to be the more surprising initiatives. Both women resort to the same strategy, that their husband should take their servant girl as a wife whose children should be considered their (i.e. the original wife's) property. We will examine soon to what extent the strategy really is surprising in the context of the times, but let us say at this point that although the strategy is basically identical, the specifics of the two cases are actually very different. In other words, they go about the same act in a very different way. We have already indicated Sarai's rather hesitant and careful strategy. There is not a hint of insult to Avram and she is very careful to put the whole story in terms which allow Avram the possibility of withdrawing if the scheme is not to his favor. Rachel, on the other hand, is direct and somewhat rude. She talks to her husband in a far less respectful way than Sarai and she basically demands of him that he does what she wants! Sarai walks on tip toes with her suggestion while Rachel basically throws it in Yaakov's face with no suggestion that she is prepared to take no for an answer.

What does the difference between the two stories suggest? One can hypothesize a number of different possibilities.

For one thing, we are told throughout the story of Ya'akov and Rachel of the former's great love for the latter. We do not have the same feeling about Avram's feelings for Sarai. Maybe Rachel is simply much more confident of Ya'akov's love for her. She doesn't need to beat about the bush. She has the measure of her man!

Another possibility is in the personality of the two women. Rachel comes through as an impulsive and spontaneous woman who lives at a high emotional pitch. She says what she means and she means what she says. She does not censor her words in what might be called politically correct terms. She knows what she wants and she goes for it. Sarai is very different. We get a less clear picture of her personality in general in the stories, perhaps because the focus is so clearly on Avram, but she comes across as a person who lives an inner life that she is not prepared to reveal to those who surround her. For example, in the famous story of her laughter, she is not prepared to admit that she laughed. In the story of the Akeda, she is completely "absent" leaving plenty of room for the midrash to supply the missing links. She certainly appears in general as different from Rachel. This could be the explanation of her different approach in this story.

A third possibility is the difference in Sarai and Rachel concerning the reason for initiating this whole episode. In Rachel, the reason is clear. She is distraught by her failure to conceive, and she feels that her life is hardly worth living. In Sarai's case, things seem very different. We have already remarked on her unemotional approach to the whole episode, so far as we can glimpse things from the text. But let us now suggest that what lies behind the story is a mix of two factors, confusion and fear.

Sarai, no less than Avram, must be perplexed by the promises she believes have been made to Avram. So many years have passed and both of them are so old. Can it possibly happen? But in addition, she must be feeling threatened by the promise. The promise has after all been made to Avram. It has not been made to her. The promise has mentioned that the nation of the future will come from Avram. She has not been mentioned. In addition it is still possible biologically for Avram as an old man, to have a child. It would perhaps be highly unusual. But for Sarai it would take a miracle. The most likely explanation from her point of view is that if indeed such a thing is likely to happen, it will happen by Avram taking another wife, at her expense and her place in the family as Avram's wife will in that case, almost certainly change. This perhaps, is not so much about theology as it is about status. At the end of her life she is worried that her place will be usurped, and all that she has worked so hard for during her long life, in terms of status, will be lost to her.

We have no indication how she felt throughout her life, about her failure to have children. Perhaps, in emotional terms, it had not been a great inner need, or maybe it had been, but she had suppressed it and now in old age, it had faded into a regret of the past. But we can suggest that she felt deeply threatened and the more that time went on, and she and Avram thought of the offspring that had been promised to Avram, the more she worried about the possibility of being usurped. This would explain the careful nature of her address to Avram. This is the carefully conceived speech of a woman who has been planning a scenario for a long time.

How extraordinary that so much of the contrast between Rachel and Sarai could be conveyed in a few carefully chosen words!

### *3. How does the woman in question treat the other characters in the scene?*

Chana is the model of the long suffering woman. She internalizes her suffering and does not complain. Her internalization of her suffering is so painful that it brings her to the situation where she cannot eat. When her husband questions her, he does not come out by accusing Peninah of provoking her suffering. Rather she does not respond to his questions. She weeps silently. In fact, in the text as we have it she does not utter a single word before she talks to God at Shilo. She is badly treated but she is anything but vindictive. She seeks respite, she does not seek revenge.

We have already discussed the difference in Rachel's tone to Ya'akov and Sarai's tone to Avram. But one thing should be mentioned here that we have not yet touched, and that is the attitude between the two women and their maidservants. In both stories, at first glance, the maidservants, Bilha and Hagar, are completely ignored. They are passive, vehicles for the consummation of the plan: they have no word in this, they are not to be consulted. But a careful look at the story shows a difference of one word in the way the two are treated by their mistresses. Rachel, spontaneous and so human, gives Bilha to Yaakov and in so doing, she introduces Bilhah by her name. הנה אמתני בלחה, בא אליה. But Sarai, remote and at least in this story, unemotional and unforgiving, sees the girl only as an instrument in the plan that she has hatched. She never mentions Hagar's name. בא נא אל שפחתי. She has no need for humanity towards the girl. Her full attentions are focused elsewhere. This is cold and calculating. It lacks the warmth of even the perfunctory mention of Bilhah's name by Rachel. This is a business transaction, pure and simple. In business, there is no room for sentiment.

Thus we suggest that below the surface of the story of Sarai, Hagar and Avram, there are some very complex things that are happening despite the brevity and the surface simplicity of the text. The full richness of the story only comes out when attention is drawn to details in the text that

might, at first glance, appear superfluous or when careful comparisons are made between parallel stories. It can be suggested, with Alter, that a contemporary audience, much more tuned on than we are to the nuances of language and to the keys needed to decode the art of the narrator, would be as attuned to the small narrative details as to the broad sweeps of surface plot.

Let us close this part with an exercise to illustrate a possible practical use of this approach in the classroom.

### **Structuralist - Parallel Stories in Genre**

- Explore with the students the idea of parallel or similar stories or motifs in the Tanakh. See if they can make a list of such stories or scenes that they are aware of.
- Ask them if they think there is any connection between such parallel scenes and if the parallels or similarities between stories can help interpret such a scene when it occurs? If they say yes, ask how this could work. Discuss possibilities.
- Introduce them to the ideas of Robert Alter mentioned above. If appropriate, use excerpts from his book from the pieces that we have brought above or the article that appears in the [appendix](#).
- Explain that they are going to be given two extra stories, one of which (Chana) has certain features in common with the Sarai/Hagar scene under discussion and one of which (Rachel/Bilhah) is almost identical. In small groups they are asked to compare the three stories and to answer the questions that were asked above.
  1. What is the emotional reaction of the woman in question to her barren state?
  2. How does the woman in question react to her barrenness?
  3. How does the woman in question treat the other characters in the scene?
- Pool all the various answers as the basis for a discussion on the three questions.
- Now sum up with the questions (for homework?)
  - What can we learn about the story that we are examining from our comparison with the other two stories?
  - Have you gained any insights into the character of Sarai and what makes her "tick" by examining the comparative stories?
  - Explain and analyze the process that you have just gone through. How does it work? What are the suppositions on which this mode of learning is based? Do you agree with them?

## **#8 - Summarizing the Literary Approach**

### **- What Have we Gained?**

We have examined the language and structure of the story and tried to understand as much as possible about the author's intentions from a close analysis of the text. We have seen that the text, if closely analyzed from the literary point of view, suggests many insights into the characters involved, their motives, feelings and relationships. We have added in a couple of extra exercises in order to deepen the students understanding of the characters involved and to increase the engagement of the students in the story. We think that this analysis of the story of Avram, Sarai and Hagar gives a good insight into the potential of the use of literary techniques as a context for the study of Tanakh.



## Appendices:

### Three Worlds and the Text: The World BEHIND the text, The World IN FRONT OF the Text and the World IN the Text by Walter Brueggemann<sup>5</sup>

Paul Ricoeur has reflected upon the relation between text and world and has proposed that all "worlds," that is, all coherent systems of symbolization and meaning, are **text suggested, text legitimated, and text propelled**. "World" as coherent symbolization is not a given but is an offer of artistic articulation. This way of putting the matter directly resists any "commonsense world of givenness" and insists that even our most readily accepted world is a text-offered world.

Ricoeur has distinguished three worlds that are text related:

- 1- The first is "**the world behind the text**," the one that is already there as a given before there is any text. This is the world that scripture study has assumed in its "**historical**" study. This world does not in fact concern us in scripture study, if we are text focused.
- 2- The second is "**the world in front of the text**," that is, a world of possibility generated by the text, which inspires, empowers, and permits hearers of the text to live and act differently on the basis of the substantive claim of the text.
- 3- But third and most crucial for Paul Ricoeur, is "**the world in the text**" that is, the dramatic transactions that are offered within the confines of text wherein the several characters of the text - including YHWH, the God of Israel - interact with each other in ways that "the world behind the text" would never permit. It is the primary work of interpretation, so Ricoeur urges, to live in "the world in the text," in order to see what is permitted and required by the transactions given there.

Ricoeur suggests that focus upon "the world in the text," without that world needing to cohere with our taken-for-granted world is an exercise in imagination, which permits the text community to redescribe, reimagine, and recharacterize the world in which it lives. The symbolic world we inhabit, unless there is great intentionality, goes by default to the hegemonic definitions of the dominant powers. It is the work of the decentered community, if it is to maintain its distinctive vocation and its subversive identity, to resist the commonly described world, and to engage in, ponder, and enact a redescribed world according to the offer of the text.

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<sup>5</sup> Selection from CADENCES OF HOME (p.60) where Brueggemann has explicated using Paul Ricoeur the difference between an historical, a literary-structuralist and a reader-response/personalization model using different terminology.

## The Laconic Style of the Bible and the Greeks: Erich Auerbach's classic essay, *Odysseus' Scar*"

Summarized in *The Slayers Moses* by Susan A. Handelman

In literary criticism, one of the most famous discussions of the contrast between Greek and Hebraic conceptions of reality is Erich Auerbach's classic essay, "Odysseus' Scar." Auerbach's comparison of the Bible and Homer elucidates the way in which the philosophic differences Jonas points out are reflected in narrative structures.

Auerbach perceives, first of all, that the basic impulse of the Homeric style is "to represent phenomena in a fully externalized form, visible and palpable in all their parts, and completely fixed in their spatial and temporal relations . . . nothing must remain hidden and unexpressed." In Homer, everything takes place in a foreground in an absolute temporal present which is uniformly illuminated. By contrast, in Biblical narrative, such as the story of the sacrifice of Isaac, everything is indeterminate and contingent; time and space are undetermined, motives and purposes are unexpressed, and only what is minimally necessary for the narrative to proceed is externalized while the rest is left in obscurity. The account seems fragmentary, or in Auerbach's apt phrase, "fraught with background," full of lacunae. Speech here hides as much as it externalizes, and the narrative is entangled in layers of history, not at all entirely immersed in the present.

In Homer, psychic complexity is expressed through the alternation of emotional states, whereas in the Bible, consciousness extends into multi-layered depths, which simultaneously exist and conflict. In Homer, there is no concealment, no secret hidden meaning, although later Greek allegorists tried to read him in this fashion. In Auerbach's felicitous words: "Homer can be analyzed ... but he cannot be interpreted." The Biblical text is oriented not towards "realism," but towards "truth." "Far from seeking, like Homer, merely to make us forget our own reality for a few hours, it seeks to overcome our reality: we are to fit our own life into its words, feel ourselves to be elements in its structure of universal history.", The Biblical narrative is not meant to "represent" simple reality or merely tell a story. It is intentionally mysterious, demanding subtle interpretation, imbedding doctrines within itself which are inextricably connected with the physical aspect of the narrative.

Indeed, Auerbach continues, the Biblical narrative claims an absolute authority which subsumes our own reality and everything that happens in our own world. The Homeric poems, on the other hand, are set in a particular space and time; events which come before and after them are not dependent upon them. But the Biblical narrative claims that it is the structure into which all of history fits, and everything that is known about the world becomes part of its sequence of events. Moreover, by interpretive extension, all new facts become fitted into its account. Hence, in the Hebraic view, as Auerbach perceives, "interpretation in a determined direction becomes a general method of comprehending reality." And because of the text's claim to absolute authority, the method of interpretation spread to other non-Jewish traditions.

## Biblical Narrative's Distinctive Style

summarized from Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* by the editor

- 1- Biblical stories are fraught with **dark unexplained background**, The characters have memories and inner consciousness which is implicit but not illuminated, so "character is often unpredictable, impenetrable, constantly emerging from and slipping back into a penumbra of ambiguity" (Robert Alter). That literary style matches a hidden God revealed from time to time as well as psychologies of depths where free decisions are made. The reader too is in the dark, not fully informed by omniscient Homeric narrator (Erich Auerbach). Behavior is a result of decision not of fixed character, so biography more important than character or noble birth
- 2- Unlike the Greek visual sensitivity, Biblical literature generally provides minimal physical details of character or descriptions of scenery or dress.
- 3- The biblical chronological structure reflects a causal framework expressed in *vav ha-hipur* syntax of "and ..and.. and," with little syntactic subordination.
- 4- Characters are seldom illuminated by introspective monologues (as opposed to Greek epic)
- 5- There are many dialogues but only two characters speak in a scene and they generally use minimal words, hence feelings and thoughts are only implicit
- 6- No titles or even clear chapter endings are offered, so the reader must decide both topic, chapter breaks or endings of literary units within the overall chronological order from Creation to Redemption
- 7- Chronology is measured by a genealogical framework.
- 8- The style is an art of reticence.
- 9- Oral rather than visual, temporal rather than spatial, dominate and there is little delight in physical beauty except in the Song of Songs and the description of the Tabernacle.
- 10- Plots are action-oriented with a suspenseful pace, not leisurely descriptions of static world.
- 11- The Bible has tone of a religious seriousness that makes a claim that this is of utmost importance, a real and earthshaking event that makes history and makes demands on us as descendants.
- 12- The protagonists are not nobles but ordinary people.

## To Study and To Teach: The Methodology of Nechama Leibowitz by Shmuel Peerless

LOOKSTEIN CENTER  
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### Modeling Literary Analysis in the Story of Dinah (p. 17-19)

1. Tell the students to imagine that they are putting on a **play** about this section, and to consider one of the following questions:

- a. How many **set changes** would you need in this play? (scenes)
- b. Who is the **most important character** in the play?
- c. What **tone of voice** would character X employ in his/her part?

Example: Chapter 34 in Bereishit relating to the abduction of Dinah provides a good opportunity for the use of these methodologies.

- a. The chapter includes five **changes of set** - 1) the field, 2) the house of Shechem, 3) the house of Yaacov, 4) the city of Shechem, and 5) the house of Yaacov.
- b. It might be a challenge for students to decide who is the **main character** of the story. Is it Yaacov who struggles with the conflict between his daughter's welfare and his family's relations with the local population, is it Dina whose safety is at stake, or is it Shimon and Levi who defend their sister's honor?
- c. If asked to determine Yaacov's **tone of voice**, students would have to consider his reaction to different aspects of the story - the tone of his response to the news, of his discussion with Chamor, and his discussion with Shimon and Levi following the massacre.

These three exercises become progressively more sophisticated.

- The first exercise requires students to review the facts of the story.
- The second exercise requires some literary analysis and judgment.
- The third exercise requires psychological analysis.

2. Ask the students to provide a **title** for the section being studied.

Example: Chapter 34 in Bereishit also provides a good example for the employment of this technique. There are numerous possibilities for titles including:

- 1) "The Abduction of Dinah", 2) "Yaacov's Dilemma", 3) "Shimon and Levi to the Rescue", etc.

This exercise requires the students to give an opinion regarding the focus of the section.

3. Ask the students to identify the **key verse** in the section.

4. Have the students **divide the section into different parts**. In some cases, the teacher might want to request a certain number of divisions, or may propose a specific division and ask the students to justify or oppose it.

## Biblical Style

### 1- *Milah Mankha* - Key Word Root/Sound Repetition

(Martin Buber, *Darko shel Mikra*, p. 300-307)

For example, *natan* in Devarim 26:1-11 because God has given the land as gift, not a conquest by human effort.

Bereshit 18:2-7 repeats *maher* (5x) and *ratz* because the elderly Avraham is so keen on hospitality.

### 2- Dialogue

Biblical dialogue is usually restricted to two characters. Sometimes even when the same speaker continues to speak, *vayomer* is used again superfluously. Nechama suggests that is intentional implying that the when an answer was expected there was an unnatural silence. So the same speaker again speaks.

In Shemot 3:4-6 when God speaks again only after Moshe has had time to remove his shoes.

3- *Semichut Parshiot*- Adjacent section suggest relationship.

4- Parallelism. A poetic structure where the same idea is used in different words.

## USE OF COMPARATIVE TEXTS: (p.45-56)

### Opportunities for Comparison

A methodology that appears quite frequently in Nechama's writings is that of textual comparison. Nechama identified four common situations in which the Torah repeats itself and comparisons can be made:

1. Similar Events
2. Similar Laws or Laws that are Repeated
3. Recapitulations
4. A Command and its Implementation

### Presentation to the Students

Comparisons can be presented to students in a variety of ways.

- Students can be asked in an open-ended fashion to compare two texts. This is effective if the passage is short and the points of comparison are limited.
- Alternatively, the teacher can direct the students to compare specific items that relate to the lesson. Nechama suggested that a **chart** be utilized for comparisons of larger sections, particularly if the comparison is complex.
- Furthermore, the teacher can allow the students to discover discrepancies on their own,
- or can present them with the comparative information for analysis.

These decisions, obviously, depend on the nature of the text being studied and the goals of the lesson.

## Formats for Comparison of Texts

1. **Changes in word usage or details** surrounding the event or law that is recorded repetitively in the text.
2. **Additions** of words, phrases, or information
3. **Deletions** of words, phrases, or information
4. **Changes in Order**

The purpose of the comparison is not simply to identify the similarities and differences between the two texts, but rather to understand **the significance of the differences**. Thus, Nechama's questions relating to textual comparison would always focus on the reason for particular changes in the text, or the lessons that can be derived from those changes.

### 1. Similar Events

Events which manifest significant **similarities** can be better understood by examining their **differences**. For example, *Gen.21* and *26*:

- both Avraham and Yitzchak make treaties with Avimelech at Be'er Sheva (*Bereishit* 21:22-34, 26:13-34). It is interesting to note, however, that Avraham brings a sacrifice after he has concluded the agreement, while Yitzchak brings an offering before negotiating his treaty.
- both Avraham and Yitzchak give the name Be'er Sheva to the place where the covenant was made, but for different reasons. Avraham names it after the oath that was accepted there by both him and Avimelech while Yitzchak names it after the well that he dug after the shepherds of Avimelech had closed the wells that Avraham had dug previously.

Students might be asked how these differences reflect the different relationships that Avraham and Yitzchak have with Avimelech. Avraham perceives the treaty with Avimelech as a factor that will contribute to his ability to live securely in the land. Yitzchak, however, suffers the duplicity of Avimelech who drives him out of Gerar and whose shepherds continuously struggle with him over the use of wells, including those that were dug by Avraham. Yitzchak realizes that he must establish his own position in the land before negotiating with Avimelech. This is accomplished through the digging of his own well and the bringing of a sacrifice. Only then does he conclude a treaty with Avimelech.

Similarly, *Shemot* 2:11-21 the first three events recorded by the Torah in the life of Moshe following his maturation in the house of Pharaoh all have the same motif (*Shemot* 2:11-21). In each, Moshe intervenes in an argument that is apparently not related to him.

The teacher may ask how the differences between these cases give insight into the personality and value system of Israel's greatest leader.

- The first struggle is between a Jew and a non Jew, demonstrating Moshe's concern for the oppression of his people.
- The second conflict is between a Jew and a Jew, demonstrating Moshe's passion for justice within his own community.
- In the third conflict, Moshe intervenes in a conflict between non Jews, demonstrating that the Jewish leader has concern for universal justice as well.

### 2. Similar Laws or Laws that are Repeated

As in the narrative sections of the Torah, one finds laws that also exhibit similarities and differences. A classical example is a comparison of the laws governing honor and fear of parents. Both laws govern the relationship between children and their parents. The order in which mother and father are listed in the two commandments, however, are opposite:

**"Honor your father and mother...." (Shemot 20:12)**

**"A person must fear his mother and his father...." (Vayikra 19:3)**

The teacher should study with the class the differences between honor (kavod) and fear (yirah) as described in the Gemara (Kiddushin 31b). Honor is defined as feeding, clothing, and escorting, while fear is demonstrated by not by not sitting in the parent's seat, not standing in his/her place, and not interrupting or disagreeing. One is a close, loving relationship, while the other is a distant relationship of respect. When asked to reflect on the significance of the change in word order, students may arrive at Rashi's understanding. Rashi indicates that the change in word order reflects the difference in the relationships that normally exist between children and their parents:

Rashi (Vayikra 19:3): Here the mother is placed before the father because it is revealed before Him (God) that the child fears his father more than his mother, and in the case of honor the father is placed before the mother because it is revealed before Him that the child honors his mother more than his father because she appeases him with words.

The Torah repeats in Sefer Devarim many of the laws recorded previously in Shemot and Vayikra.

Again, the differences between the renditions can have legal, ethical, and/or philosophical implications. A prime example is the ten commandments, which appear in both Shemot and Devarim. Commentators have discussed at length the many differences between the two renditions and their significance. We will focus for illustrative purposes on the commandment of Shabbat. The most glaring difference between the commandment of Shabbat in Shemot and Devarim is the reason given for the mitzvah:

Shemot: "For in six days, the Lord made heaven and earth; the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the seventh day and hallowed it." (Shemot 20:11)

Devarim: "And you will remember that you were slaves in Egypt, and that the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day." (Devarim 5:15)

Furthermore, the commandment as it is worded in Devarim adds the following phrase: "So that your servant and maid servant may rest as well with you."

Clearly, Shabbat relates to both the creation of the world and the release from the bondage in Egypt. Students may be asked why one reason is emphasized in Shemot and the other in Devarim? One possibility is that the difference can be understood by taking into account the context in which the commandments were heard. In Shemot, Bnai Yisrael had just left the pagan society of Egypt. It was, therefore, relevant to emphasize the aspect of Shabbat relating to creation in order to strengthen the idea that God is the ultimate cause behind all natural phenomena in the world. The commandments in Devarim were delivered by Moshe just before they were about to

enter Eretz Yisrael. Here, the emphasis is on social issues such as the treatment of slaves and strangers. As they were about to create a new Jewish society, Moshe highlighted the issues of social justice that are inherent in the commandment of Shabbat.

The repetition of laws is found in a number of instances including the returning of lost objects, relieving the burden of an animal, the prohibition of taking interest, and the prohibition of taking a bribe.

### 3. Recapitulations

The repetition of information in the Torah often takes place through recapitulation, the description by someone of an event that was previously described by the Torah or the transmission of information received by one individual to a third party. A good example of recapitulation is the dream of Pharaoh that is described by the Torah and is retold by Pharaoh in his discussion with Yosef. In his reenactment of the dream, Pharaoh adds comments about the extremely scrawny nature of the thin cows:

The Torah's Description: "And behold, seven other cows came up after them out of the river, ill favored and lean of flesh..." (Bereshit 41:3)

Pharaoh's Reenactment: "And behold, seven other cows came up after them from the river, poor and very ill favored and lean of flesh, such as I have never seen in the land of Egypt for badness..." (Bereshit 41:19)

"And when they [the lean cows] had eaten them [the fat cows] up, it could not be known that they had eaten them, for they were still ill favored as at the beginning." (Bereshit 41:21)

The different approaches of the commentators regarding changes that are found in recapitulations in the Torah are reflected in their explanations on this section. One school of thought, represented by Ibn Ezra, Abarbanel, and Radak, do not attribute significance to such changes. This is expressed in the comment of Radak on verse 41:17:

"And Pharaoh spoke to Yosef: We have already written that a person changes things by adding, subtracting, or changing words, and is only careful that it expresses the same idea - and so it was in the telling of this dream."

The other school of thought, represented by Rashi, the Netziv (Ha'amek Davar), and Samson Raphael Hirsch, do attribute significance to changes in the recapitulation of a passage, claiming that otherwise, the Torah would not have unnecessarily repeated the passage:

"And Pharaoh told his dream to Yosef Because there were new things in them and details that had not been clear in the first one; and for each detail there is an explanation, as will be explained." (Ha'amek Davar)

This opinion is strengthened by the fact that when the Torah records that Pharaoh told his dream to the Egyptian soothsayers, it does not repeat the dream:

"And he told them his dream, but there was none who could interpret it for Pharaoh." (Bereshit 41:8)



Why, then, is the entire dream repeated when he tells it to Yosef? According to Samson Raphael Hirsch, the second rendition of the dream reveals Pharaoh's emotional reaction to the dream:

"It is interesting to compare the story of the dream as told by Pharaoh and the story of the Torah on how the dream was in truth. Above we heard the dream in an objective description, here we see how it is perceived in Pharaoh's soul."

According to Haketav Vehakabbalah, the changes in the dream have another function. He claims that Pharaoh's rendition of the dream includes within it, through divine providence, the hints to its solution.

Nechama clearly favored the latter view regarding the significance of changes in repetitive sections of the Torah, for it is the hidden meaning of the recapitulation that gives textual comparison its pedagogical strength. The discovery of differences, the speculation of possible explanations, and the comparison of the perspectives of classical commentaries are elements which have the power to engage students actively in the learning process. Teachers will be surprised as to how often this methodology can be employed.

#### **In the Garden of Eden:**

**God's command to Adam:** "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat, but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for on the day that you eat from it you shall surely die." (Bereshit 2:17) or touch it lest you die." (Bereshit 3:3)

#### **Chava's retelling of the command to the snake:**

"We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said that you shall not eat of it

Rashi records the Midrashic view that the addition of the phrase "or touch it" by Chava played a role in the subsequent events. According to the Midrash, the snake pushed Chava against the tree and demonstrated that she did not die from touching the tree. He then convinced her that she would also not die from eating the fruit. The Midrash demonstrates from this story the importance of the prohibition of adding on to the words of the Torah.

#### **Eliezer's Mission:**

In her gilyonot, Nechama presented a lengthy chart detailing the differences between the directions given by Avraham to Eliezer before his departure to find a wife for Yitzchak, and Eliezer's description of his mission to Lavan and Betuel. The following are a few examples:

:

#### **Avraham's Directive:**

"Do not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell, but go to my land and to my birthplace."

(Bereshit 24:3-4)

"The Lord, God of Heaven, who took me from the house of my father and my birthplace ...will send an angel before you and you shall take a wife for my son from there." (Bereshit 24:7)

#### **Eliezer's Description:**

"Do not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites in whose land I dwell, but go to my father's house and to my family." (Bereshit 24:37)

"The Lord, before whom I walked, will send an angel with you and prosper your way, and you shall take a wife for my son from my family and from the house of my father." (Bereshit 24:40)

Eliezer changes in his description of Avraham's directives references that might offend the family. He projects the idea that Avraham specifically was looking for someone from the family as a wife for his son. As a result, Eliezer must also change the order of the events as he recounts his meeting with Rivka:

**The Torah's Description:**

"And it came to pass, as the camels finished drinking, that the man took a golden earring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands -of ten shekels weight of gold, and said `Whose daughter are you?'" (Bereshit 24:22)

**Eliezer's Description**

"And I asked her and said, `Whose daughter are you?' And she said, `The daughter of Betuel...' And I put the ring upon her nose and the bracelets upon her hand." (Bereshit 24:47)

Eliezer could not let Lavan and Betuel know that he had decided on Rivka before he knew of her relationship to Avraham. These changes that appear in Eliezer's recapitulation support the ethical principle that it is at times permitted to slightly bend the truth for the sake of peace.

**4. A Command and Its Implementation**

This format is in practice very similar to recapitulation. It involves the comparison of the implementation of a command to the actual command itself. Often, one finds differences that help to deepen our understanding of the circumstances or the personalities of the individuals involved. An excellent example of this format is Moshe's first visit to Pharaoh in light of the command that had been given to him by God relating to their first encounter: Shemot 3:16,18 compared to Shemot 4:29-30; 5:1-3)

## ***Koshi - COMMON TEXTUAL DIFFICULTIES (p. 173-174)***<sup>6</sup>

### **I. The Word**

#### **A. Uncommon Words**

Shemot 16:31 *ktzifchat*

#### **B. Words with Specialized Usages**

Utensils of the Mishkan, Vestments of the Priests

#### **C. Words with Multiple Meanings**

*Kol basar* = all people or all living things -

see Bereishit 6:19, 6:17, 6:19, 6:21; Vayikra 13:24; Yeshayahu 66:23

#### **D. A Word Used Outside of Its Usual Meaning**

Shemot 23:5 *azov ta'azov*

### **II. Extraneous Language (*Lashon yetera*)**

#### **A. Repetition of Words**

Bereishit 22:11 *Avraham, Avraham*

Bereishit 22:6 and 8 *vayeilchu shenieihem yachdav* implies emotional as well as physical togetherness despite the awful secreted shared. Hence Rashi says only the second time do we know that Yitzchak agrees to the sacrifice voluntarily

#### **B. Repetition of Synonyms**

Bereishit 1:22 *pru urvu*

Bereishit 32:8 Yaacov was afraid *vayira* and *vayetzer lo*

Hence for Radak is repetition to emphasize the degree of fear, but Rashi thinks it suggests two different concerns - lest he kill and lest he be killed.

#### **C. Positive and Negative Restatement**

Bereishit 40:33 *vlo zachar .. vayishkakheihu*

Shemot 1:17 the midwives fear God and they did not do that Pharaoh told them. Why repeat?

Ibn Ezra says it emphasizes how they went beyond the call of duty, while Rashi says they did two things - both they refrained from killing them and they positively helped the babies stay alive. .

#### **D. Extraneous Modifiers**

Bereishit 28:5 *Rivka eim Yaacov vEsav*

#### **E. Extraneous Pronouns**

Bereishit 9:7 *v'atem pru urvu*

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<sup>6</sup> The categories and examples in this list are taken from Peirush Kashe laTorah: Iyunim beShitato (Rashi's Commentary on the Torah), by Nechama Leibowitz and Moshe Arend, Tel Aviv, The Open University of Israel, 1990.

### III. Lacunas (*lashon hasera*)

#### A. Missing Subjects

Bereishit 48:1 *vayomer Yosef*

#### B. Missing Objects

Bereishit 12:8 *vayateik misham hahara*

#### C. Incomplete Sentences (*mikra katzar*)

Shemot 22:22 *im ano yaaneh oto*

### IV. Grammatical and Syntactical Problems

#### A. Homonyms

##### 1. Different Tenses

Bereishit 29:6,9 *ba'ah*

##### 2. Different Conjugations

Bamidbar 22:25 *vatilchatz*

##### 3. Different Roots

Yeshayahu 21:13, Tehillim 137:2 *talinu*

#### B. Indefinite Subjects

Bereishit 44:22 *vayaazov et aviv va-meit*

#### C. Indefinite Modifiers

Bereishit 25:28 *ki tzayid bfiv*

#### D. Inconsistency Between Parts of a Sentence

Gender: Noun - Adjective Shemot 3:5 *admat kodesh hi*

Number: Subject - Verb

Shemot 19:2 *vayachanu bamidabr - vayichan vayachanu bamidabr - vayichan Yisrael*

#### E. Deviations in Expected Word Order

##### 1- Violation of social expectations

Bereshit 31:4 - Yaacov sent for Rachel and Leah even though Leah was older

Bereshit 35:29 When Esav and Yaacov bury their father it is reported according to birth order, but Yitzchak is reported before Yishmael in burying their father in Bereshit 25:9. Perhaps Yishmael as the son of the concubine has a lower official status (Radak) or because Yishmael repented and accepted Yitchak's *bechora* (Rashi).

##### 2- *Mikra msuras*- a violation of grammatical word order

Bereshit 41:47 - *the whole land came to Egypt to get grain to Joseph*

So Rashi rearranges the fractured sentence into:

*the whole land came to Egypt to Joseph to get grain*

### V. Chronological Order Issues - *mukdam umeukhar baTorah*

Rashi rejects chronological order so even though the orders to build the mishkan precede the Golden calf story, he places their actual communication to Moshe AFTER the Golden Calf. However Ramban maintains that the order is intentional, that God conceived of the mishkan even before the crimes of the Golden calf. The mishkan is not merely an after thought.

## **Biblical Style: Point of View summarized from Walter Hertzberg**

From "Traditional Commentators Anticipating A Modern Literary Approach" in *Boundaries of the Ancient Near eastern World*, pp. 509 ff by Walter Hertzberg

Two categories of *perspective* (point of view) that Meir Weiss presents in *Scriptures in their own Light (Mikra Kifshuto)*.

1. Narration from objective narration or subjective perspective
2. Speech from the perspective of the speaker or the listener

### **I. Narration from the subjective perspective of the characters.**

Narration is **generally considered to be objective reporting**. However, Meir Weiss notes that narration often 'imperceptibly moves' from the so-called perspective of the narrator to **the subjective perspective of the characters.**'

Weiss cites as his example par excellence a verse from *Genesis 29*, where we are told that Jacob worked seven years for Laban in order to receive Rachel's hand in marriage. When Jacob fulfilled his commitment (v. 22): 'Laban gathered all the people of the place and made a feast. (23) When evening came, he took his daughter, Leah, and brought her to him; and he cohabited with her... (25) When morning came, behold it was Leah: So he said to Laban, "What have you done?"'

Weiss notes that in v.25, the objective narration changes perspective. The Hebrew word *hinneh*, translated 'behold it was Leah', indicates Jacob's surprise, and therefore becomes narration from Jacob's perspective. 'Jacob's innermost feelings are brought to our attention as words of the text.'

When the Bible speaks about the protagonists, it embodies their spiritual world, their state of mind, through the structure and style of the description. It is as if at that moment the Biblical author identifies with the actors in the story and speaks from their hearts and minds - not in their words, but in his own. (M. Weiss, *The Bible from Within* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press), p. 250)

Robert Alter also notes that,

Most readers' impression of biblical narrative is that everything is told from the perspective of an impassive authoritative narrator. However, several recent literary studies of biblical narrative have persuasively argued that in fact the point of view frequently switches at strategic moments to one of the characters. The biblical narrator... often uses the term *hinneh* to mark the crossover between his perspective and that of a character. the 'Behold' becoming in effect part of the unspoken inner speech of the personage, especially at moments when something unexpected or untoward is seen. (Alter, *The Pleasures of Reading*, pp. 176-77)

### ***Kinui* - Pronouns, indirect referrals reflect emotional relationships**

Meir Weiss and Nehama Leibowitz note that **the names or designation of a character will vary, intimating important issues, relationships and ideas**. The change of name or designation of a character will not occur arbitrarily or simply for stylistic reasons, but rather will often be laden with meaning.

A fine example is found in Genesis 21, which begins with the birth of Isaac. The text relates that Sarah sees Ishmael taunting his younger brother, Isaac, and therefore she has both Ishmael and his mother, Hagar, banished from Abraham's house. Between vv. 9 and 17, Ishmael is referred to in six different ways: 'the son of Hagar the Egyptian', 'her son', 'son of the bondswoman', 'his son', 'lad', 'child'. Four of the six variations are found in the narrative voice as follows:

(Gen. 21.9)

And Sarah saw the *son of Hagar* the Egyptian ... making sport. (10) Wherefore she said to Abraham; 'Cast out this *bondswoman and her son...*' (11) And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's eyes on account of *his son* ... (14) And Abraham arose up early in the morning, and took bread and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and *the child*, and sent her away; and she departed, and strayed in the wilderness of Beersheba (15) And the water in the bottle was spent, and she cast **the child** under one of the shrubs ... (17) And God heard the voice of *the lad*...

In these verses, one can clearly see how the epithet for Ishmael is changed each time in accordance with the perspective of one of the characters involved:

**Sarah's perspective** (v. 9): The son of the Egyptian woman. We are told that Sarah saw 'the son of the Egyptian woman taunting...' This epithet reflects Sarah's inner feeling, her disdain for Ishmael and her stripping him of any relationship with Abraham; he is neither Abraham's son nor Isaac's brother just the son of the Egyptian woman.

**Abraham's perspective** (v. 11): His son. After Sarah insists that Abraham banish Ishmael and Hagar from their home, the text reveals that 'the thing was very grievous in Abraham's eyes on account of his son'. The pronoun his tells it all; Abraham is concerned about the fate of Ishmael, his son.

**Hagar's perspective** (vv. 14-15): The child. Although Ishmael must be at least 15 years old, the text refers to him as a child. In the eyes of his mother, he will always remain a child, especially when he is in a vulnerable position.

**God's perspective** (v. 17): The lad. Finally, we are told that 'God hears the lad's voice'. From God's perspective, he is objectively a lad about 15 years old, no longer a child.

Once you understand the principles of perspective change, you can read the traditional commentaries with a new awareness. In this particular instance, two commentators actually disagree with Weiss's reading of 'child' as narrative from the *mother's perspective*.

*Haketav V'Hakabalah* (J.Z. Meklenburg, 1785-1865) notes that Ishmael was at least 15 years old and wonders why the text would refer to him as a child (vv. 14-15). He answers that 'because of his weakness and sickness he became like a child who has no strength ... to walk on his own and has to be carried by his mother'. In other words, the designation child must be understood from *Ishmael's perspective*, for he became 'like a child'.

*Or Hahayim* (Rabbi Hayim ben Attar, 1696-1743, Morocco/Israel) suggests that the first time 'child' is used in v. 14, it must be read from *Abraham's perspective*. He bases his argument on the following analysis: God's words to Abraham (v. 12) are parallel to the words of the narrative in the previous verse:

(11) And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's eyes on account of his soil.

(12) And God said to Abraham: 'Let it not be grievous in your eyes because of the lad... for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be called for you!'

God's response to Abraham is as if he heard Abraham's inner thoughts (v. 11). Or Hahayim states that God `removed the title of son from Ishmael by calling him `lad', and telling Abraham that `it is through Isaac that offspring shall be called for you'.

After God concludes speaking to Abraham in v. 13, and the text reverts to the narrative voice in v. 14, Abraham's reaction must be understood not through dialogue, but through the words of the narrative. Therefore, Or Hahayim concludes that you will find that Abraham now accepted `their words, for the text states that "Abraham arose. . . and the child" and doesn't state "his son" as in v. 11, `for the text is testifying for Abraham'.

The same examination of epithets is very revealing in Gen 34 with Dinah as our sister, as daughter of Leah, as naarah, as daughter of Yaacov. Similarly the varied response to Joseph in Gen 37 as the dreamer, the child, your son, our brother.

## The Power of a Word – A Poet's Perspective

By Hayim Nahman Bialik

*In studying Torah we often concentrate on the plot, on the sentence and rush by the words. Yet identifying a few unique or particularly revealing words can give us a deep window into the Tanakh. For example the words: shomer or akh or anokhi or isha reveal a whole world. See how Bialik the Zionist poet seeks to sensitize us to the word as it first emerged inhuman usage and how he encourages us to dwell on their associations.*

*Hayim Nahman Bialik in the his essay, **Gilui v'Chisui ba'Lashon** ("Revelment and Concealment in Language"), stressed the power of the primal word.*

Every day, consciously and unconsciously, human beings scatter heaps of words to the wind, with all their various associations; few men indeed know or consider what these words were like in the days when they were at the height of their power. Many of these words came into the world only after difficult and prolonged birth pangs endured by many generations. Others illuminated with one sudden flash of lightning a complete world. Many were paths through which living hosts passed, each leaving behind its shadow and odor. There were words which served as receptacles for delicate and profound thoughts and exalted emotions. Some words were like the high mountains of the Lord, others were a great abyss. Sometimes all the vital essence of a profound philosophic system, its complete immortality, were hidden in one small word. There were words that laid low nations and lands in their time, deposed kings from their thrones, shook the foundations of heaven and earth.

But there came a day when these same words, having fallen from their height, were thrown aside, and now people wallow in them as they chat, as casually as one wallows in grass....That is the way of the world. Words rise to greatness, and, falling, turn profane.

**What is essential is that language contains no word so slight that the hour of its birth was not one of powerful and awesome self-revelation, a lofty victory of the spirit.** So, for example, it was with the first man, when, taken aback by the sound of the thunder (" *The voice (sound) of the Lord is in the power, the voice (sound) of the Lord is in the glory*"), overcome by amazement and terror-stricken, he fell on his face before the divinity. Then a kind of savage sound burst spontaneously from his lips --let us assume, in imitation of nature--resembling a beast's roar, a sound close to the 'r... r' to be found in the words for thunder in many languages (*ra'am*). Did not this savage cry vastly free his confounded soul? Was a smaller measure of the power, the fearfulness, and the exultation of creative victory revealed in this echo of a spirit shaken to its depths than are revealed in the 'happy phrases' on exalted subjects expressed by any of the great seers in moments of spiritual elevation? Did not this meager syllable, this seed of the future word, embrace a complete volume of primordial emotions, powerful in their novelty and vigorous in their savagery, resembling terror, fear, amazement, submission, astonishment, preparedness for self-defense, and the like? And if this was true, was not the first man himself at that moment an artist and lofty seer, an intuitive creator of an expression--and a very faithful expression, for himself, at any rate--pointing to a deep and complicated inner disturbance? As one thinker has commented, how much of profound philosophy, of divine revelation was there in that small word 'I' that the first man uttered!

(from An Anthology of Hebrew Essays selected by Israel Cohen 1966)



## Aron Freidenreich – Nine Literary Techniques<sup>7</sup>

### Name: Repetition of Key Words

Definition: When an important word, phrase, or *shoresh* appears many times in the same story

### Functions:

- (1) Catches the reader's eye to focus on that word; ingrains the word/root into the reader's head
- (2) Those words contain the main idea of the story; the meaning of that word is central to understanding the meaning of the story
- (3) Often the number of times the word appears has meaning for that story
- (4) The word may connect different parts of the story together

### Tanakh Examples:

- (1) "hee" in Deborah's introduction, emphasizing that she is female (Judg 4:1-5)
- (2) "h.l.kh" showing Barak's hesitancy and weakness (Judg 4:8-9, x8)
- (3) "sh.a.l." in Sam 1 with Samuel's name
- (4) [Many words repeat often in Samuel 3]
- (5) Key words in the sin, prophecy, and punishment sections of Eli's house (Sam 2-4)

### Modern Examples:

- (1) "Father," "Home," and "Bangarang" in Hook
- (2) "Inconceivable" and "As you wish" in Princess Bride
- (3) "Force" and "Dark Side" in Star Wars

### Name: Type-Scene

Definition: A pattern that authors follow because it is part of the culture

### Functions:

- (1) It is popular and well-liked
- (2) Readers can relate to it - it is familiar to readers, and they expect it
- (3) Slight changes from the type-scene are especially noticed and have added meaning

### Tanakh Examples:

- (1) birth narratives: obstacle, annunciation, birth

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<sup>7</sup> NOTE: The following includes my own notes for filling out the "**Tanakh Literary Techniques**" worksheets. I have tried to define the techniques in a way that students can understand, and the Tanakh examples that I include are ones that they are familiar with by the time in the course that they encounter the technique officially. The techniques appear in the order in which we officially fill out the worksheets in class.

- (2) meeting the bride at a well
- (3) the younger overcomes the elder brother(s)
- (4) rivalry between wives or concubines
- (5) people complain, G-d gets angry and punishes, people repent
- (6) repeating numbers (3, 7, 10, 40)

Modern Examples:

- (1) "Once upon a time" and "happily ever after" opening and closing fairy tales
- (2) Threes, with the third being different (Goldilocks & the Three Bears, etc.)
- (3) Westerns: quick-shooting sheriff able to remove gun from holster, aim, and kill many enemies with already-cocked guns before they can even pull off one shot
- (4) Superhero movies: hero gets captured and is near-death, villain tells entire plan and leaves, hero escapes and saves the day
- (5) "Chick-flicks": nerdy girl liking cool jock but ending up with nerdy friend
- (6) Sports movies: underdog team of horrible players ends up winning the championship
- (7) Poor deprived child becomes great hero in the end (Cinderella, Harry Potter, Cosette, Huck Finn, etc.)
- (8) Damsel in distress saved by knight in shining armor (Shrek, Sleeping Beauty, Princess Bride, Rapunzel)

Name: **Repetition of Storyline**

Definition: When a phrase or part of the plotline appears more than once within the same story

Functions:

- (1) To remind the reader of previous events or foreshadow future events
- (2) Slight changes in the repetitions are noticed - they add extra meaning and insights

Tanakh Examples:

- (1) "*Rosh*" and "*Katzir*" in Yiftach's negotiations with the elders (Judg 11)
- (2) Samson's future significance as told by angel and then by mother (Judg 13:3 & 13:5)
- (3) Angel appearing twice to Samson's mother (Judg 13)
- (4) Instructions given about the wife and boy (Judg 13:4-5, 7, 13)
- (5) Hannah reminds Eli of who she is by repeating his repetitious phrase back to him (Sam 1)
- (6) Sam 3: Sam goes to Eli 3 times and receives different instructions
- (7) Compare Eli's instructions in Sam 3 with Sam's fulfillment of them
- (8) ("And G-d saw that it was [very] good" in Gen 1)

Modern Examples:

- (1) Groundhog Day
- (2) Songs where the chorus changes at the end (Cats in the Cradle)
- (3) Classical music and jazz, where the main theme repeats throughout but changes slightly
- (4) Enyigo Montoye's line in The Princess Bride: "You killed my father, prepare to die."
- (5) "And the tree was happy" in The Giving Tree

**Name: Comparing and Contrasting Characters**

**Definition:** When a story points out similarities and differences between its characters  
[Similar technique: Character Development = showing change in a character as time goes on]

**Functions:**

- (1) To show more clearly a character's qualities
- (2) To emphasize specific character traits that are found in one character and not in others, or exaggerate one character's qualities when everyone else has the opposite traits
- (3) To remind the reader of other characters (in same or another story) that have similar or opposite qualities
- (4) To show the importance/greatness or weakness of a character by making him/her similar to previous characters who are also important/great or weak

**Tanakh Examples:**

- (1) Deborah vs. Barak (strong/brave and weak/coward) in Judg 4-5
- (2) Manoah vs. his wife (stupid and wise) in Judg 13
- (3) Peninah vs. Hannah in Sam 1
- (4) Samuel/Hannah vs. Eli (close to G-d and not) in Sam 1
- (5) Samuel vs. Eli/sons (same) in Sam 2
- (6) Samuel vs. Eli: both have sons who do not follow in their ways (Sam 2:12-17; 8:1-3)
- (7) Ruth vs. Orpah (devotion) in Ruth 1

**Modern Examples:**

- (1) Heroes and villains in superhero movies
- (2) tall/thin/smart vs. short/fat/dumb in cartoons (Bugs Bunny vs. Elmer Fudd, etc.)
- (3) Harry Potter vs. Malfoy
- (4) Lisa vs. Bart Simpson
- (5) The "smart" Italian and the hero of Princess Bride
- (6) Scar vs. Mufasa in The Lion King

**Name: Dialogue**

**Definition:** A quoted retelling of two parties talking [note that the Tanakh never has more than two parties talking at one time]

**Functions:**

- (1) Focus on a character's first recorded words (to whom and what about) - they tell the reader important information about the character
- (2) Who a character conspicuously never speaks to is significant about the character and that relationship
- (3) Focus on the last words in a dialogue - the last one to speak is always correct or at least considered correct by the other character, who is quieted

(4) (A repeated "va-yomer" within the same character's speech means that the other character should have responded with words or action but did not)

#### Tanakh Examples:

- (1) Sam 1: Hannah's first words are directed toward G-d - so she & her son Samuel are/will be close to G-d
- (2) Sam 1-4: Eli never speaks to G-d - he and his sons are not close to G-d
- (3) Judg 13: Manoah's wife is the last to speak, saying they will not die; she is correct
- (4) (Gen 18: G-d is the last to speak, saying that Sarah did laugh, and G-d is correct)

#### Modern Examples:

- (1) The hero always has the last word against the villain in the end: "Asta la-vista," "I'll be back," etc.
- (2) In arguments with your parents, you always want to get in the last word, because then you feel correct.

#### Name: Chiasmus (X)

Definition: A symmetrical structure - when a word, phrase, or entire story repeats on itself in mirror image (ABCCBA)

[Similar (but opposite) technique: Parallel Structure = a structure that repeats in the same order (ABCABC)]

#### Functions:

- (1) It makes the reader focus on the center line, which is almost always the most important to the meaning of the story
- (2) It makes the reader connect the parallel parts of each half of the story together and therefore understand each part better
- (3) It's interesting/cool/fun/brilliant - for the writer to make and for the reader to see

#### Tanakh Examples:

- (1) Gen 9:6 = "*shofekh dam ha-adam ba-adam damo yishafekh*"
- (2) Gen 11:1-9 (Tower of Babel story)
- (3) I Sam 2:11-36 (Comparing Samuel and Eli/sons)

#### Modern Examples:

- (1) Palindromes (hannah, racecar, a man a plan a canal panama, etc.)
- (2) Dr. Seuss Books? Caterpillar?

#### Name: Wordplay

Definition: A play on words (pun) - using the sound or different meanings of a word to make a double-meaning

### Functions:

- (1) It contains two meanings - the literal and the double-meaning
- (2) It might explain (or make fun of) a name of a place or person (etymology)
- (3) It's funny - adds humor

### Tanakh Examples:

- (1) Gen 11 plays on "*shem/sham/shamayim*" and on "*Bavel/Bala'*"
- (2) Possible plays on Deborah, Eshet Lapidot, Yiftach, Shimshon, Manoah, etc., in Judges
- (3) Play on "*Shmuel*" and "*m'H' she'iltiv*" in Sam 1
- (4) (Gen 25, 27 plays on the name "*Ya'akov*," meaning "heel," "protector," and "supplanter")
- (5) (Gen 17, 18, 21, 26 plays on the name "*Yitzchak*" - Abe laughs, Sarah laughs, all who hear will laugh, Yishmael is "laughing" with him, Isaac is "playing" with Rebekah, etc.)

### Modern Examples:

- (1) Puns in "Bugsy Liminator" - that name, "accordion to...," etc.
- (2) "Tissue, I hardly know you!"
- (3) "Knock knock, who's there, boo, boo who, stop crying;" "orange you glad I didn't say banana;" etc.
- (4) "Take my wife... please!"
- (5) "Outside of a dog, a book is man's best friend; inside of a dog, it's too dark to read" (Groucho Marx) [and many other things he says]
- (6) "My nose runs so much it should be in a marathon."

### Name: Allusion

Definition: A reference to another (existing and known) work

### Functions:

- (1) If the reader catches it, he/she gains extra meaning - humorous or deeper/interesting
- (2) Familiar - reader recognizes it and likes it
- (3) Makes the reader think of the other work and compare it with the present one, and therefore compare the characters and events in the two stories

### Tanakh Examples:

- (1) "*Lekh*" in Samuel's first calling (Sam 3) relates to Abraham's first calling (Gen 12)
- (2) Sam 4-6 is an allusion on the grand scale to the Exodus story
- (3) Judg 11 alludes to Gen 22 with "*yechidah*"
- (4) Gen 11's "*roshe ba-shamayim*" alludes to Jacob's ladder dream in Gen 28 "*roshe magiya' ha-shamaymah*"

### Modern Examples:

- (1) Spoof movies (Austin Powers spoofs on James Bond, Spaceballs spoofs on Star Wars, Scary Movie spoofs on scary movies, etc.)
- (2) "Chicken Run" with Star Trek and Star Wars
- (3) "Toy Story 2" with Star Wars

**Name: Inclusio / Frame / Bookends**

**Definition:** When the same or similar word or phrase appears at both the beginning and end of a story

**Functions:**

- (1) To mark where the beginning and end of the story are (which is important when there are no chapter numbers in the original Tanakh)
- (2) To make the reader, when he/she gets to the end, think about the beginning, and compare the two, realizing how things have changed in the story from beginning to end
- (3) To frame/envelope the story and close it nicely by tying it together

**Tanakh Examples:**

- (1) Gen 11:1-9: "The language of the entire earth"
- (2) Judg 13: Linking father's name with son's name (and the locations)
- (3) Sam 2:11-3:1: "And the youth (Samuel) served G-d before Eli"
- (4) Sam 3:1-4:1: "The word of G-d was rare" - "The word of G-d appeared to Samuel continuously" - "The word of Samuel"

**Modern Examples:**

- (1) Lion King: Simba and Simba's child being anointed and shown to the public
- (2) The Outsiders: opening and closing paragraphs are the same
- (3) The grandfather telling the story to the child in opening and closing of The Princess Bride
- (4) The floating feather at the beginning and end of Forest Gump

## FIVE PATTERNS - TO ENGAGE THE BIBLICAL TEXT

by Joel Lurie Grishaver

(from The Jewish Teachers handbook, ARE, p. 392f))

The central goal of every Bible teacher is to reveal to his/her students that the **Holy Scriptures are haunted** - that indeed something is lurking behind the words, phrases, and metaphors. Every time we open the text, we try to encounter the force which inhabits each ancient phrase. It does not matter whether we are seeking God's true voice, the - ghosts of Rabbinic sages past, the secret identities of the "real" authors, or simply the echoes of ancient footsteps. What is important is that we encounter the text itself, that we allow it to conjure from our past, from ourselves, from its past and from its own reality, a dynamic relationship. What we are seeking is a text with which, and over which, we can talk.

To search for the text's inner voice, we need to know how to probe the text, how to listen for its response. In doing so, it is necessary to go past the story to the way the story is told. The depth of the biblical material lies not in the intricacies of plot, but in the complex workings of the words themselves.

The Bible is well suited for this probing. In fact, it demands it of us. Regardless of our vision of the text, be it divine or exquisitely human, we can see that its style is unlike any other great literature. For it is like a marvelous haunted mansion, carefully crafted. It is filled with individual works of art, which are both more beautiful and more puzzling because of their age. It is alive with echoes and glimmering light sources, and its construction is riddled with secret connections and hidden passageways.

In the course of this chapter, we will first examine five patterns which enable us to engage the text in dialogue. (While there are at least five other such patterns, we cannot cover them all here because of space constraints.) Following the analysis of the five patterns, we will discuss the steps necessary in the preparation of good lessons on the Bible.

The kind of biblical investigation we are suggesting is not limited to the adult or to the sophisticated learner. All who like to engage in dialogue and all who are fascinated by mystery can be involved. Students of all ages will be intrigued when exposed to these patterns and become aware of their significance. **So let us take candle in hand and begin our investigation of some haunted passages.**

### PATTERN ONE: REPETITION

We open the Bible and start reading. One of our first impressions is that the text frequently repeats itself. We see the same pattern over and over: God tells someone to do something, and then (more or less repeating the same phrases), the narrator tells us that the deed has been done. Or, a character is told to tell someone something, and then (more or less repeating the same phrases), the character delivers the message. Additionally, we find incidents when the narrator describes a character's actions, and then (more or less repeating the same phrases), that same character or another character describes the action. Such is the biblical style, but there is more to it. The narrative portion of the text is basically made up of narration and dialogue. The two are very carefully structured; it is the variation, not the repetition, which is significant. The

repetitions focus our attention and build our expectations. But the subtle variation in the pattern holds the author's hidden message.

Let us look at some **examples**. The first consists of two passages about Abram and his family as they leave certain places. One passage describes leaving Haran and going to the land of Canaan; the other describes leaving Egypt and returning to the land of Canaan.

And Abram took Sarai his wife,  
and Lot his brother's son and all their substance... (Genesis 12:5)  
And Abram went out of Egypt He, and his wife  
and all that he had, And Lot with him... (Genesis 13:1)

What seems to be the change in Lot's status? (Clue: Lot's position in the description is not the only thing. Look also at what the syntax suggests about collective ownership of property.) Genesis 13:1 immediately precedes the fight between the shepherds of Lot and Abram which results in their split. What might the narrator be trying to tell us about that incident? What lesson or message can be drawn from this insight?

A second example from the book of Numbers describes Moses turning the leadership of the people over to Joshua ... and the Lord answered Moses, "Single out Joshua, son of Nun, an inspired man, and lay your hand upon him. Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and before the whole community, and commission him in their sight. Invest him with some of your authority..." (Numbers 27:18-20)

Moses did as the Lord commanded him. He took Joshua and had him stand before Eleazar the priest and before the whole community. He laid his hands upon him and commissioned him, as the Lord had spoken through Moses. (Numbers 27:22-23)

Some questions to ponder: Moses follows God's instructions, but there is one major shift in sequence as the instructions are carried out. The order which Moses uses to carry out the instructions is the logical sequence. Why might God have inverted the order when instructions were given to Moses? (Clue: What insight into Moses' character might God have acted upon?) What lesson can be drawn from this inversion of the repetition? Explain why Moses decided to add a hand to his installation process. This explanation can be used as the basis of a moral lesson.

Rashi poses this solution to the case of the extra hand (after all, we are exploring a haunted house) :

And he laid his hands generously; meaning in much greater measure than he had been commanded - he did it with both hands to make him as a vessel which is full to the brim and overflowing, and so he filled him with a generous helping of wisdom.

Rashi, in his own way (as all of us do) distorts the text slightly for his own purpose. Consider this: In the text, what does God tell Moses to use as he invests Joshua? What does Rashi suggest that Moses used? Is there a correlation? Are the two identical? Should they be identical? Can another lesson be drawn, this time from Rashi's comment?

In each of the above examples, we have found that **behind the apparent repetition and use of formula in the text, a message is conveyed through that which is not repeated (more or less using the same phrases) and through that which is altered**. This kind of analysis is a form of literary criticism, which is technically known as **form criticism**. It is used by literary scholars, as well as by the commentators Umberto Cassuto (1883-1951) and Benno Jacob (1862-1955). It is



also standard procedure for the Midrash and for Rashi. In spite of its "scholarly" roots, any of us can participate in this process.

## Classroom Applications

Here are a few possibilities for adapting the pattern of repetition to classroom lessons. You can generalize these suggestions to other passages.

1. Using an inquiry format, have your students find the clues in the text by  
a) providing them with the portions of the text laid out in such a way that they can easily see the variations, b) having them color code their texts with circles and arrows and other markings, or  
c) having them read the two versions out loud. As we have done here, emphasize both the finding of the clue and the creation of lessons to be learned.
2. Adapt the childhood exercise, "What is wrong with this picture?" Create (or have students create) pictures which go with each version of the story. Then have the students match phrase and illustration.
3. A standard vaudeville sketch format occurs when the protagonist repeats the dialogue directed by the narrator:  
Narrator: And then God said: "Let there be light."  
God: Let there be light.  
Narrator: And there was light.

Write skits which exploit this device to reflect the changes in the text.

4. The first text dealt with the relationship between Abram (and Sarai) and Lot. Our reading of the text suggested that relations had begun to break down before the shepherds fought. Have your students act out or creatively write the scene inside Abram's tent when he and Sarai talk about Lot, and the scene inside Lot's house as he discusses Abram. Use these scenes to evaluate the solution to the conflict arrived at by Abram and Lot.
5. In the text on the installation of Joshua by Moses, we found a significant issue revolved around the laying on of hands. After studying this passage, have the students invent a ceremony during which they grant gifts to each other through the laying on of hands.
6. In Rashi's solution to the text, we saw that there is a question of the relationship between knowledge and authority. Have your students play Blackjack (or any other game). Have them adjust the rules so that the dealer (or the leader) has varying amounts of knowledge and authority. Discuss what happens to the game if the dealer gets to see everyone's cards before he or she plays, or what happens to the game if the dealer can decide for each player how many cards they may (or must) take. Then discuss the question in the passage.

## PATTERN TWO: TWICE TOLD TALES

Most events in the Bible are told at least twice. Deuteronomy retells many of the accounts in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. Chronicles I and II retell a great deal of history, especially what has already been reported in the books of Samuel and Kings. The Prophets and the Psalms echo many of the accounts in the Torah and especially the portions of Genesis which precede Abram. Often, the second version of a story imparts new information. Consider, for example, the fourth commandment as it appears in the two versions of the Ten Commandments.

1. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days shall you labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God: you shall not do any work - you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it. (Exodus 20:8-11)
2. Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God: you shall not do any work - you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or your ass, or any of your cattle, or the stranger in your settlements, so that your male and female slave may rest as you do. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God freed you from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day. (Deuteronomy 5:12-15)

Determine which portions of the text are the same in both versions. Which are parallel (more or less the same words in the same place)? The central difference between the two versions of this commandment is in the reasons given for celebrating the Sabbath. The starting words for each of the two commandments (the active verbs) are different. The closing formulas are also different. In Exodus, God is the subject and the Sabbath is the direct object. In Deuteronomy, God is the subject and "You" is the direct object. All of the Exodus version of this commandment is contained in the Deuteronomic version. However, the commandment as found in Deuteronomy has two major additions.

How are the elements of each list consistent? Do the two versions of this commandment contradict each other? Do they complement each other? If so, in what way? What lesson can be drawn from the fact that the two versions outline different reasons for celebrating Shabbat?

The first verse of "Lecha Dodi," the song with which we welcome the Shabbat, begins: "Observe' and 'Remember' were said together in one breath.. ." Is the "lesson" of "Lecha Doda" similar to the one drawn above?

Now we look at a second example, the two versions of the story about sending spies into the land of Israel (Numbers 13:1-3, 27-32 and Deuteronomy 1:22-28). Unlike other repetition patterns, these two stories confront us with significant contradictions rather than literary variations. In Numbers, (1) the Lord instructs Moses to send spies, (2) the spies are princes of the tribes, (3) the land is "flowing in milk and honey," (4) Moses is credited with bringing the people there, and (5) the spies spread an evil report "that the land consumes its inhabitants."

In the book of Deuteronomy, (1) the people ask to send spies, (the spies are simply "twelve men," (3) the land is "good," (4) God gave it, (5) the inhabitants are "greater and taller than we," and (6) God brought us there because He "hated us." Now we have to resolve these differences. Here are some "popular solutions." Consider the evidence for each.

1. The "documentary hypothesis" suggests that the Bible was assembled by collecting various documents/texts which had been written by different groups, under different influences, in different time periods. What evidence is there that these two editions might indeed be two different accounts (from different sources) of the same event?
2. Several commentators say that there is no real contradiction between the two accounts. Like two news reporters, the writers are simply choosing to focus on different details. Can you explain how both versions could be "factual?"
3. A commentator named David Hoffman suggests that the two accounts had different intents. The account in Numbers was created to preserve an historical reality, while the edition of the story found in Deuteronomy was structured to teach a "moral truth." What is the evidence for this point of view?
4. The Ramban (Nachmanides) suggested that the two versions of the story were designed to fit the needs of two audiences. The first was written about (and for) the generation which left Egypt and the second was written for the generation which was about to enter the land of Israel. Is there evidence to support this point of view?
5. Why do you think the Bible includes two separate accounts of this incident? What are we supposed to learn from the two accounts? Do you accept one of the above explanations or a combination of them? Do you have a different point of view? Many portions of the biblical text appear in more than one location. The Bible seems to preserve multiple testimonies about specific occurrences and legal concepts. Sometimes these experiences are nearly identical; at other times they seem significantly different. In either case, we are drawn into the material. We find ourselves looking for the "true" version and, like good detectives, we begin to sort out the various testimonies and piece together our version of the truth. Frequently we discover that it is not the facts of the event that have changed, but the nature of the conversation. Different people tell (and retell) stories differently, and different audiences call for different ways of telling. In confronting conflicting accounts, we must realize that the resolution may never be clear. Often the presence of two (or more) voices expands rather than confuses our image of the text; at other times the ambiguity enhances our involvement in the material. It is as if the Bible is asking us, "Nu, so what do you think?"

Other examples of the pattern of twice told tales may be found in the accounts of the story of Saul's death in I Samuel 31 and I Chronicles 10. Look also at Psalm 105 and find the three stories retold there.

## Classroom Applications

Let's explore a few possible lesson formats for this pattern. Some of these will deal with the nature of confronting two sources; the remainder will draw on the insights gained from the passages.

1. As with the repetition pattern, use written or oral inquiry techniques to find clues in the text.
2. A particular professor was famous for staging a "murder" in his class once a semester. At some point, when everyone least expected it, an assistant would burst through the door, shoot the professor, and disappear. The class would then be asked to write an account of the incident. Reports varied as to the size, height, age, race, and dress of - the "murderer." Adapt this (in a less violent format) to your classroom. Use the various reports to talk about the nature of human testimony.
3. Do the same kind of thing with a past event. Analyze a significant event which took place last year or a while ago and compare the results of "historical memory"
4. Bring in two articles about the same news events or two reviews of the same film from sources such as Time and Newsweek. Use the two accounts to try to reconstruct the "true" event.
5. Do guided imagery with your class. Have students close their eyes and imagine an event you describe. Then have everyone write down a description or draw a picture of their experience. Compare the diverse impressions of a single experience.
6. Have someone tell a story to a group of adults and then to the first grade class. (Videotape this if desired.) Compare the versions of the stories told. Decide if this situation is analogous to the two accounts of the same story found in the texts you have studied.
7. Compare the other differences in the two versions of the Ten Commandments. Also, look at the structure of the Ten Commandments. For background and activities, see Bible People Book Two by Grishaver.
8. That there are two versions of a commandment about Shabbat could serve as the basis for explaining why Shabbat is celebrated with pairs of candles; two challot; angels who, in the midrash, escort people home. Explore the pairs theme. A good reference is *The Sabbath* by Abraham Joshua Heschel (New York: Harper and Row, 1952).
9. Imagine what Shabbat would be like in the Garden of Eden and what it was like for the slaves in Egypt. Simulate these experiences with your class, then reread the reread the two sets of commandments
10. Organize a debate on which version of the incident of the spies is most true (or create a 60 Minutes type report on the topic).
11. Two versions of the story of the spies represent an interesting literary format: we are presented with "mixed reports" of the land, from "mixed reports" of spies. Have students respond to the reports from the point of view of Joshua, of one of the spies, of Moses, of an ordinary Israelite, of Moses 30 years later, of an ordinary Israelite 30 years later, of one of the spy's children or grandchildren, of Joshua's mother, of a history teacher 75 years later, etc.

## PATTERN THREE: CONVENTIONS

Certain kinds of events seem to characterize the lives of many biblical characters. Biblical women, for instance, have a difficult time getting pregnant. What is more, it sometimes seems that no self-respecting biblical hero is ever born of a mother who got pregnant on the first try. Aliases (and other name changes) run in biblical families. Many good biblical marriages (and many poor ones) began at a well. And, in almost every generation, the "wrong" child - the one who is qualified by skill but not by order of birth - takes over the leadership of the Jewish family/ people.

The idea of standard events (or technically, "**type-scenes**") is familiar to us. In movies and television shows we are used to certain basic "conventions." Lightning storms at night (especially around castles and abandoned houses) and full moons (accompanied by ominous string music) are certain clues to what will transpire. It is universally accepted that the first place every western hero goes when he gets to town is through the swinging doors into the saloon. We all know that his entry into the saloon will reveal both the degree and style of his machismo.

Whenever we watch a western movie, we have a number of expectations. We expect to meet many of the following types: a good sheriff trying to tame a bad town; a good sheriff fighting bad guys with the people of the town; a bad sheriff and gang controlling a town; the lovable prostitute; a retired gunman who will not pick up a gun, but who somehow does, just in time to resolve the story] an ex-bad guy, gone straight, who is discovered and soon thereafter dies fighting for right (usually in his son's arms) having finally paid his debt to society; the kid who wants to be a gun fighter; lots of cowardly town folk who make their living by walking back and forth across Main Street in period clothing; etc. In poor westerns, these stock incidents become cliché's. In a good western, such conventions are used to establish and define the hero. Similar conventions exist in biblical literature. How the characters behave within the type-scenes, and how they live up to or confound our expectations reveals their unique, dynamic personalities.

Two characters who provide good examples of conventions and expectations are Samson and Isaac. Both are strange biblical heroes. Samson is strange because he does little that is heroic and less which conforms to normative Jewish values. Isaac, "the silent one," according to the Rabbis, is a quiet presence who intensely occupies, but doesn't fill, his portions of the text.

As we compare some key events in the lives of Samson and Isaac, be aware of how the tension between our expectations and what actually happens shapes our insight into the characters' humanity.

### 1. The Mother's Inability To Get Pregnant

Our Expectation - 'My mother will be unable to get pregnant. She will appeal to God, and because of her merit or piety, God will "open her womb."

Samson - Samson's mother can't get pregnant. She is not named, but identified only as Manoah's wife. There is no statement of merit, and no demonstration of any positive qualities.

Isaac - In Isaac's case, neither Abram or Sarai ask God for the pregnancy. Abram appears to merit the pregnancy, and not Sarai. (See Genesis 12:7, 15:1-7, 16:1-4, 17:1-7, 18:9-15.)

### 2. Annunciation and Naming

Our Expectation - Either God, an angel, or an agent will inform the mother of her "open womb" and project the nature of the child. The child is given a name either when notice is given or at birth. The name reflects the condition of birth and usually projects part of his character.

Samson - An angel appears twice, because Manoah doubts the credibility of his wife's report and wants to be told "how to act with the child that is born." The angel predicts that the child "shall be the first to deliver Israel from the Philistines." Something else is also foreshadowed in this portion (which is another example of pattern one, repetition). When the angel first speaks to the wife, she is given the following three warnings: (1) let no wine touch his lips; (2) let him not eat anything unclean; and (3) let no razor touch his head, because he is to be a Nazirite. When she tells the instructions to Manoah and when the angel/man restates them, wine and unclean food are repeated, but the razor is forgotten.

Isaac - Abram, and not Sarai, is informed of Isaac's impending birth. Yet, it is Sarai's reaction to the news which determines his name. (See Genesis 17: 21, 18:9-15 and 21: 1-7.)

### **3. Sibling Rivalry**

Our Expectation - The younger brother will struggle with the older brother, and eventually take over the key role. The older brother is usually the outdoor type, and the younger more "homespun."

Samson - No example

Isaac - It is mother Sarai who does Isaac's fighting. (See Genesis 21:9-14.)

### **4. Leaving/Fleeing from Home**

Our Expectation - At some point in our hero's development he will leave home (usually because he needs to flee), and will develop his own lifestyle. The break with the family usually reflects the development of the character's own identity.

Samson - Samson is described leaving home (for no particular purpose) and then returning to his parents once he has seen a woman he wishes to marry.

Isaac - Isaac remains at home upon the decision of his father. His wife is brought to him. (See Genesis 24: 1-9.)

### **5. Initiatory Trial**

Our Expectation - Our hero, having left home, encounters a challenge which forces him to demonstrate his strength, courage, faith, and abilities.

Samson - Samson wrestles the lion and proves his strength for the first time. When it states "the spirit of the Lord gripped him, and he tore (the lion) asunder with his bare hands," the text informs us that Samson lost control. Rather than applying the minimal force necessary, he uses all his strength. The same will be true at his death. The text tells us, "Those who were slain by him in his death outnumbered those who had been slain by him when he lived." When he returns to the "scene of the crime" a year later, the lion's bones become a source of honey. Thus some good does come from his violence.

Isaac - Isaac left home for his trial when he went to Mt. Moriah with his father. But Abraham is really the star of Isaac's trial. (See Genesis 22.)

### **6. The Betrothal at the Well**

Our Expectation - Our hero should go to a town well. There he should meet the girl of his future dreams. The two of them interact. He may do something for her. She will draw water for him. Then, straight from the well, they go to her tent to meet the family and arrangements are made.

Samson - Samson's betrothal scene is aborted; the anticipated marriage is never consummated. He sees the girl (presumably at the well) and then, instead of interacting with her, he goes home and has his parents work out the details.

Isaac - Isaac's marriage is arranged by Abraham's servant Eliezer. He meets Rebekah at the well and then interacts with her family. (See Genesis 24.)

## **7. Dying Testament**

Our Expectation - Unlike western heroes, biblical heroes die in bed surrounded by their families. They usually know they are about to die and gather the family for a "closing benediction."

Samson - Samson doesn't have a family. He dies alone, asking God for the strength to take revenge. His closing remark is, "Let me die with the Philistines." This is a reversal of the set formula in which the hero usually asks to be buried with the family.

Isaac - Isaac's final benedictions do not go as he wishes them to. Indeed, he has no control over the situation; his wife sets the stage for the blessing. His actual death is reported in a matter-of-fact manner. Esau and Jacob bury him.

We began this comparison with the notion that Samson was less than the ideal biblical hero.

Our study has revealed that he consistently fails to fulfill the expected conventions. His annunciation scene foreshadows his fall, his initiatory trial demonstrates the out of control violence which will determine his death, and the aborted betrothal scene defines his alienation both from his people and from most human contact. Samson is the Jewish leader who is born to "deliver Israel from the Philistines," and who dies "among the Philistines." For the biblical narrator, Samson is a tragic hero who does kill Philistines, but who dwells in the same gulf of human relations which existed between his unnamed mother and his doubting father. He has to die in order to reach peace with his people.<sup>3</sup>

Isaac, on the other hand, was a quiet figure. If we look at the type-scenes which come into play here, we begin to understand why. Others dominate each of Isaac's key moments. His parents are the central focus of the annunciation. His father dominates the story both when Isaac leaves home and when he goes through his initiatory trial. His betrothal is arranged by his father's servant. And his testament is in the hands of his wife and youngest son. This leaves us with an impression of Isaac as a weak individual who has no control over his own life.

## **Classroom Applications**

The analysis of type-scenes and conventions provides us with many possible lessons. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Each of the type-scenes is like a key life cycle moment. We can bridge from the moments to teaching about birth, courtship, marriage, death, and other similar events in the lives of the biblical characters and of our students.
2. We can look at characters via the type-scene. In doing so, we can go beyond comparing Isaac (Eliezer), Samson, and Moses at the well. What, we might ask, would John Wayne, Humphrey

Bogart, and Mork from Ork do there? Write or act out type-scenes in which non-biblical characters experience biblical conventions. These would be appropriate to videotape.

3. Imagine biblical characters experiencing American conventions, e.g., Moses walks into the saloon, etc.
4. Write biblical conventions for characters in the Bible who don't experience them, e.g., Abram and Sarai at the well, etc.
5. Create dioramas (shoe box scenes) of various character's type-scenes. Stack them to form a 3-D chart of these characteristics.
6. Use the insights gained into the biblical characters you study to project other incidents: Abraham fighting with Isaac, Samson talking to his brothers, etc.



## PATTERN FOUR: LEADING WORDS `

Read the following text:

When your brother sinks down beside you and his hand falters beside you  
hold him fast sojourner and settler let him live  
beside you  
You may not take from him interest or multiplication  
Stand in fear before your God your brother shall live beside you  
Do not give him your money on interest for multiplication do not give your food  
I am your God  
who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan  
to be God to you  
When your brother sinks down beside you and sells himself to you  
you shall not make him serve the service of a serf  
As hired-hand as settler  
shall he be beside you  
Until the year of Recall he is to serve beside you  
then he is to go out from beside him he and his children beside you  
and return to his clan to the land plot of his fathers  
he shall return  
For they are my servants  
whom I brought out of the land of Egypt they shall not be sold in servant-selling  
Leviticus 25:35-42  
(Translated by Everett Fox in Response. Winter 1971-1972. Reprinted with  
permission)

Think about these questions: What two laws does this passage teach? What theological rationale is given for both commandments? What is the lesson of this passage? Note how often the phrase "beside you" appears. Noticing this phrase can affect our understanding of the passage or our view of the text's lesson.

Let's look at a second text:

His word was to Yona son of Amittai, saying: Arise,  
go to Nineveh, the great city, and call out concerning it  
that their evil-doing has come up before my face.  
Yona rose  
to flee to Tarshish, away from His face. He went down to Yafo, found a ship travel-  
ing to Tarshish, gave (them) the fare,  
and went down aboard it, to travel to Tarshish, away from His face.  
But He hurled a great wind upon the sea,  
so that the ship was on the brink of breaking  
up.  
The sailors were afraid, they cried out, each man to his god,  
and hurled the implements which were in the ship into the sea, to be lightened  
from them.  
Now Yona had gone down into the hindmost deck, had lay down and had gone to  
sleep. The captain approached him and said to him: How can you sleep!  
Arise, call upon your god! Jonah 1: 1-6 (Translated by Everett Fox Response,  
Summer 1974)

Does the text tell us anything about what Jonah is thinking or feeling? Note each usage of the verbs "to arise" and "to go down." The use of these leading words can give us clues to Jonah's psychology. This example and the previous one have provided us with some understanding of the ways the biblical text uses words.

**The Leitwort (leading word)** is a pattern in biblical style, defined first by Martin Buber. Biblical texts resemble poetry in many ways, especially in their conscious use of words. This amounts to serious punning. In the biblical text, puns form a subliminal guide, an internal commentary on the text.

### **Classroom Applications**

While the pattern of leading words is hard to generalize (and very difficult to recognize in the usual English translations), your students can feel the presence of the leading words and then recognize their role. They do so by working with a passage, understanding what it says and how it feels, then finding out the significance of repeating phrases. Here are a few ways that this pattern can be used with your students:

1. To convey the idea of word obsession, designate a word for the day. Give out a piece of candy, a point, or some other reward for each time the word is used in class. Encourage puns, variations, and other word plays.
2. Do as Groucho Marx did and hang up a magic bird (duck) with a secret word. Give out play money every time the magic word is said. (Use a cigar and a grease pencil moustache if you have the gumption.)
3. Upward and downward movement is central in the Jonah story. Create a comic book or a calligraphic version of the text which reflects these movements.
4. Give your students a story to tell or write and a leading word to utilize.
5. Compare one of Everett Fox's translations with either one of the Jewish Publication Society translations (see Bibliography). See which words emerge.

## PATTERN FIVE: MOTIVATION

The pattern of motivation is similar to what happens in detective movies. A crime, or other action, has occurred and our job is to figure out why. We know who did it (usually), we know exactly what was done. The problem is, we almost never know the motivation. This pattern is a direct outgrowth of the biblical style. As we have noted previously, the biblical text is essentially made up of two components - dialogue and narration. The dialogue is usually minimal; it captures the essence of the story. That which is said out loud is usually the character's central action or concern. The narration is used to establish and define the action, usually describing it while providing few other details. Whatever explanation of motive that is given is usually spoken "in the heart."

Let's look at an example:

Now Aaron's sons, Nadab and Avihu, each took his fire pan, Put fire in it and laid incense on it; and they offered a strange fire before the Lord, which He had not requested of them. And a fire came forth from the Lord and consumed them; thus they died before the Lord.

Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord meant when He said: Through those near to Me I show Myself holy, and assert My authority before all the people." And Aaron was silent. (Leviticus 10:1-3)

Notice that most of the passage is narration. We have only one line of dialogue, spoken by Moses to Aaron. The narrator gives us no clues as to the motivation of Nadab, Abihu, or Moses, or the reason for Aaron's silence. We are given a behavioral description of the incident; yet we have no insight into the emotions and feelings - the motivation.

First let us establish the facts:

1. Nadab and Abihu offered "strange fire" that was not requested before God. We don't know if the fire is strange because of its timing or because of the kind of fire used.
2. The fire which killed the two men "came forth from the Lord." Notice that we are not told that God "sent forth" the fire. We don't know if their deaths were caused by the conditions of the fire or by God's reaction to the fire.
3. We do know that Moses goes and talks to Aaron. We know that he quotes God. We do not know if God directed Moses to instruct Aaron, or whether this piece of "instruction" is Moses' reaction.
4. We do know what Moses says to Aaron. We do not know if he intended it to mean
  - a. I'm sorry - we all know how hard it is to be a public servant, or
  - b. they got what they deserved: if you misuse power, you pay the price, or
  - c. both responses. The narrator gives no description of Moses' tone of delivery.
5. We know that Aaron's response to Moses is silence; we have no insight into why. It could be shock, grief, anger, or even agreement. Given all the above questions, it is time to play detective. Using the Bible, decide which of the following is the true story of this death/homicide:

- a. GOD did it. Nadab and Abihu violated the sanctity of the Tabernacle and so God punished them
- b. AARON did it. Nadab and Abihu tried to take over his job. They were doing too much exploring of the role, so he rigged the fire pans.
- c. MOSES did it. There was an ongoing tension between Moses and Aaron which goes back to the golden calf. Moses was worried that the priests are getting too powerful, so he arranged the accident as a warning.
- d. THE FIRE WAS AN ACCIDENT

In his **solution to this mystery**, detective Rashi found a suspicious verse, Leviticus 10:89: "And the Lord spoke to Aaron, saying: ` Drink no wine or other intoxicant, you or your sons with you, when you enter the Tent of Meeting, that you may not die.'" Based on that verse, this is Rashi's report:

Rabbi Ishmael said: They died because they entered the Sanctuary intoxicated by wine. You may know that this is so, because after their death he admonished those who survived that they should not enter the Sanctuary when intoxicated...

Let's look at a second case, this one from Numbers 20. This is the story of why Moses was not permitted to enter the Promised Land. Most people think this occurred "because he hit the rock," but that's wrong. Previously (Exodus 17:5), God had ordered Moses to hit a rock. Others say that it was "because he didn't talk to the rock" - but that's wrong. Moses stood before the rock and said: "Shall we get water for you out of this rock?" While he didn't talk exclusively to the rock, he did talk about the rock in the rock's presence.

Now let's take a closer look. (Remember, the clues are usually in the dialogue.) From the dialogue we learn that Moses was really "not publicly affirming God's sanctity." Our next question must be: what action (s) or lack of action did not, in God's view, affirm His sanctity?

Here are several possibilities (suggested by the classical commentators):

1. Getting angry at the people and not responding to them even to reprimand them (with respect). Think about what he says to them. (Rambam)
2. Letting the people think that Moses and Aaron, and not God, were bringing them the water. (He says: "Shall we bring you forth water?") (Rambam)
3. Missing an opportunity to teach the people. It was not getting angry, hitting the rock, or saying "we," but rather not using this opportunity to show the people that God would take care of them. This situation wasn't like the first time, when the people were coming straight from being slaves in Egypt. This was the new generation who were about to enter the land. (Ibn Ezra)

### **Classroom Applications**

The pattern of motivation is clearly the most fun, and the most accessible of the five we have looked at. It is easy and challenging to play detective and the text provides us with both an abundance of mysteries and a plethora of clues.

Here are a few exciting classroom activities:

1. Use the same kind of inquiry approach described above
2. Have your class script and present the Nadab and Abihu story as an episode of "Quincy" or any other detective series. Present it live, as a radio play on tape, or videotape it.
3. Develop a new set of cards and play Clue with biblical problems.
4. Have a panel discussion between various commentators on a biblical issue.
5. Create (in any number of media) Moses and Aaron questioning God on what they really did wrong.

## Five Literary Patterns by Joel Lurie Grishaver,

Learning Torah: A Self-guided Journey through Layers of Jewish Learning Torah Aura/U AHC Press

### PRESCRIPTION (p. 58-67)

In "**Close-Reading**," we saw the use of repetition, patterns, and exceptions in the text. We saw the differences between two tellings of the same story. From these examples we learned that the Torah demands close-reading. Now we will learn to recognize **five literary patterns** used in the text and add them to our investigative skills. They are: **Repetition, Twice-Told Tales, Finding the Motivation, Leading Words, and Word-Echoes**.

In the course of this module, each of these patterns will be explained and a work example will be provided. By the end of this module, you should be able to:

- 1 Compare "repeated" portions of the biblical text and identify changes in the patterns of repetition.
- 2 Compare versions of stories and laws which are presented more than once in the text and identify differences in these versions.
- 3 Explain the concepts of "**back-story**" and "**sub-text**" and (a) describe how some midrashim fill this in, and (b) explain why that midrash was demanded by the text.
- 4 Identify leading word(s) in a passage and describe their impact.
- 5 Trace a "word-echo" between several passages and draw the connection the text seems to be making.
- 6 Describe and give an example of how the biblical author uses each of these five patterns to editorialize the story.

### REPETITION

When we read the Bible, it often seems to repeat itself constantly. We find that often God tells somebody to do something, that person does the thing, and then someone else is told about it—all in more or less the same language. The key is in the "more or less." As we saw in Genesis, chapter I, pattern and variation are important tools of the biblical author. Look at this example.

When Abram left Ur and then Haran, he was accompanied by Lot, his brother's son. He travels with him from chapter 12 of Genesis through most of 13; then the text tells us:

The land could not support them staying together; for their possessions were so great that they could not remain together. And there was quarreling between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and those of Lot's cattle. (13:6-7)

But this may not be the whole story. If we look closely at two other passages (and notice the subtle change in the pattern of repetition), we see that the biblical narrator is giving us more information.

When Abram leaves Haran we are given the following description of his family:

- (1) Abram took (2) Sarai his wife, and (3) Lot, his brother's son, and (4) all their possessions ... (12:5)

But just before the quarrel Abram and family return from Egypt and the description is more or less repeated:

- (1) Abram went up into the Negev. He, and (2) his wife and (3) all that

he possessed, and (4) Lot with him... (13:1)

Here, in what seems like just a repetition of the cast, is a clue from the biblical narrator as to what is about to happen.

1. The order of people is the same in both passages, but how is the ownership of property changed?
  2. Does this insight into the change in Abram's and Lot's relationship make anything clearer about the fighting between their shepherds?
  3. Can you draw a lesson from this?
- As you can see, repetition in the Bible requires close examination.

## TWICE-TOLD TALES

We have already seen that sometimes a biblical story is told more than once and that sometimes the details seem to change.

Compare the following two versions of the story about the spies who scouted Eretz Yisrael.

(Num.13:1-3) and (Num. 13:27-28; 30-32) and (Deut. 125-28)

- I. Who decides that the spies should be sent?
2. Who were the spies? What were their qualifications?
3. Compare Moses' responsibility. (Clue: What is God's role?)
4. Who is responsible for the people refusing to go up?
5. What new "theological" idea (about God) is added in the Deuteronomy passage?

As in the two stories of creation, we have found here that there are some details which differ. Let's

spend a moment looking at what various scholars have done with these two versions (to give them meaning).

Give some evidence (or answer the specific questions) for each interpretation.

1 The "documentary hypothesis" is an approach to the text which suggests that the Bible was assembled by collecting various documents/texts which had been written by different groups, under different influences, in different time periods. What evidence is there that these two passages might indeed be two different accounts (from different sources) about the same event?

2 Several traditional commentators say that there is no "real" contradiction between the two accounts. They are simply (like two news reporters) choosing to focus on different details. Can you explain how both excerpts are "factual"?



3 A traditional commentator, the Ramban (Nachmanides), suggests that the two versions of the story were designed to fit the needs of two audiences. The first was written about and for the generation which left Egypt the generation which died in the desert. The second was written for the generation which was about to enter the Land of Israel-the generation which was born and raised in the desert. What evidence can support this point of view?

4 A modern commentator, David Hoffman, suggests that the two accounts have two different purposes. The version in Numbers was written to give us the historical details, while the version in Deuteronomy was created to teach us a "moral lesson." Give evidence supporting this point of view.

5 One of my students, Danny Kaufman, suggested that the two versions simply reflect aging. Moses is forty years older when he presents the second account. Do you have a comment?

6 Why do you think the Torah includes two separate accounts of this incident? What are we supposed to learn from them?

## FINDING THE MOTIVATION - "Back-Stories"

Imagine that you are an actor and someone has just handed you a script, asking you to play the part of a lawyer. Before you can begin playing the part (and have a sense of how to approach your lines), you need to know something about this lawyer. You want to know if she/he is bright or stupid, rich or poor, idealistic or crooked, if she/he is related to Oliver Wendell Holmes or was self-taught while in prison, etc. This background on the character helps the actor understand the motivation for the lines-in the theater it's called the character's **"back-story."** Often, an actor has to figure out what a character's back-story is because the playwright hasn't filled in the details. She/he has to read the script and then fill in the missing details with imagination (extrapolated from the given data). The Bible often leaves us in the same position.

Here is an example from Genesis:

Now this is the line of Terah: Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begot Lot. Haran died in the lifetime of his father Terah, in his native land, Ur of the Chaldeans.... (11:27-28)

Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and they set out together from Ur of the Chaldeans for the land of Canaan; but when they had come as far as Haran, they settled there. (11:31)

The Bible introduces the cast-Terah, Abram, Lot, and Sarai-but we are told nothing about them. We know what they do, but not why. We know their names and family relationships, but nothing about their motivations.

Write your own back-story for Abram which explains:

1. Why the family left Ur.
2. Why the family left Haran.
3. Why the Lord chose to talk to Abram.
4. Why Abram listened and went.

### "Sub-text"

Actors have a concept called "sub-text." The sub-text of a line is the message which is being communicated by the ways words are spoken, not just by what the words mean. Think of it this way: Imagine two people sitting at the breakfast table: one asks the other, "PASS THE MILK, PLEASE." Usually we think that person A is just asking person B for the milk. But, if they had just had a fight, person A could ask for the milk in a tone which really said: "I am mad at you." Or, "I am really hurt." Or, "Do you want to make up?" Or even, "You know, I really love you." The message behind the words is called the sub-text.

The Bible is written in such a manner that we often have to figure out the subtext for ourselves. Most biblical stories are written in a format which scholars call biblical narrative, which is made up of two parts: dialogue and narration. The narration describes action and almost never discusses the feelings or motivation. We have to guess at what characters are feeling or thinking by what they say. This means we are often trying to discover the sub-text.



In the following passage, Jacob is trying to fool his father, Isaac, into giving him the blessing which was intended for his brother, Esau. Underline all the dialogue. (Genesis 27:6-26).

If you were an actor playing the part of Isaac, would you be fooled Jacob or not? It is clear that by now you have some doubts, but, by the end of the dialogue, do you believe that it is Esau you're blessing, or do you know that it is Jacob? (In other words, what is the sub-text of the line "The voice is the voice of Jacob, yet the hands are the hands of Esau"?)

Explain how and why you would make your choice.

The Bible often leaves us with the problem of understanding the tone of the dialogue.

## LEADING WORDS

The biblical text uses leading words in telling a story, a technique not often found in English stories.

**Martin Buber** defined it.

By "leading word" we mean a word or word-stem which is ingeniously repeated within a text, a series of texts, a group of related texts: to one who pays attention to these repetitions is disclosed or made clear an interpretation of the text .... It need not be the same word but merely the same word-stem which recurs in this manner; through the momentary variations, the dynamic effect of the whole is often magnified. I call it dynamic because a kind of movement takes place between the articulations of sound which are interrelated: one for whom the whole is present feels the waves beating back and forth.

*Leitwortstil in der Erzählung des Pentateuchs* Translated by E. Fox, Response, Summer 1972

Hebrew is based on three-letter roots. Grammarians call these three-letter roots "word-stems." Often, the biblical narrator weaves a word or word-stems into a passage. That word seems to be used far more frequently than is necessary, and both its sound and its meaning add something to a passage. Sometimes, even the exact number of times it is used may be a clue to its importance. Like a poet, the biblical narrator can hide the interpretation of the text in the words used to tell the tale. **Leading words** is one of these devices.

## WORD ECHOES

Three related incidents.

Incident # 1-The Binding of Isaac - Hineni (I am here)."

Incident #2 Burning Bush Exodus 3:4

Incident #3 I Samuel 3:3-10

## POST-TEST PEP TALK (p. 73)

Learning Torah should now seem both more difficult and more exciting. Things have been made more complicated, but we've also opened up new things to find. Most importantly, you've begun to master new tools which you can use to look for meaning.

At the beginning of the midrash to Song of Songs, the rabbis had a dialogue on what it felt like to learn Torah. They talked both about the difficulty and confusion experienced in trying to unlock a text and about the excitement and joy in finding meaning. Here is part of their conversation.

**NARRATOR:** Besides being wise, Solomon also taught knowledge to the people. He was the first biblical commentator. He measured and searched out meaning, set many things in order, and taught parables and explanations. Before Solomon, Torah learning was difficult. After him, all could enter into the text.

**VOICE ONE:** Learning Torah is like trying to explore a palace with many doors and hallways. Everyone who went into this palace used to get lost. Finally, one wise person (Solomon) tied a string at the entrance and found his way by unrolling it as he entered, and rerolling it as he left. Since then, everyone can use his method.

**VOICE TWO:** No, it is more like this thick forest of thorns through which no one could pass. Finally, one person (Solomon) took out a sickle and cut a trail. After that, all could pass through using his trail.

**VOICE THREE:** Think of it this way. There was a big pot of boiling water which no one could lift. Then, along came someone (Solomon) who invented handles. Now there was a way for anyone to carry that pot.

**VOICE FOUR:** I think it was like the time when once there was a basket of ripe fruit which no one could pick up until someone (Solomon) came and attached handles. After that, everyone could get the fruit home.

**VOICE FIVE:** Picture a deep well. Its water was clear and sweet, yet none could reach down to drink from it. One wise person (Solomon) took pieces of rope and tied them together, and then attached a bucket. Now all could drink from the Torah's deep, sweet water. *Song of Songs Rabbah 1*

## Basics of Plot by Dana Fewell and David Gunn

Reading for the plot is a desire for order (p.103-105)

Plot is the organizing force or principle through which narrative meaning is communicated. There must be events for there to be story; not random events but **events that are connected, events that have design, that form a pattern - events that are in fact 'plotted'**. It is this plotting of events that allows narrative to communicate the **temporal nature of its message**. For the meaning of narrative is not static, like that of a painting, but something that is developed through time - the time of the characters living out the events of their narrative lives and the time of readers as they enter and 'live out' the lives of the characters they read.

**Plot provides a time continuum**, but it is a continuum that relies upon the reader's sense of design. Plot is constructed through different and incomplete sources - the voice of the narrator, the speech and actions of characters. Narrative stories depend on meanings delayed, partially filled in, stretched out. **Relations between events are not always apparent, but our propensity for order drives us to make sense of what we read.**

This is particularly apparent in the reading of Hebrew narrative. Most events, even whole stories or episodes, are simply connected with 'and' (most often in a construction called the *vav-* or *waw-* consecutive). Readers, however, usually following the lead of **translators, variously interpret the 'and' to mean 'when', 'then', 'now', 'so', 'but',** and so forth. Hebrew narrators provide the events, but often the relationships between and among events are not explicit. The reader infers the chronological order or the system of cause and effect. It is as though the text provides a kind of map and the readers are left to chart a course. **We plot our way, connecting events, often without thinking, in a way that makes the most sense to us.**

**Presuming that every element of the story has a purpose** and is somehow connected to every other element of the story, we are constantly organizing and amplifying the fragmented but potentially coherent information, striving in the process to forge meaning and a sense of the whole. We read "in a spirit of confidence, and also a state of dependence, that what remains to be read will restructure the provisional meanings of the already read" (Peter Brooks).

### Structure

Plots may be charted most simply with three basic categories which correspond perhaps to **Aristotle's famous 'beginning, middle, and end'**.

- 1- The **exposition** sets up the story world and initiates the main series of events. The situation presented in an exposition is usually characterized by incompleteness, disorder, or unfulfilled desire, from which develops a subsequent conflict or complication.
- 2- The **conflict**, which may be internal to a character or an external one, between characters, moves through various phases
- 3- until a climax gives way to some degree of **resolution**.

Plots have clear beginnings and clear endings. Often they are patterned after natural experiences: A - the **span of a life**, for instance. For many stories that focus on individuals, birth marks the beginning, death marks the end.

B - **Human aspiration** is another common model. A **quest** that must be undertaken, a goal that must be attained introduces the incompleteness and structures the complication and resolution.

While they may be structured around real-life experiences, literary plots differ from real life. **Whereas, in real life, events often seem random, narrative shapes events into meaningful patterns.** Even clear beginnings and endings are not apparent in real life. Death is hardly the end to the biological process, and one need only listen to the abortion debate to be reminded that birth is hardly the very beginning. Our lives, even particular episodes in our lives, do not have the distinct parameters that we find in literary plots. Nor, for that matter, are they commonly accorded obvious meaning. Consequently, while plots must be similar enough to real life so that we can understand and relate to them (i.e., *mimetic*, in Aristotle's terms), they must also be different in order for us to appreciate them. **We see enough disjointedness in everyday life. When we read, we expect to see significance.**

The simple model of exposition, conflict, climax, and resolution is, of course, not universal where many biblical narratives are concerned. The book of Jonah has no exposition at all. Chronicles I's exposition is a list, s a genealogy that takes the reader back to the very beginning of Israel's story. If one knows the stories of Genesis-Judges, the very names function as allusion. It is the tradition in shorthand. The genealogy also communicates that the Chronicler's story is a story about community. The genealogy represents all Israel. Even the attention to David is one that takes in the larger community and shows David to be a public, community figure rather than the private individual who is found in the books of Samuel.

There may be more than one conflict and more than one climax. Longer stories are characteristically plotted this way. The story of David and Saul in the books of Samuel includes a whole series of episodes in which Saul seeks to kill David or have him killed...

Recent theoretical work on plot has drawn an analogy between readers' experience of this classic plot pattern and **Freud's pleasure principle.** The implication of this model is that plots, and **the reading of plots, are goal-oriented: we read to get to the end because the end will make sense of what has gone before.** `The reader proceeds forward under the thrust of expectation to the conclusion which provides a vantage point which the story is seen as a whole' (Paul Ricoeur). **The end represents meaning fulfillment, completion, and closure.**

When we are reading a Bible story for the first time, the obsession with the end is often operative. **The unfulfilled desire in the story's beginning creates desire in the reader.** We want to know how order will come from disorder, completeness from incompleteness, and the further we become immersed in the conflict, the obstacles to resolution, the more captured we are by our desire to know how it will all end. The end, we trust, will not only bring resolution to the story's action, but also resolution to the reading process - for the end offers us a `promise to bestow meaning and significance on the beginning and the middle' (Peter Brooks).

The idea that endings will bring resolution and will clarify all that has come before is, however, too simplistic. Plot endings, whether signaled by a closing formula or by the fact that the words on the page simply stop, do not always make sense. Genesis-2 Kings, for instance, ends with Jehoiachin, king of Judah, in exile, but sitting daily at the Babylonian king's table. Certainly the end tells us that the entire story has been pointing to the possibility, perhaps the inevitability, of the nation's exile. The image of the Judaeen king (of the line of David) dining at the foreign king's table, however, is an ambiguous one. Does his political servitude spell a pessimistic ending? Or does his release from prison and his receipt of a regular allowance indicate hope for the nation?

Some endings, like that of the book of Jonah, bring no closure at all. The *God's* final speech ends with a question - 'Should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many -cattle?'

# Literary Features of Tanakh Narratives

editor's summary from of Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives* <sup>8</sup>

## I. Beginnings and Endings by Amos Oz

- 1- Amos Oz in the *Story Begins* writes: "Any beginning of a story is always a kind of contract - "Sometimes the opening paragraph or chapter works like a secret pact between writer and reader behind the protagonist's back." For example, Gene 22:1 tells us but not Abraham that the Akeda is only a test
- 2- "There are beginnings that work like a honey trap: at first you are seduced with a juicy piece of gossip or an all-revealing confession or a bloodcurdling adventure, but eventually you find out that what are you getting is not a fish, but stuffed fish also many delicatessen items not mentioned on the menu, not even hinted at in the opening contract." For example, II Samuel 13 story of love of Amnon for Tamar sounds like typical love story but ends up ghastly, twisted, perverse.
- 3- "Sometimes we are confronted with a harsh opening contract, almost forbidding, which warns the reader right from the outset: Tickets are expensive here. If you feel you cannot afford a tough advance payment, you'd better not even try to get in. No concessions and no discounts are to be expected." For example, II Samuel 18:19 where the bad news of killing of Avshalom must be taken to David.
- 4- Philosophical contract that promises deep reflections on human life like opening of Anna Karenina or Genesis 1.

## II. Plots - Aristotle - "Every story has beginning, middle and end."

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<sup>8</sup> Literary Approach to Tanakh –  
Summary of Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives*  
(Fortress Press, Minneapolis)

### I. The Power of Stories

- 1- Bible as autobiographical saga of a people/family - *Vhigadta lvincha*
- 2- Rhetorical power to convince others with superior power to feel empathy  
For example, Natan's parable to King David (I Samuel 12), Judah's retells tear-jerker family saga to Viceroy Joseph (Genesis 44:18),
- 3- Telling mythic stories of God's heroic deeds – *mi yimalel gevurot hasem*
- 4- History of unique foundational events like Sinai and Exodus that happened in past so no access to them except thru power of story (Deuteronomy 4)

### II. Transition from Diachronic Higher and Lower Biblical Criticism of the Text (based on historical philology of 19<sup>th</sup> century) to Synchronic Literary Analysis

- 1- Herman Gunkel (Germany 1990) on Literary Forms
- 2- Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber – leading word, role of the redactor
- 3- Erich Auerbach – *Mimesis* – comparing Odyssey to Akedah in literary style DONE
- 4- Meir Weiss – *Mikra Kidmuto*
- 5- Meir Sternberg – *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*
- 6- Robert Alter – *The Art of Biblical Narrative*

Two approaches: Literary approach analyzing textual as redacted by tradition whatever its history of transmission OR clarify the best text at least with lower textual criticism and then begin literary analysis

**(Poetics 7:26)**

PLOT communicates a CHANGE from initial to end situation.

"A story relates what is happening to people. .What makes a description into a story is significant change:

a bad situation improved (for example, one rival overcomes another)

a good situation markedly worse (for example, failure of a plan)

Five stages of plot form a concentric structure in chronological or causal order:

A- Exposition or Background - descriptive and static information which is habitual, not unique occurrence which will appear as the first complication of crisis.  
For example, I Samuel 28:3 -6 is essential background.

B- Complication or Crisis which initiates change

C- Change

D- Unraveling or denouement

E- Summary - ending - outcomes returning to beginning and measuring what has changed relationships, in inner growth, in space, in time, plans fulfilled or thwarted

Examples - Babel - Gen 9 and Ehud Judges 3

PLOT in SCENES - like a play there are scene transitions whenever place or character or times change. Unlike a play there is "telling" by narrator as well as "showing" by action or dialogue. More telling is more dramatic and longer and requires reader to figure more on his/her own.

Example - Otniel Judges 3 is all report -telling - with no showing.

Sale of Machpela is all showing.

Gen 27 involves several scene changes between Yitzchak-Esav , then Jacob-Rivka, then Yitzchak-Jacob, then Yitzchak - Esav, each time with two characters. Missing scene is Yitzchak-Rivka.

Ehud in Judges 3 begins with dagger then hall of tribute then cool chamber of king with change (assassination) to hall where servants wonder where king is to Ehud's escape and preparation for ambush of Moabites

Concentric symmetry of chiastic story.

Tower of Babel

Kerem Navot - II Kings 9 from vineyard to palace to place of judgment to palace to vineyard.

Three and Four Structure for Persuasion - three failures and final success

Example- Delilah seduces Samson - Judges 16:4-21

Jotam's Parable - choosing a king among trees - Judges 9:7-21

Job's tests - four messengers - Job 1

### III. Type Scene

Well - meet, test, marriage (Gen 24, Gen 29, Exodus 2)

Calling - encounter with mystery, appointment, refusal, encouragement, request for signs, (Exodus 3)

### IV. CHARACTER

#### Categories:

**Round** (like Michal who has inner life and choice and develops or Jacob, like David in Samuel II) **versus**

**Flat Characters** (like Batsheva, Avishag)

**Stock Type Stereotypical Character** (like Abigail being the wise woman, like David in Chronicles)

**Agents** (angels)

#### Method of characterization:

**Direct by narrator** (like "Nabal was bad")

**Indirect by showing**

**Naming** - *midrash shem*

#### Role of God as character:

**Developing** (in Gen 6 after disappointment with Noah's generation or Exodus 32-33 with Golden Calf)

**Stock Character with Divine anger**

**Agent** (closing Sarah's womb)

### V. NARRATOR

**For Bible narrator is almost always reliable as is God. The contract with reader is that this is historical truth and that God is reliable.**

(snake accuse God of lying about the tree of knowledge but we rely on God)

(I Samuel 31 death of Saul contradicts Amalekite report in II Sam 1. We never know who to believe).

**Abstract narrator creates illusion of objectivity.**

**Participant narrator** like Nehemia tells his own story and Moshe telling his story ( DT 3)

### VI. TIME

G.E.Lessing: "That which the eye take sin at a glance, the poet enumerates slowly and by degrees and it often happens by the time he describes the last trait we have already forgotten the first...To the eye the parts, once seen, are constantly present; it can scan them again and again. To the ear those parts which have already been describes are lost, unless memory retains them."

"A narrative cannot exist without time - it unfolds within time (time of narration) and time passes within it (narrated time). The narrative needs time to unravel itself in stages before



the reader .. and the narrative requires internal time because the characters and incidents exist and develop in time" (Shimon Bar-Efrat).

Techniques to compress narrated time - to cover long period in short narrative time: list / genealogies / string of verbs (Exodus 1:7 - Israel was fertile and prolific and multiplied etc" / segues - "After time passed" / summary statements ("the land was quiet for 40 years.") / chronological marker \*("until the morning" "all night")

Techniques to slow down and dramatize short time making it feel like it lasts forever: repeating (both command or plan and its execution in plagues, tabernacle, engagement of Isaac); detail ( like tabernacle); showing with dialogue

Flashbacks (like Gen 42:21 when we discover Yosef had cried out to his brothers who ignored him)

Anticipations when angels, prophets, oracles tell us what will happen but not how (God promises Abraham great nation; God promises Abraham his sons will go to slavery; Joseph's dream; Rivka's birth after Isaac saved in Akeda - Gen 22:20-24)

**Narrator gives away God's intervention** (like II Sam 17:14b - Ahitophels' advice is ignored so God can bring ruin on Avshalom)

## VII. SPACE

**Place in geographical sense - not scene or nature - is very important to create sense of verisimilitude and to connect event to a place with midrash on name ( for example, Beth-El or Pni-el in Jacob stories).**

**Lack of place expresses parable status (like Natan's parable)**

**Place as main topic** (like purchase of Machepla and of place of Temple - Gen 23, II Samuel 24:24)

**Place as hero - Givah** is anti-hero of rape while all characters are anonymous, thus imputing Saul of Givah

**Typological routes of wandering** - desert, Abraham down to Egypt to be repeated by children

## VIII. Midrash Shem - NOMEN ET OMEN - Onomastics, the Study of Names

Midrash shem is multifunctional technique that goes to heart of both literary and theological issues. Theologically, we note that the world is created by God's naming in Gen. 1 and one of God's first gifts to Adam in Gen. 2 is the ability to assign names. The Kabbalist tradition sees all of the Torah as nothing less than God's names. The name is felt to be a window into the soul and the calling of a person by name is central to the dialogic philosophy of Martin Buber that developed out of the prophetic calling of God to Abraham and Moshe by name. Often God changes a Biblical character's name to mark a turning point as in Abram to Abraham, Hosea to Yehoshua, Jacob to Yisrael, so names reflect not only eternal essences but the possibility of transformation. Often names are theomorphic tying the character to God, as in Yisra-el.

Educationally many students are deeply connected to their names which sometimes ties them back to their families. This connects to the central role of genealogies in the Tanakh that preserve names from generation to generation. Mitzvot like yibum and the idea of yad vashem in Isaiah also make clear that keeping a name alive is a primary concern for Biblical immortality.

Literarily midrash shem uncovers the way parents name their children after incidents at birth (Esav, I-kavod), after their own personal struggles and hopes (Yitzchak, Reu-ven, Naftali). So names are part of the plot. But the Torah also uses the names in ways that go beyond self-consciousness of the parents. So a name may become prophetic as in Shaul - "asked for" by the people to be king - or David, beloved of the people and a great lover or Mahlon/illness and Khilhyon/destruction who die young. . Names may reveal character as in Jacob who is called the supplanter/ *vayaakveini* by his brother Esav after the great deception. Names often reflect plot as Gideon who cuts off the *ashera*, the pagan tree. Names can hint at comparisons to earlier stories as when Yerovam's sons are called as Aharon's sons - Nadav and Avihu. A name's meaning can be a conscious tool in irony as when Naomi calls herself "Mara."

## **Ms. Rose, by Any Other Name, Might Still Be a Florist**

By Sam Roberts Published: March 27, 2005

UESS what Dilip Doctor does for a living? (Hint: His receptionist answers the phone, "Doctor's office.")

"Back home in India, we had a different last name that began with a Z and in school I would always be called on last," Dr. Doctor, a Queens urologist, recalled. "One day I was complaining to my teacher and he said because my father and mother were both physicians, Why not call yourself Doctor? That was 40 years ago. And then I figured if they called me doctor, I might as well become one."

The Romans called this phenomenon *nomen et omen*, roughly, names are prophetic. Today's students of onomastics, as the study of names is called, describe it as "nominative determinism." Apt names were dubbed aptonyms by the columnist Franklin P. Adams. Once you start collecting them, you can't stop.

Think of baseball's Cecil Fielder and Rollie Fingers, the news executive Bill Headline, the artist Rembrandt Peale, the poet William Wordsworth, the pathologist (not gynecologist) Zoltan Ovary, the novelist Francine Prose, the poker champion Chris MoneyMaker, the musicians Paul Horn and Mickey Bass, the TV weatherman Storm Field, Judge Wisdom, the spokesman Larry Speakes, the dancer Benjamin Millepied, the opera singer Peter Schreier, the British neurologist Lord Brain, the entertainer Tommy Tune, the CBS Television ratings maven David Poltrack.

Think, too, of all those fictional characters and the real-life doctors and dentists named Payne, Blank the anesthesiologist, Kramp the swim coach, Blechman the gastroenterologist, Faircloth the fashion designer, Goodness the church spokesman, Slaughter the murderer and the funeral director named Amigone.

"I once had a doctor named Gore," recalls Anne Bernays who, with her husband, Justin Kaplan, wrote "The Language of Names."

Originally, professions were one way of establishing surnames (the most common American surname is Smith, of whom there are more than a million, far more than the number of blacksmiths). Other aptronyms are nicknames and surnames that were legally changed retroactively. Then there are the names of people who succeeded in their professions despite what might be called their an-aptronyms: Dr. Kwak, Judge Lawless or Orson Swindle, a member of the Federal Trade Commission. Long before Armand Hammer bought Arm & Hammer, the baking soda company, many people assumed he owned it.

What stumps many students of onomastics is the extent to which names become self-fulfilling. After all, Newton Minow did not become an ichthyologist. Paul Bunyan wasn't a podiatrist. Are there a disproportionate number of people named Doctor among medical professionals?

"Some people think I'm a bird specialist, which I'm not," said Dr. Meredith Bird, a Rhode Island veterinarian, who added that she doubted that her name influenced her career choice. "I loved animals since I was a little kid. But I was forever grateful my mother didn't name me Robin."

Others believe names truly are destiny.

"Names and 'life script,' researchers say, are not merely coincidental but, indeed, causative in considerable measure," Prof. Ralph Slovenko of Wayne State University Law School has written. "Dr. Robert E. Strange, director of the Northern Virginia Mental Health Institute, tells people that he had no choice but to be a psychiatrist."

David J. Lawyer, who practices in Bellevue, Wash., says: "My routine answer on most days is I do not know why I became a lawyer. But I do know of people who have been inspired by their names. I was deposing an arborist, a tree doctor, and the guy said his name was Greenforest. I said, 'I get a lot of snickers about my name. You must, too.' He said, 'That's why I chose it.' And I did get a call from a fisherman once with a damaged boat full of fish. It was taking on water and he goes to a pay phone and all the attorneys in the yellow pages were ripped out, so he looks up lawyer in the white pages and finds me."

Mr. Lawyer said that two of his uncles are attorneys, but that it's unlikely his three children will follow in his footsteps. "They all vow not to become lawyers," he said.

Cleveland Kent Evans, a psychologist at Bellevue University in Nebraska, said: "It is certainly possible that when someone's name corresponds with a word which is associated with a particular interest or profession in their culture, it might make them somewhat more likely to go into that profession. But the people involved themselves wouldn't necessarily consciously know that or consciously want to admit it when it would happen."

Dr. Lewis P. Lipsitt, professor emeritus of psychology at Brown, agrees that the influence of a name is often subliminal.

"You wouldn't expect people to reply that they had a strong awareness of moving toward a profession or occupation or a preoccupation just because their name signified that they should," he said, "but I think there is a real process at work to gravitate people toward occupations and preoccupations suggested by their names."

"I was lecturing to my class one day, telling them to be careful because coincidences do happen. To illustrate, I said I could probably convince you people's names cause them to go into certain

occupations. I mentioned Mrs. Record who keeps alumni records, Professor Fiddler in the music department, Dr. Fish of the Oceanographic Institute. By the time I got that deeply into it off the top of my head, I'm beginning to think there might be a causal relationship. And then a student said, and you, Dr. Lipsitt, you study sucking behavior in babies. And that had never occurred to me."

## History versus Storytelling, Myth versus Trial by Harold Fisch

From *New Stories for Old: Biblical Patterns in the Novel*

The telling and retelling of stories is no incidental feature of the Hebrew Bible. It sometimes seems as though there is nothing of greater importance. The Bible is not simply concerned with telling us what happened; in two places in the book of Exodus - 10:2, and 13:8 - it enjoins upon its readers **the duty of retelling the story to their children and grandchildren**. There is thus a narrative and a meta-narrative, an account of what occurred and a foregrounding of the account itself as a primary outcome of the occurrence. *Which matters more, we may ask, the Exodus or the relating of the Exodus?*

The Rabbis tended to put their emphasis on the narration and the attendant ceremonies as the ultimate value, the end-purpose so to speak of the whole historical process. They read Exodus 13:8 as: "*And you shall relate to your son on that day saying: It is for the sake of this [relating and the visible symbols that accompany it] that God so did to me when I came out of Egypt.*"

Historical discourse, as philosophers and historians have become increasingly aware, is inseparable from story-telling. The "facts" cannot be represented without an element of narrativity. And this means inevitably the ordering and moralizing of those. But whilst admitting this, most objective, "scientific" historians would maintain that the object of historiography is history; the data are what really matter, the story as story is secondary.

The Bible it would seem inverts this order: the "telling" is all important. Things happen in order that they may be told about! And not only told but retold "in the ears of your son and your son's son." These in turn would relate the story to their own children and grandchildren.

It follows from this emphasis on retelling that what is valued is not only the story, but the ongoing life of the story, including **the potentiality for change inherent in the process of recapitulation**. Clearly, when it is repeated from age to age, it will not be quite the same story each time; it will have been interiorized, experienced afresh as the new generation brings its own historical experience to bear on the record.

**The retelling** thus achieves two functions simultaneously - it **gratifies the fundamental human need for novelty and also for sameness, for a constancy of meaning**. 'Repetition', as Paul Ricoeur reminds us, 'involves an existential deepening of our sense of time.' When a story is retold its previous tellings echo down the memory. **But repetition not only points backwards in time; it also points forward, gratifying our need for continuity, affirming an openness to the future.** The reader too, like those who took part in the first Exodus, is booted and belted for the road, ready to start out on an **ongoing interpretive journey**. In retelling the story, he or she affirms its unexhausted possibilities and meanings. There is a sense in which such a tale is never concluded, for readers are encouraged to insert themselves into the narration. "*Everyone is obliged to see himself as though he too had gone out of Egypt.*"

In the biblical models the reader becomes a witness and the story, **a testimony** that he is charged to deliver. "Witness" and "testimony" are in fact the terms which Moses in Deuteronomy uses to define the reader's response to a poem, the poem he is about to introduce which would focus on the desert experience:

And it shall come to pass, when many evils and troubles have befallen them, that this poem shall testify against them as a witness; for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed. (Deut. 31:21)

Such an ongoing testimony, enjoined upon the Israelites in regard to the Exodus and the journey through the wilderness, indicates a particular hermeneutic stance, a particular relation assumed between reader and narrative. **If the tale is never completed it is because the reader has an active role still to perform. His retelling is of the very matter of the story.**

**Absence of closure** is implied in the necessary relationship between an original narrative and its subsequent retellings down the ages, but in the case of Bible stories it is implied very often in the structure and context of the original narratives themselves. Bible stories seem to resist closure. **The Exodus may seem to have a clear beginning (Egypt), a middle (the wilderness trek) and an end (arrival in the Promised Land). This would give it an Aristotelian shape.** But the arrival in Canaan when it comes seems more like a beginning than an ending. There is a dynamic forward movement which takes little account of the supposed exigencies of narrative form which we are told demands an ending. **There is no real ending.**

As though to make this clear, the people on their arrival in Canaan perform the Passover ritual with its re-enactment of the Exodus. They also partake of the first corn of the Land (Joshua 5:10-12). The whole occasion suggests the beginning of a new era. Likewise, the story of Joseph and his brothers has often been seen as having a classical shape, beginning with the enmity which as a youth of 17 he aroused among his brothers, proceeding through his trials and difficulties in Egypt and ending with his triumph as vice-regent of Egypt and his restoration to his father. But if the story is read in its context, there is **no such neat closure**. Even Joseph's death is no terminus. Significantly, his bones will accompany the people on their pilgrimage through the desert. And their interment in Shekhem (Joshua 24:32) will mark something of a new beginning - the beginning of the turbulent history of the northern kingdom of Ephraim, the "children of Joseph," with its uncompleted vistas, its still-awaited fulfillments. It follows from this **typical ongoingness of the biblical narratives...**

In his *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye suggests that we may think of the different *mythoi* of literature as ultimately part of one unified myth, that of **the quest**. The hero's struggle, his disappointments, his death, and his final success or recovery at the end of the cycle are all comprised in this archetype of archetypes. It reflects the "law of the eternal return.

But might one not suggest that, infolded with this and at the same time dialectical opposed to it, is another supreme myth, which we may term, **the test**. Joseph K. in Kafka's *The Trial* or Job in the Old Testament can certainly be spoken of as quest-heroes, the former defeated, the latter, seeming to triumph. But fundamental to both these stories is the sense of a trial or test....

As against the cyclical shape of the quest, the test is open-ended. We never know quite how it will end. "Then I saw," says Bunyan's hero at the end of his pilgrimage, "that there was a way to hell even from the gates of Heaven." The conditions of the test are what keep the options open. We may make a further distinction here. The rounded form of the quest narrative yields such a genre as the epic (Aeneas is first and foremost a quest-hero); the open-ended character of the test yields a different form, which we might term the pilgrimage. The pilgrimage is thus an alternative to the epic. Lord Jim's career, like that of many other heroes of Conrad, is a pilgrimage. There is

an uncertain but nevertheless persistent movement forward along a narrow path; ascent and descent are not arranged in regular sequence, and there is the ever-present possibility of error. Here is a fundamental literary genre.

Ernst Cassirer in his doctrine of "Symbolic Forms" distinguished between **myth** consciousness and the consciousness of **history** as such. The former based on "biological time," can yield a rounded, harmonious pattern, a myth of origins or of grand, universal world-cycles. But it is essentially spatial and is grounded in nature. It can at best rise to the apprehension of a cosmic order, the order of destiny. But it cannot apprehend the unrepeated quality, the portentousness of historical time." By contrast, true time-consciousness, for which, according to Cassirer, the Hebrew prophets provide the classic example, reaches into the past through memory and gains a perception of the future as something hidden and yet unfolding out of the past. There is here no unchanging pattern as in the biological time of nature. Thus Nature can offer no support to the prophetic consciousness: Nature is given, objective, history is open, its events, irreversible. In particular, the openness to the future, the quality of expectation, provide a human dimension specific to prophecy.

The difference between history and myth is that history has within it a potentiality for change. What kind of pattern is it that can embody changes of this kind? Frank Kermode finds in many fictions a "**structure of adventures**," in which **the beginning implies the end**. The shape of novels is determined by what he calls "**the sense of an ending**." As in the biblical mode of Apocalypse, by which our literary tradition has been largely conditioned, "past, present and future are related inextricably by the felt need for a foreordained conclusion, an *eschaton*, whether of disaster or blessing. Time is in this way given form, significance. It is not mere duration, the time of the clock, but rather the "time of men in certain postures of attentiveness." This is well said and it catches the sense of expectancy with which we read novels, relating them to our own mode of existence. **We desire to impose a pattern on the flux of time**, to see it teleologically poised and directed. We also obscurely seek such a *telos* in our own lives. We live for the sake of what is to come and in some sense that promise is already beheld as present, like the biblical *eschaton*, in every moment. But if the notion of apocalypse can be seen to shed meaning and value on our quotidian existence, does it not also in a manner tend to abolish the felt contingency of such existence, its human density and unpredictability?

True, we do not live without pattern, but it would seem that we should be looking for a pattern-if that is the right word-which does not have quite the degree of closure assumed by Kermode. His temporal order has something of the symmetry and balance of arrangements in space. **His notion of an end present in every moment is a little too tidy for life or for literature either**. It is also a little too tidy to do justice to the Bible itself. The truth is that the Bible does not (except in the final book of the New Testament and in a few verses of Daniel and the later Prophets) talk too much about the end of days. But it does talk about **tasks** imposed in the historical present, about accidental judgments and purposes mistook. If we read Samuel and Kings, we find that history works much more by **trial and error** than by the sense of an ending. There is, of course, movement and direction, but such terms as **trial, pilgrimage, promise, and warning are more to the point than apocalypse**.

The Exodus from Egypt, the seeming ending of a story of trial and sacrifice, is really a beginning. In particular it is the beginning of a story that has to continue to be told into the future. The future witness is of its essence (cf. Exod. 10.2). Ruth is a good example of a biblical story with a seemingly well-defined beginning, middle, and end. The end comes with the birth of Obed and the cry "A son is born to Naomi." If, in line with Christian typology, we change the lowercase "son" to "Son," then we get the suggestion of the final consummations of apocalypse. But typology is not

history: if we attend to the dynamics of the story itself, we shall see that it resonates into the distant past and into the far future. But it denies closure. The birth of Obed is not the end but the beginning of a history that will continue to David and beyond. The verses of genealogy at the end pick up the thread of genealogy from the beginning. Here is a tale that is part of an ongoing history of promise and struggle, of suffering and redemption.

A better term than apocalypse (proposed by Kermode) **covenant**. Biblical history in Ruth and elsewhere is covenant history. This is a dynamic, not a static form, not a pattern given but a pattern unfolded through trial and error. The human partners have a share in its unfolding. The essence of the covenant is dramatic, the memory of an encounter in which responsibilities are undertaken and promises exchanged by both parties. These responsibilities and promises remain with us through the time of our lives and beyond. We may seek to escape the former, and the latter may be hidden (as at the beginning of the story of Ruth), but they are potentially present and will one day reassert themselves. There will be unexpected obstacles but also unexpected opportunities. **The course ahead is never clearly marked out, because while we are coerced by the terms of the covenant, we are also free agents.** We may choose, and this choice gives to every moment a quality of peril and uncertainty.

The American founding fathers felt themselves to be involved in just such a covenant enterprise as they sailed the seas to make a new beginning in a New World. John Winthrop aptly quoted to them the covenant formula from Deuteronomy 30: "*I have set before you this day life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life.*" They had the sense of momentous possibilities for good or ill on every side as they stepped forward into an unknown land. "The world was all before them where to choose," one may say. That line from Milton reminds us also that, in spite of the typological scheme that governs the "plot" of *Paradise Lost*, there is along with this an implicit denial of closure, an openness asserted at the end of the poem, suggesting the openness of real time and real history as men endure them.

The covenant is a condition of our existence in time, rather than an end foreseen. We cooperate with its purposes never quite knowing where it will take us, for "the readiness is all." The phrase is Hamlet's.



## TWO Perspectives: Hannah versus Eli in Samuel 1 by Evan Wolkenstein

### Instructions:

For each category, suggest how character A and B perceive a given topic...and then how you see it and/or your own commentary. For each item, PROVIDE TEXTUAL EVIDENCE, summarizing and then citing the text. Here's how quoting a biblical text should look. → Shmuel has a brand new pair of boots. (Sh 1,7) – chapter/verse

- Note: if a character **changes his/her perception, has a confused perception**, or anything else interesting, explain that.
- Make sure to answer in complete thoughts, and to **go beyond just the surface level**. Do not answer as quickly as possible. Offer implications and conclusions.

	Perception A	Your Commentary	Perception B
Example: Gideon's feelings about desert	(God) God thinks Gideon loves a nice chocolate mousse (Judges 6:4-5) God thinks this because he overheard Gideon talking about mousse out of context.	I think Gideon is being excessively picky and this chocolate pickiness will get him in big trouble later when he meets the chocotrolls.	(Gideon) Gideon hates chocolate (Jg 6:7)
1. Hannah's need for a child: box 1	(Hannah)		(Elkanah)
2. Hannah's lips moving, no sound coming out (box 1 1:13)	(Hannah)		(Eli)
3: Box 1.5: The importance of behaving morally	Eli		Eli's Sons
4. Box 2: The voice calling out to Shmuel in the night (line 4)	(Shmuel)		(you, the reader)
	Perception A	Your Commentary	Perception B

<b>6. Box 4 - The relative value of the ark vs. Eli's own children's lives</b>	Eli's value of the Ark		Eli's relative value of his children
<b>7. Box 5: The recipe for getting back on God's good side</b>	(Shmuel )	(the people – line 7,8)	(Gideon – yes, Gideon!)
<b>8. Box 8 The people's request for a king</b>	(Shmuel)		(God)
<b>9. Box 8: The need to behave morally</b>	(Shmuel)	Compare this to Eli and his sons... what's happened in the past 40ish years to Shmuel?	(Shmuel's Sons)
<b>10 Box 8: the king</b>	(the people) The value of a king:		(God – the cost of the king)

**FOCUS QUESTIONS:**

1. What is the job of a community leader, and to what extent is Eli and/or Samuel doing that in this section?
2. What are God's expectations for human's behavior – especially leaders?
3. "It's foolish to place faith and trust in symbols" while shirking the relationship that the symbol stands for." Where do you see this concept at work in the text?
4. Authority figures, despite their high titles, and despite whatever put them into their place of authority in the first place, are often misled, misdirected, misguided, and may suffer from misperception.

**Overviewing Skills:  
An inventory of extensive reading skills  
By Esther Orenstein Lopian**

(edited and abbreviated from Eddah website – "Fear of the Forest: Avoiding Meta-Themes and Overviews in Orthodox Bible Education" )

**Stating the Problem:**

A yeshivah high school student can graduate from day school after spending many years immersed in the study of Tanakh, and have no clue as to the most basic intentions, meanings, and messages of the biblical books that he has studied.

Teachers avoid or waffle over meta-questions, meta-themes, and overviews when teaching the Bible. They may devote many hours to in-depth analysis of each verse and its multiple commentaries, but shy away from questions like: "What is this book about?" "What are its messages?" "Why was this book written?" "Whom was it written for?"

**1971 and the Book of Job**

As a high school student, I attended a Modern Orthodox day school highly esteemed for both its Jewish and general studies education. In eleventh grade, we studied the Book of Job, closely accompanied by major medieval commentaries. I recall devoting many hours to studying Job, particularly before exams and being rewarded in the end by a satisfactory, even pleasing, final grade. In a graduate course on Jewish thought at Brandeis University several years later, Professor Nahum Glatzer alluded to, "the Book of Job and the problem of evil." I was a bit perplexed, but said nothing. A day or two later, he made a similar allusion, this time to "the Book of Job and the question of reward and punishment." By now I was completely confounded. Turning to a classmate, I asked, "Job is about the problem of evil? Job is about reward and punishment?"

I went home and reread Job, stunned to find a complex and fascinating book dealing with the nature of the universe, questions of good and evil, and the manifestations of divine providence, among other things. I could have recited verse and commentary almost by heart, but had no idea that the Book of Job was about the problem of evil.

**Towards a Pedagogy of Extensive Reading: An Inventory of Skills for Extensive Reading of the Bible**

**Skill # 1: "Overviewing" a Text**

Overviewing a text is looking at and asking carefully chosen questions about the **text as a whole**. Overviewing necessitates becoming familiar with the entire narrative. What kinds of questions might we ask when we do extensive reading?

What is this book about? What story does it tell?

Can we ascertain for whom it was written? Why it was written?

What questions does the book raise? Which of these questions would you consider "an essential question"?

How does the text raise these questions? How is the reader meant to ascertain them?

What message or messages does the book convey?

How does the book convey its messages?

What literary tools or language patterns does it employ?

How do the Rabbis relate to this book? Why was the book canonized?

What are the major themes in the book?<sup>15</sup>

More book-specific overview questions might be:

From your reading of Megillat Esther, what aspects of the story did you find interesting or puzzling? What aspects of the Diaspora experience described in the Megillah are familiar to you? What aspects unfamiliar?

These questions open up the books of the Bible for discussions that engage students and lead directly to essential questions. Although over-viewing texts may sound obvious to the people inclined to be reading this article, in truth, these kinds of questions are seldom posed in our classrooms. A teacher recently confessed to me that she had not "yet" read the entire narrative of the biblical book that she was teaching, although she was midway through teaching the book. If so, how could she possibly ask any overview questions or any questions that require a broad look at the book?

### **Skill #2: Identifying a Genre**

One of the major contributions of the **form-critics** to Bible scholarship has been the identification and naming of genres.<sup>18</sup> The rabbinic tradition discerned distinct literary styles in the Bible<sup>19</sup>, but did not classify or identify specific distinctions.

Biblical literature can be divided according to different kinds of categories. For example, the Torah may be divided into narrative and law, or into prose narrative and poetry. A popular breakdown frequently referred to in literary analyses of the Bible is a fivefold division into the following genres: Narrative, Law, Prophecy, Poetry, and Wisdom Literature. Each one of these genres has distinctive rules and its own internal dynamic. Within each genre, there are sub-genres. Narrative prose, for example, includes stories, first-person speeches, blessings and curses, laws, lists, genealogies, enumerations, and more.

Identifying genres is part of understanding Tanakh as a discipline. It is important for teachers to determine the genre of the text that they are teaching, to know something about the **rules of that genre**, and to be sensitive to their application.

Let us look for a moment at the first two chapters of Genesis. We are by now familiar with the distinctions between the two "versions" of the creation story presented in chapters one and two of Genesis.<sup>20</sup> To my mind, these distinctions are to be found not only in the details of the stories, but in the differences in style between the two chapters. Chapter two is an easy, flowing narrative; chapter one, a highly-charged hierarchical list of the Almighty's daily creations. The distinct style of each of the chapters corresponds in an exquisite manner to the differing content of each.

"Historical" events related in narrative form must be understood differently from similar events related in an elegy. Repetitions used in poetry should be read differently from repetitions used in prose. Each genre underscores the subtle nuances of the text as well as its overt meanings. Genres exist, and it is a mistake to continue to ignore them. Identifying genres and understanding how they work to convey meaning are essential parts of extensive reading. Pedagogically, it is advisable to reveal and explain the genre to students while in the midst of study, and not in an introductory lecture about genres.

### **Skill # 3: Choosing a Reading Orientation**

A reading orientation refers to the reading approach that one takes when analyzing a text. A teacher should be knowledgeable enough about her subject matter to be able to deliberately choose one, two, or three reading orientations. Teachers are naturally pulled to orientations that

they are familiar with from their own days as students. In most cases, they are not even aware that they are teaching an approach that is underpinned by certain assumptions. As a young teacher, I recall being asked by a colleague what was my approach to teaching Humash. The question was disconcerting, because I had never been challenged by anyone to articulate my approach to teaching Tanakh. I mumbled something about Rashi and Nehama Leibowitz and fled as quickly as I could.

Teachers need to be exposed to different orientations, so that they may deliberately choose an orientation based on knowledge of various approaches, as well as personal inclination, and not an approach based solely on imitation. Ideally, teachers should be able to work with several different, perhaps even opposing, orientations in order to enrich their teaching, and to develop in their students a "flexible understanding" of the subject matter. It is both respectful and empowering to develop in our students the ability to negotiate between reading orientations.

Some common orientations to teaching Bible are:

- (1) **Literary:** An approach that focuses on what the text says and how it says it. It aims to understand the text from "within" and is exemplified by the writings of scholars such as Meir Weiss, Yair Zakowitz, Meir Sternberg, Shimon Bar-Efrat, Robert Alter, and David Silber. Rabbinic/Traditional uses early rabbinic sources, as well as medieval commentators such as Rashi, Ramban, Ibn Ezra, Rashbam to understand "the plain meaning" of the text (peshuto shel mikra). The books of Nehama Leibowitz and Rav Issachar Yacobsen are examples of commentaries that rely heavily on the rabbinic tradition.
  - (2) **Midrashic:** A particular way of understanding the text based on the midrashim of the Sages. Midrash is a window to the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual world of the rabbis. In this approach, we read the text from "without." The midrash, too, asks "literary" questions, but offers different kinds of answers. A midrashic orientation can uncover an entirely different set of significances and essential questions.
  - (3) **Historical/ANE:** An approach that gleans from archeological discoveries and from contemporaneous Ancient Near Eastern texts in an attempt to illuminate the Bible. This approach can deepen our understanding of the political, economic, and social world in which the heroes of the Bible found themselves. This orientation may be found in the books and commentaries of Nahum Sarna, Moshe Greenberg, the JPS, M. D. Cassuto, and the Olam ha-Tanakh, among others.
  - (4) **Modern Midrash and Interpretation:** Includes diverse modern approaches, such as Nationalist/Zionist, Secular/Humanist, School of Rav Kook, Modern Midrashic, Feminist, Orthodox/Literary. These orientations can be found in the writings of Yehezkel Kaufman, Zvi Adar, Martin Buber, Shelomo Aviner, Adin Steinsaltz, Aviva Zornberg, Ilana Pardes, Mieke Bal, Yisroel Rosenson, Menachem Leibtag, and the journal Megadim.
- Teaching varied and sometimes opposing orientations is absorbing and thought provoking. It affords students the opportunity to understand the seminal role played by interpretation in all of our readings of the Bible. It allows students to connect the texts with different aspects of their own selves. When teaching and comparing various approaches, essential questions cannot be avoided.

#### **Skill #4: Reading from Different Perspectives**

There are alternative ways to read a text. For example, it is possible to read Megillat Esther from a political perspective, from a feminist point of view, and as a paradigmatic "Book of the Diaspora." Each perspective uses a different "set of glasses," and is based upon different

"interests" and assumptions. Students should be able to appreciate how these interests and assumptions lead us to view textual details in a certain way.

With each perspective, we can ask different kinds of questions. Some questions we might ask when we are wearing a political set of glasses are:

What kind of regime is being described here?

How is that regime structured? What are its components?

How are decisions made in this empire? How are decisions revoked?

Give examples of at least two major decisions, and describe how they were made?

What does this tell us about the Persian Empire?

How many different appellations for court servants are enumerated in the Megillah?<sup>24</sup>

What does this tell us about the nature of this regime?

If we try on feminist glasses, what kinds of questions would we ask if we were reading the Megillah?

How does the Megillah describe the position of women in the Persian Empire?

Why does the Megillah give us so much detail about the beauty contest?

What does the writer of the Megillah think about the beauty contest?

Is Vashti portrayed as a heroine or as a fool? Why are we told the Vashti story at all?

What is Zeresh's function? Lady Macbeth? loyal wife? wise pragmatist? evil schemer?

Would she would have obeyed the decree issued by the king at the end of Chapter 1?

What role does Esther's femininity play in this story?

Is this question important to the Megillah, or just to us 21st Century creatures?

Or, if we were to read Esther as a paradigmatic book of the Diaspora, we could ask:

Was the Persian exile typical?

Is it meant to be portrayed as archetypical? What characterizes this particular Diaspora?

What elements of it are familiar to you? What elements are strange to you?

Reading texts from different perspectives is challenging, eye-opening, and fun.

### **Skill #5: Finding themes and motifs**

Finding themes is one of the most important skills that students need to develop in any study of the great books. It enables us to ascertain the deeper meanings of the text. In teaching Tanakh it is a skill that both the teachers and the students need to acquire.

How do we do this? We look for patterns and repetitions. We look for key words, key phrases, key places. We look for repeating ideas, words, artifacts, and places. We look at structure.

When we look for themes, we are looking for key ideas that form part of a narrative's value system, define its central purpose or underpin the whole narrative structure. We look for motifs, i.e. a recurrent action, word, or object that keeps drawing attention to itself and forms links that help unify a story. Motifs force the reader to think of one passage in terms of another, and help shape the way in which the story is read. Students should be able to identify particular motifs and understand how they influence one's reading of the text. If we learn how to locate themes and motifs in the Tanakh, then we learn to read.

### **Skill #6: Intertextual Reading**

An intertextual approach involves examining one text in light of and in comparison to other texts in the Bible. Intertextual reading involves a comparison of motifs, ideas, events, characters between two texts. The reason that this skill is so important is because the Bible is written intertextually. Certain texts are written with other texts in mind. In order to enhance our understanding, we must therefore learn to look for and listen to the echoes of other texts.

One example from Megillat Esther would be to read the Megillah with an eye to the story of King Saul and Agag (1 Sam. 15) and to the story of Joseph. An example from Genesis would be to read the story of the expulsion of Hagar (Genesis 15:21) in comparison to the flight of the Israelites from Egypt.

A particular form of intertextual reading involves identifying story repetition. Thus when studying a particular text, students should be challenged to recall a similar story in some other text in the Tanakh. We ask them, "What other story in the Tanakh does this remind you of?" Students should be able to identify a similar episode told or retold in different ways. They should be able to locate the changes, compare them and discuss possible reasons for the alterations.<sup>27</sup>

## V. Conclusion

Each of the skills discussed above leads us to essential questions. They demand and contribute to a deeper understanding of the contents, the structures, and the significances of the Bible on the part of the teacher, and of the student in turn. A teacher adept at these skills cannot avoid the **big picture**..

<sup>1</sup>Williamson McDiarmid, Deborah L. Ball, Charles W. Anderson, "Why Staying One Chapter Ahead Doesn't Really Work: Subject-Specific Pedagogy," in Knowledge Base for the Beginning Teacher, ed. M.C. Reynolds (Pergamon Press, New York, 1989), p. 193.

<sup>3</sup>See: Isa. 9:13-20; Jer. 7:3-15, 21-28; Amos 5: 2

<sup>4</sup>"Constructivism" proceeds from the assumption that students are not simply empty vessels waiting for teachers to fill their heads with information. Rather, they are constantly "constructing" their own understandings of the material in front of them.

<sup>11</sup> Meir Weiss, "Avnei B'enyah liMelekhet ha-Sippur ba-Miqrah," in *Miqra'ot ke-Kavvanatam* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1987), p. 294.

<sup>12</sup> A detailed and expanded introduction to both intensive and extensive reading skills can be found in our joint Teachers' Guide entitled "*Reading Esther: A Curriculum for Teaching Megillat Esther*," written by Esther Lopian and edited by Paul Forgasz.

<sup>14</sup> For an excellent **typology of close reading skills**, see Maria Frankel, "The Reading of Bible in the Elementary Grades of the Day School," Masters thesis, University of Toronto, 1979. For literary analyses of the biblical narrative, see writings of Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Jewish Publication Society of America Basic Books, (Philadelphia, 1981); Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Shmuel I and II*, Am Oved, (Tel-Aviv, 1996);, and David Silber, "Kingship, Samuel, and the Story of Hanna," *Tradition*, (New York, 1988); "The Joseph Narrative: The Reconstruction of a Family," 8 CD's produced by the Drisha Audio Project, The Drisha Institute for Jewish Education, New York; Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, Indiana University Press, (Bloomington, 1985); Meir Weiss, *The Bible from Within*, Magnes Press, (Jerusalem, 1984); Yair Zakowitz, *Mavoh Li'Parshanut P'nim-Miqrait*, Rechess, (Even-Yehuda, 1992).

<sup>19</sup> R. Naftali Zevi Yehudah Berlin (the Netziv), in the introduction to *Ha'ameq Davar*, his commentary on the Torah, refers to all of the Bible as poetry.