Chapter Twelve: Troubleshooting for "Problematic" Texts

A. Tactics for Teaching - to confront or to preempt or to avoid challenging texts of the Torah that undermine one's sense of authentic fidelity to our community, our people, God and the Torah.

Troubleshooting for "Problematic" Texts

Introduction – The Torah is a normative text, often viewed as a sacred source of ethical values, theological/scientific beliefs and true descriptions. Its students are asked to hear its authoritative claim and move toward beliefs, normative actions and emotional identification with the Torah. However the student belongs to communities with values that may not fit with the text under scrutiny. Here is a characterization of "problematic" texts analogous to "problematic" students who have attitudinal problems to school norms. The "problem" does not inhere IN the student or in the text but in the misfit between the two.

These normative problems arise out of a misfit between a text and the context of beliefs, values, and "facts" that the student/community feels or expects from the Torah.
For example, the student may be taught that the Torah is given by God word for word, but his study of the text reveals emendations or even incoherence leading towards a plausible documentary hypothesis solution.
For example, the student may be taught that the Torah is source of ethical values beginning with the Ten Commandments. Yet the student may find a contradiction between that claim and God's commend to wipe out all of Amalek.
For example, the student may be taught that the Torah is a historical text yet one discovers and contradiction between archeological finds ands the Biblical verbal description.

Modern Orthodox Rabbis have taken very different perspectives on the students right to hold up Biblical characters to moral and psychological standards typical of the student's world. The debate begins in the Talmud which brings views that identify many faults in the Biblical ancestors and others who oppose this trend vehemently: "Whoever says that our forefathers (Reuben, David, etc.) sinned is mistaken" (TB. Shabbat 55B). Compare these two positons:

Rabbi Aharon Kotler of Lakewood said:
"Therefore, when you teach the stories of our forefathers we have to explain to our students that **we are not talking about normal people, with urges and desires like us.** We speak about people without
ambitions and personal aspirations; people whose level cannot be reached by us**. In so much as we cannot evaluate angels, there is no way to evaluate our forefathers and to reach their level**:' (*Shmaatin* 15, 1968)

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (in his commentary to Genesis 12:10):
"**The Torah never hides from us the faults, errors and weaknesses of our great men**. Just by that it gives the stamp of veracity to what it relates. But in truth, by the knowledge which is given us of their faults and weaknesses, our great men are in no ways made lesser but actually greater and more instructive. **If they stood before us as the purest**

models of perfection, we should attribute them as having a different nature, which has been denied to us. Were
they without passion, without internal struggles, their virtues would seem to us the outcome of some higher nature, hardly a merit and certainly no model that we could hope to emulate.”

A. Theological-Educational Issues with the Historical Critical Approach to Tanakh by Steve Israel

One of the most controversial aspects of Biblical studies involves the historicity of the Biblical text. Is the text historically true, as the Jewish and Christian traditions have held? How many teachers of Tanakh, while examining some Biblical episode, have had to confront that most difficult of questions, usually coming from a skeptical, impatient and sometimes bored student, "but is it actually true?" And such questioners are unlikely to be satisfied with complex explanations regarding the multiple natures and definitions of truth. What the question invariably means - and will continue to mean – to petulant questioners, is almost always the degree of historical truth in the story: not moral truth, not spiritual truth, but historical truth. Did the particular event actually happen in the way that the story tells us?

The academic fields of Biblical history and archaeology are veritable battle-grounds - and have been for generations – between those who seek to "save" the text, defending its essential historical basis and those who see most of the Tanakh as unhistorical, the romantic story of the putative early story of a later group who sought a history for themselves in the imaginings of fictional scribes. One of the questions that all teachers of Tanakh must decide is to what extent they are going to expose their students to such questions and allow them to come to their own conclusions. In many Jewish schools and learning settings – not only Orthodox - the tendency is to avoid the whole issue as much as possible, seeing it not so much as a legitimate field, ripe for examination, but rather as a minefield to be skirted with the utmost care. That is clearly a legitimate choice, subject to the agenda and the ideology of a particular school. However, it is also a problematic choice, a choice that comes with a high potential price tag.

There are a number of questions that are worth posing at the outset of this chapter.

- Do we demand of our students that they believe in the historical truth of a text? Are all Biblical texts to be understood as reports of historical events (Adam and Eve? Noah? Job? Jonah?)
- Is such belief a necessary presupposition that we are not prepared to suspend?
- Is our understanding of the Tanakh one which supposes that value in the text can only come together with belief in the fact that the text is telling a story that actually happened as the text itself hold?
- Is our belief in the theological validity of the text dependent on the idea that God actually did what the Biblical text suggests and that the text records accurately God's interactions with the human race in general and the Hebrews in particular?
- If a story is questionable in historical terms, can we acknowledge that and still save the text as a repository of intrinsic value?

Let us take for example the familiar story of the Tower of Babel, in which a group of people build a tower which in some way is seen to confront God to such a degree that God must destroy the project and punish the offending builders by confusing their language and making effective and united communication between them impossible. Generations have analyzed the story and drawn moral lessons about human pride and

pretension, about the immorality of human attempts to challenge God or to behave like God or to claim God's creative power for mankind. The story has been a springboard to discuss profound human and theological issues. All of these lessons and insights assume that the story in one way or other reflects **a genuine human interaction with God** in which God reacts to human activity and we are conform our behavior to these Divine intentions and plans.

But what do we do if we assume, as many historians have done, that underneath the story of Babel is a human story which preserves some ancient memory of one of the great ziggurats – or temple mountains - for which the Mesopotamian world was famous, perhaps even the ziggurat of Ur, one of the most famous in that world, constructed in the very place from which Avram is believed to have come, a place which according to our collective memory is the birthplace of our existence as a particular people?

And what do we do if, as some recent historians have claimed, the story is a rewritten Monotheised version of an ancient mythic story involving the great god Marduk who builds a gate to the god(s) - Bab El – in the heavens to celebrate the connection between earth and heaven?

Do such ideas invalidate the messages of the text? Do they delegitimize the search for moral lessons? Do they undermine the value of the examination of the story? Many would answer these questions in the affirmative. Even if we don't feel compelled to defend the literal truth if every word of these "prehistoric" stories and can see them on one level as allegories, there are many who would claim that to reduce them to simple "bricks and mortar" historical facts or to see them as late versions of earlier mythical texts, is unacceptable. To read God out of the story altogether is to lose the reason for studying the story. Without that reason, the story becomes no more than a diverting lesson in history or anthropology. By no means should the study of Torah be reduced to such a level. It is to this claim that we must now address ourselves as we try and understand the essential nature of a historical approach to the Tanakh.

Relevance to Teachers:
What is the historical approach to the Tanakh?

To read the Bible as history may mean to take God out of the Bible as an active player, for the modern discipline of history is the study of human societies. Historical causality is restricted to the interaction of people – not God - and the natural world in which they live. The Bible makes a claim about the way in which God works in the world. However historians will accept God's role only in so far as the *belief* in God has been an important force in human action. History deals with humans and their societies, while theology is seen as the science of God's activity.

Questions we must consider when studying Tanakh as scientific history:

- The Biblical Jews did understand the world around them and their place in the world, through the prism of their own specific theological and philosophical beliefs about the world as a place where God *does* interact with humans. Are we prepared to accept that for all their insights and ideas, they were mistaken about the nature of reality?
- Are we prepared to substitute for God's presence in the world, the *belief* in God's presence in the world?

The Pros and Cons of the Historical Approach

The Cons

1. Even the greatest literalists to use examples of social customs culled from the ancient east to explain aspects of the patriarchal stories. To that extent, the historical material functions as a type of commentary to the existing approach, in the same way as Rashi for example, employed linguistics to illuminate the meaning of an obscure point in the text. Many use archaeology to substantiate the biblical text , however, they may use it extremely selectively, even tendentiously, since for every claim brought forward in the name of archaeology to support the text, there are an equal or larger number of examples that can be used to undermine the text. To choose only the first and to completely ignore the second would be questionable.

The extensive use of the historical method will depend on the parameters of belief of the teacher, the institution of learning or the wider community. Generally speaking those who come from the world of Conservative Judaism and "leftwards" will tend to be open to most or even all of these approaches since they have always held a positive attitude to history and its evidence. But even here, some teachers who will choose to limit their students' exposure to the more radical and challenging aspects of the historical approach or at least to present them emphasizing their own reservations.

2. The teacher may not have a theological problem with any aspect of the historical approach for himself as an adult but still feel that for the students the Tanakh should remain a spiritually uplifting text, not "reduced" to the level of a secular history or anthropology text. It is legitimate to feel that while you want to expose your students to all aspects of the modern world, you want to inculcate and preserve a certain kind of respect and mystique towards the text which might be spoiled by the nitty-gritty of the historical approach.

It is perhaps something of this sense that Ahad Ha'am, one of the great Jewish secular thinkers of the 20th century was trying to convey in his famous essay on Moshe when he poured out his anger and scorn on the historians whose whole attempt was to try and discover the historical Moshe. As far as Ahad Ha'Am was concerned the pursuit of the historical Moshe was entirely irrelevant

> *When learned scholars burrow in the dust of ancient books and manuscripts in order to raise the great men of history from the grave in their true shapes…they do not appreciate the fact that every archaeological truth is also a historical truth. Historical truth is that, and that alone, which reveals the forces that go to mould the social life of mankind. Every man who leaves a perceptible mark on that life, though he may be a purely imaginary figure, is a real historical force: his existence is a real historical truth. Real history…is only concerned with the living hero, whose image is graven in the hearts of men, who has become a force in human life…And so…I care not whether Moshe really existed, whether his life and his activity really corresponded to our traditional account of him, whether he was really the savior of Israel and gave his people the Law in the form in which it is preserved amongst us…We have another Moshe of our own, whose image has*

been enshrined in the hearts of the Jewish people for generations and whose influence on our national life has never ceased from ancient times till the present day…For even if you succeeded in demonstrating conclusively that the man Moshe never existed…you would not thereby detract one jot from the historical reality of the real Moshe – the Moshe who has been our leader not only for forty years in the wilderness of Sinai but for thousands of years in all; the wildernesses in which we have wandered since the Exodus.

Ahad Ha'Am had no theological problem with the historians. His problem might be termed educational. The figure that he wanted to inculcate as an educational model among the Jewish people was the Moshe of the text, even if the text was historically – "archaeologically" in his words – wrong. There was a human truth more important than history to be found in the Tanakh, and, for him, that truth was not in heaven.
That is clearly a valid educational choice, and the issue he raises is one which all teachers of Tanakh have to think about whatever their personal philosophy.

The Pros

With such weighty disadvantages thrown into the arena, we must ask whether there are any compelling reasons to use a historical approach in the teaching of Tanakh. We will suggest three major ones.

1. The first – and this is not said facetiously – is because it is there. If we want to encourage our students to grapple with the deep questions of Jewish identity and to treat them as responsible individuals with intellectual honesty, then we need to present them with all the options and help them try and make sense of them. In an ordered and serious learning atmosphere, we can encourage them to work their way through to a complex understanding of Judaism with all of its question marks. If we offer them only our own version of what it is that we want them to think? A student might feel tricked, at some point in the future, to find out that he or she was only presented with a partial selective approach to the Tanakh. Is it unreasonable for them to feel that?

2. The second, there are many young students in the Jewish educational system who are essentially alienated from the Biblical text because they do not buy in to the theological or philosophical suppositions through which they are taught. They are taught in a way that limits their ability to question: they are taught in a way in which there are more answers than questions unless the questions fall within relatively narrow parameters of legitimacy. Such students are unlikely to grow up with many positive feelings towards the text. At worst they might see it as a series of superstitious fairy tales: at best it might be irrelevant to them. A distance grows up between such students and the text which is difficult to bridge in subsequent years. It is distinctly possible that **an exposure to the Tanakh in a way that does not entail their hiding their skepticism but rather legitimizes it**, will be very helpful to such students.

3. Thirdly, aspects of the historical approach are extremely interesting and can involve students by their inherent fascination. The questions asked, though often inconclusive can be thought provoking and stimulating and can add an additional layer of engagement to the learning of Tanakh for many students. If one of our aims is to challenge the

students intellectually, the questions that come naturally in many cases from the addition of a historical perspective to the process of study, can do exactly that.

Thus there are indeed pros and cons to the use of the historical approach. Some might feel that the price to be paid for any but the most innocuous uses of the approach is too high. Others might feel that such approaches can add a valuable educational weapon in the armory of the Tanakh teacher.

WHO DONE IT? WHO WROTE THE BIBLE?
by Joel Lurie Grishaver

Learning Torah: A Self-guided Journey through Layers of Jewish Learning,
Torah Aura/UAHC Press (p. 97 ff)

The Torah is the Jews' portable holy land. Heinrich Heine

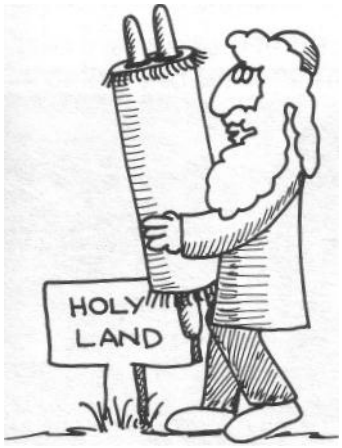
The Bible is and at all times was a world full of fresh life, not a dead book. Hence,
every period, every school, every individuality introduced into the Bible its own way of regarding the contents of the Bible. Abraham Geiger

The early Hebrews have created the Bible out of their lives and their descendants created their lives out of the Bible. Abram Leon Sachar

The Bible is a seed, God is the sun, but we are the soil. Every generation is expected to bring forth new understandings, new realization. Aberman

Words of Torah are like golden vessels: The more you scour and polish them, the more they glisten and reflect the face of him who looks at them. Talmud

The pages of the Bible are God's love letters. Julius Mark



Preview

In this Module we are going to look at three possible understandings of how the Torah was written and how we should relate to it. By the time you are finished, you should be able to:

.1 Describe the "chain of the tradition" and put in the right order the links in that chain.
.2 Describe the "documentary hypothesis" and somewhat identify the source/ document of given passages.

.3 Describe two different systems which weave divine and human authorship of the Bible.
.4 Describe how the three understandings of how the Torah was written solve each of the problems in the Genesis texts (indicated below).
.5 State your own beliefs about the authorship and authority of the Torah.

We already looked at the first two chapters of Genesis and uncovered many questions/problems/contradictions/etc. In this module, we are going to use three of these problems to understand different ways of learning. We'll see how the various ways we believe the Torah was written lead us to find different answers.

PROBLEM 1 In the two creation stories, God is called by two different names. Each name has a distinct personality and style.

PROBLEM 2 The two stories contradict each other, presenting the order of creation differently and sometimes repeating certain creative acts.

PROBLEM 3 The two stories of creation present different explanations of when, how, and why people were created.

WHO WROTE THE BIBLE??

There are many ways of looking at the Torah:

As literature
As history As God's words
As a collection of ethics and values
As a law code All of the above
Some of the above

The way we learn Torah is totally dependent upon our beliefs about how the Torah was written. Each set of assumptions creates another disciplined way of learning Torah. Each disciplined way asks its own questions.
We're going to use three of these problems to understand different ways of learning. We'll see how the various ways we believe the Torah was written lead us to find different answers.

I GOD WROTE IT
We can believe that God designed the Torah and one way or another transmitted it to the world via the Jewish people.
If we believe that the Torah is God's words, we have to believe that it is perfect. Every word and even every letter has meaning. It is our job to discover what each of these is trying to teach us.
There can be no mistakes in the Torah. Every difficulty, everything which looks confusing, every place which feels like a contradiction is only a clue. It is our job to figure out what God is trying to teach us in each of these passages.
THIS IS THE BASIS OF TRADITIONAL TORAH STUDY.

II PEOPLE WROTE IT
We can believe that the Torah was written by people over a period of years. The Torah was created, passed on by word of mouth, edited, and then written down.
If we see the Torah as a collection of humanity's writing, every flaw, every contradiction is a clue. By studying these, along with archeological and historical data, we try to come to understand the people who created the Torah.
We can begin to understand the Torah as a mixture of periods, beliefs, and influences. Each generation adds and transforms that which it received from its predecessors.
THIS IS THE BASIS OF CRITICAL TORAH STUDY.

III GOD AND PEOPLE WROTE IT
Or we can believe that God inspired the people who wrote the Torah. We can see in it both revelation (God's messages) and the historical process.
This means that we have to find a way to fuse critical Torah study with traditional Torah study. We have to be able to see and understand the same thing in many different ways.
Both traditional Torah study and biblical criticism work with the same difficulties, problems, and questions in the text. For each, they are clues to different kinds of answers.
As modern Jews, we have to be able to balance these two disciplines of Torah study.

I GOD WROTE IT

PASS IT ON - THE CHAIN OF THE TRADITION

For the Jewish tradition, the Torah was written by God and dictated to Moses. The "chain of the tradition = ***shalshelet hakabalah***, is very carefully traced from Moses to us.
At Mt. Sinai, God revealed to Moses not only the Ten Commandments and not only the Chumash (his five books) and not only the whole Written Torah (the Bible) but the whole Oral Torah.

Moses wrote down his five books (except for the last eight lines of Deuteronomy) and told the rest to Joshua and the elders. Joshua wrote the last eight lines of the Torah (about Moses' death) and the Book of Joshua. Samuel studied with the elders of his day

and wrote down judges, Ruth, and Samuel. David was anointed by Samuel. David wrote the Psalms. Solomon, his son, wrote Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes. Along came the prophets who wrote their own books. The prophet Jeremiah wrote his book and Lamentations. Ezra, a scribe and the first leader of the Great Assembly, wrote Ezra and Chronicles. The men of the Great Assembly wrote down the rest of the Bible.
Talmud, Baba Batra 14b

Moses received the Torah at Sinai, and passed it on to Joshua. And Joshua passed it on to the elders, and the elders passed it on to the prophets, and the prophets passed it on to the men of the Great Assembly. Pirke Avot 1:1

This is the Torah that Moses set before the Children of Israel, from the mouth of God and the hand of Moses. Siddur

... I will give you the tablets of stone, and the Torah and the Mitzvah, which I have written, that you may teach them. Exod. 24:12

Rabbi Levi Bar Chama said that Rabbi Shimon Ben Lakish said:
tablets of stone = the Ten Commandments, Torah = the Chumash,
Mitzvah = the Mishnah,
which I have written = the Prophets and Writings,
that you may teach them = the Talmud.

Thus we learn that the whole Torah was given to Moses at Mt. Sinai.
Talmud, Berachot 5a

THE ORAL LAW

Meanwhile, the Great Assembly V' kept on meeting, though it became known as the Sanhedrin. Later, the same meetings took place at the great academies. Studying and trying to apply the Torah, Prophets, and Writings to their own times, they evolved the Oral Law. A member of the Great Assembly had the title "rabbi." The rabbis wrote three great works: the Mishnah, the Gemara, and the Midrash.

Mishnah + Gemara = Talmud. The Talmud is the organization and application of the laws of the Torah. Reading the Talmud, you get the whole conversation surrounding the law. There are two Talmuds, the Jerusalem Talmud, and the Babylonian Talmud, which is the most important legal source book.

Midrash is a collection of stories and explanations (some of which also teach about laws). When the Oral Law was being written, people still had to figure out how it applied to them. A group of men-the commentators- began collecting and writing down explanations. But, with all these laws and commentaries being recorded, people began to need a simple way to find answers (without getting fifty opinions), so they began collecting the Oral Law in books of codes.

Even with the codes of law, there were still questions. People wrote to the great scholars and elders of their time. These questions and the scholars' answers became books of **responsa.**

THE TELEPHONE SYNDROME

Quite often we compare the oral "chain of the tradition" to a game of telephone. We figure that things will get lost and confused as they go from mouth to ear. Actually our ancestors were better at remembering and retelling things than we are. They did a good job of keeping things unchanged ...but

> When Moses died.. Joshua forgot three hundred laws and had seven hundred doubts about the law.... During the mourning period for Moses, three thousand laws were forgotten. The people said to Joshua, "Ask." But he answered..."It is not possible to tell you." And he told the people..."It is not in heaven." The people asked Samuel to "ask." But he answered them, "These are the commandments" (meaning that this is all we have-no one can add to them).... All the scholars who were from the days of Moses until Rabbi Yose Ben Yoezer were free from blemish, but after him all scholars have some blemish. Talmud, Temurah 16a

AUTHORITY

n spite of some "missing pieces," the traditional attitude is... "Well, this is all we have"- "These are the commandments." Because of the problem of "lost laws," they worked out a principle - the older the source, the closer to Moses getting the word at Sinai, the more authority it has. The older the quote, the more authority. Torah is more important than the rest of the Bible. The decision of a rabbi from the Mishnah will always take precedence over that of a rabbi from the Gemara.

TRADITIONAL TORAH STUDY

Traditional Torah study is predicated on the belief that God wrote the Torah and gave it to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Moses received not only the Written Law but also the Oral Law. So when you learn Torah traditionally, you never do it without commentaries, codes, and the other explanations. You need the Oral Law to understand the real meaning of the Written Torah.

Traditional Torah study is based on the assumption that each generation understands less about Torah than the preceding generations. The closer you are to Sinai (in time), the more you understand.

Traditional Torah study is based on the belief that the Torah is God's word and that God's word must be perfect. In spite of the long "telephone game" involved in the "chain of the tradition," traditional Torah study states: "These are the commandments." If we don't understand something, it is our fault and not the Torah's fault. We simply no longer have the level of scholarship necessary. In generations before ours, these things were understood.

Traditional Torah study requires our finding "problems" in the text and then showing that rather than being mistakes (God doesn't make mistakes) these "problems" are clues left for us - forcing us to understand the Torah on deeper levels.

Traditional Torah study considers the Torah to be not just a book of laws and stories but a bottomless source of understanding.

Ben Bag Bag said - Turn it and turn it for all is in it. Pirke Avot 5:25

ASSUMPTIONS

In this section we've been looking at traditional Jewish beliefs about the Torah's origins. Whether or not we accept the divine authorship of the Torah, it is important for us to be able to work with these traditional assumptions which formed the basis of all Jewish scholarship up to the 1800s. To study Talmud, Midrash, codes, and commentaries, we'll have to learn to think (not believe) that God revealed everything to Moses. In other words:

1. God wrote the whole Torah (oral and written).
2. If God wrote it, it must be flawless and perfect (no mistakes, contradictions, etc.).
3. Everything that seems like a "mistake" or that feels like it might be a "problem" is really a clue to a deeper meaning.
4. If we can't understand something, it is the result of our lack of understanding, not a flaw in the text.
5. The Torah has many levels of meaning.
6. The older the source - the closer in time to God's revelation to Moses - the more authority it has.

Exercise

According to the assumptions of the "chain of the tradition," place the following in the right chronological order:

Prophets, Joshua, Moses, the rabbis (The people of the Great Assembly)
God, the elders, us

II PEOPLE WROTE IT

BIBLICAL CRITICISM

Biblical criticism starts with the assumption that people (not one person and not God) wrote the Torah. Given that assumption, our job is to try to figure out who wrote it, when, and why.
In the seventeenth century, people began to seriously question the idea that God had single-handedly written the Torah. Out of these doubts came new schools of biblical learning: biblical criticism and scientific criticism. The most prominent and influential advocates of this kind of study were two German (non-Jewish) scholars - Karl Heinrich Graf and Julius Wellhausen.

> The Hexateuch (the Pentateuch plus the Book of Joshua) does not present a history of Israel: rather, it provides the source material through which that history can be reconstructed.
> (Paraphrased from the introduction to the *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*)

For them, Bible study was a kind of archeology, digging into the Torah; using the text as clues to piece together and reconstruct a picture of the periods and cultures which produced the Torah.

Biblical criticism uses such clues as literary style, the kind of language utilized, the names God is called, and the images individual texts present. With these, the modern biblical scholar tries to isolate layers or periods in the text.

Biblical criticism doesn't mean pointing out what is wrong with the Bible; rather, it is a technical term for the exacting use of the scientific method.

THE DOCUMENTARY HYPOTHESIS

Graf and Wellhausen defined four major sources/periods/authors/ layers in the "biblical material." For them, the major clue was something we've already noticed - the contradictions between different versions of the same story, especially where different names of God are used. These four major sources or documents are called J,E, P, and D.

> **J = Jehovah/ Yahweh/Adonai**
> J is a storyteller; his people are real people, and his God talks directly to people. His God can be talked to (and even argued with). His God is described in human terms.
> J tells stories about pain and pleasure, ambition and promise, love and hate. All his characters have real strengths and weaknesses.
> J is people- and earth-centered.
> J tells the story of a people. For him, people have free will.
> GOD o107x
>
> **E = Elohim**

E is writing history. His stories all show the importance of the Jewish people and how their one God has helped them. His people are perfect, his God is in total control, and people talk to God via angels and messengers.
E is God and heaven-centered.
E's history is a story of events, and God predetermined and ordered everything.

P stands for the priests.
P is a lawyer more than anything else. The priests were teachers and their style is legal.
P lists births, deaths, measurements, and statistics. P also lists every law over and over in every combination (so that no one can mistake them).
P describes in great detail sacrifices, the Tabernacle, and other priestly duties.

D = Deuteronomy
D is concerned with the covenant. D talks about blessings for those who follow God's laws and curses for those who break them.
D is believed to be the author of Deuteronomy, which was found by King Josiah (621 B.C.E.). It was a time when many of the people worshiped idols and other gods. D summons the people to enter into a covenant with God and to pledge themselves to abide loyally by God's rules.

PROOF-TEXT:
And Hilda the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe: "I have found the book of the Law in the House of the LORD .... At the king's summons, all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem assembled before him. The king went up to the House of the LORD, together with all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests and prophets-all the people, young and old. And he read to them the entire text of the covenant scroll (Deuteronomy) which had been found in the House of the Lord. The king stood by the pillar and solemnized the covenant before the LORD: that they would follow the LORD and observe His commandments, His injunctions, and His laws with all their heart and soul; that they would fulfill all the terms of the covenant as inscribed upon the scroll. And all the people entered into the covenant. II Kings 22:8,23:1-3

ASSUMPTIONS
Biblical criticism is a scientific way of approaching the biblical text. When it is done at its best, it starts with no assumptions. For the critical biblical scholar, everything must be proved through the use of evidence taken from either internal (the Bible itself) or external (e.g., archeological findings) sources. It is a slow, careful process of reconstructing the history and social fabric which produced and compiled the Bible. Biblical criticism works from the same basic phenomena as does traditional Torah learning. For biblical criticism, the "mistakes" in the text aren't secret messages from God, but rather clues to authorship.

RECONSTRUCTION
In the same way that an archeologist can reconstruct the shape of a piece of pottery from a small shard, a modern biblical scholar working creatively from the biblical text and archeological evidence can reconstruct the history and culture of the biblical period.

EXERCISE
1 Look up the following selections and 'try to identify the source documents (J, E, P, D).

DEUT. 27:15-26 GEN. 36:1-6 GEN. 18:20-32 EXOD. 2:23-25 EXOD. 25:1-9 GEN. 22:1-14 GEN. 22:15-18 LEV. 23:23-25 GEN. 46:8-27 G EN. 6:9-22 GEN. 7:1-5 DEUT. 6:1-9 NUM. I:I-54

2 As a biblical critic - what can you learn from this quotation?
God spoke to Moses, and said to him, "I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name Adonai I made Me not known t0 them." Exod. 6:2-3

Hints: Look at the names of God that are used and you should be able to tell what sources cannot be the root of this quote. How about a combination?

R IS REDACTOR

R stands for the redactor. The redactor is the name given to the editor(s) who pieced together the J,E,D, and P materials. Some see R as being P, reworking the J,E, and D materials. Others see R as an independent party, weaving together the J,E,D sources and the P source.
In either case, whoever R was, the result was the Torah- where the threads of all these sources are woven together- and the teaching tradition of Israel.

I.D. CHECK
Without peeking, identify and describe the following:
R / J / E/ D / P / GRAF-WELLHAUSEN/ RECONSTRUCTION/ DOCUMENTARY HYPOTHESIS

III GOD AND PEOPLE WROTE IT

Basically, there are two methodologies for learning the Bible. You can study Torah using traditional commentaries and assume that "GOD WROTE IT," that the Torah was revealed to Moses at Sinai. Or, you can study the Bible critically (using the scientific method and archeological findings) and assume that "PEOPLE WROTE IT" over a series of years and influences.

Even though there are only two basic methods of Bible study (each reflecting a theology), today many Jewish thinkers are looking for some middle ground ...for a way to understand the Torah as a product of both people and God. This section will present a series of different models of how BOTH OF THEM might HAVE DONE IT. At the end of the section we'll take a look at ways to combine traditional and scientific Bible study.

METAPHORS AND MODELS

Revelation is the fancy name for the process of God talking to people. Traditionally, the Torah was considered to be a revealed document. God told it to Moses (etc.). If we believe that both God and people were involved, then we have to come up with new metaphors and models which help us imagine the process. Here are a few.

1. Order in the universe
God created an orderly universe, with a set of rules (both natural laws and moral laws). When people looked at the world, they began to understand something of the divine order, and from that the laws by which all should live. Their understanding of this order formed the basis of the Torah.

2. The single zap
In some way, which only God knows, God can communicate with people. We don't know if God whispers in ears, uses mental telepathy, or just "zaps" what He wants people to know into their ears. Some people, like Moses, received "revelations" from God, which they wrote down in their own words. The Torah, then, is the human expression of God's revelation.

3. The "domino theory"
God communicates with one person (A) who then retells his/her experience to (B), who uses his/her own words to tell it to (C), and so on....
TORAH =GOD+A+B+C+D.

4. The multiple zap
The multiple zap is a complex version of the single zap. In God's mysterious way, God reveals "truth" to a number of people. All of these people use their own words to tell others about their experiences. When all this "truth" is collected and written down as the Torah, we have multiple versions of what people have learned from God.

5. "Divine inspiration"

In the "God zaps" model, God is the active party. "Divine inspiration" suggests that people, either mystically or rationally, are able to understand "God's will." Here, people do the searching, and their understandings become the Torah.

6. The course of history

Working from a master plan, God could also shape both individual and national historical events in such a way that the sum total of all these events, and the individual responses to these events, is a Torah written totally by people as per God's design.

7. Mix and match

It is easy to imagine one or more of these models working at once.

Not at all /A Little/ Some /A lot

Which model do you prefer. Why?

EXERCISE: Famous Thinkers on Who Wrote the Bible

Look at these quotations from famous Jewish scholars. Decide to which of the above models (if any) these correspond

1.
To the question of the "truth" of Genesis the sensitive response can only be: It is, indeed, true; not in the sense in which a statement of a physical law is true, but few things that really matter to the poet ever are. It is true in the way that great poetry is always true: to the imagination of the human heart and the orderliness of the human mind. The God-and-Israel centered account discriminates, as every good historical narrative must, in its choice of events and presents us with history not, perhaps, as it was but as it ought to have been.
Stanley Gevirtz (quoted from *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, edited by W. Gunther Plaut)

2
Alone atop the mountain, above the clouds, I experienced cold and hunger and loneliness and anxiety about my purpose. I prayed to Him from time to time, and He answered my prayers. I wrote and scratched out what I wrote. Then, when still not finished, I became weary of writing; I found a huge flat rock, and on it I chiseled the Ten Words He had spoken; it was a double rock, as if two tablets of stone had been miraculously joined together.

The laws of property, of crime, of judicial procedures all come easy to me. More difficult was the need to fashion laws for worship, to limit sacrifices .... But so determined was I that I should not be thought of as a ruler, or king, that I wanted there to be an important office which I would never hold. My laws must never be mine, must never come from the imposition by a tyrant of his will on a cowered and subdued people. Rather, my people had to be the unique people I needed them to be. In the

interest of my role as the framer of their laws, I felt the need for a priest, while I would always remain Moses without a title.

I wrote the laws on the sheets of parchment, trying to find different ways to express them. One way was to be very brief, for example: "Whoever kills a man is to be put to death." I wrote and rewrote, I thought and rethought, and again wrote and rewrote. I imagined that I was a Hebrew, a hundred years later, in prosperous Canaan, and I wrote laws and regulations for worship which seemed to me could be suitable for that future time.

In every single item which I wrote there was my conviction that there must be a special people, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, a moral people, an elevated people. Surely without this conviction I would not have had the impulse to write, not the persistence to rethink and rewrite and to press on and on. The laws, as you know, have been copied with some minor confusions. There comes in the midst of them now what I wrote as their very beginning:

"Justice, truest justice, must be our pursuit." I had the sheets of parchment before me. Should I bring down with me those sheets on which I had written the beginning of thoughts, the first efforts to
express in words what needed to be recorded? ...I separated the sheets into the preparatory and the acceptable. I arranged the sheets of the acceptable in their right order and smiled at myself for having forgotten to bring along needle and thread to sew the sheets together before rolling them up. I wrapped them in the cloth that I used to cover myself against the cold winds .... I dared not leave two tablets. Heavy as they were, and weakened as I was, I picked them up, and, burdened with them and the sheets of parchment, I began to go down the mountainside.

I heard the noise of the camp before I was able to see it. I heard shouting and singing and was reminded of the dancing around Jethro's altar. They were dancing, and my brother Aaron was dancing, and it was not around an altar that they danced, but a golden calf! As the men danced they repeatedly pointed their fingers at the calf, singing. "Here is your god, O Israel."... I spoke only these words, which all of them heard. "You shall have no other gods beside Me. You shall make no graven images."... Then my fury welled up in me, and I threw down the two tablets, and I saw them fall onto a huge boulder and shatter. I unwrapped my garment and let the parchment sheets float down, pushed by the winds, and I did not care what happened to them.

I sent for Caleb. "Did you read the parchment sheets?" He nodded his head.
"Did you understand them? I mean, are they clear?"
"Some sheets would be clear except that other sheets say somewhat different things."
I know that he meant the first sheets and the final ones. "Forgetting these differences, what did the parchments say to you?"
"They are laws to govern us."
He looked at me. "Except for the disorder in them."
Samuel Sandmel (from his novel, *Alone Atop the Mountain*)

3

I may not accept the account the Bible gives of our origin and descent ...and yet look upon God as the creator of all that is or was or shall be. I may not believe that the moral laws of the Bible had been written by the hand of God, and yet follow them more scrupulously than he that does subscribe to that belief. **Joseph Krauskopf**

4

We recognize in the Mosaic legislation a system of training the Jewish people for its mission during its national life in Palestine, and today we accept as binding only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilizations. **The Pittsburgh Platform**

5

The unique character of the Bible consists in furnishing us both the revelation of God to man as given in the Pentateuch and in the Prophets, and the revelation of man to God, as contained in the Psalms and in other portions of the Scriptures of a liturgical nature. **Solomon Schechter**

ANSWERS TO OUR THREE PROBLEMS about Stories of Creation

We raised some questions about the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis. Previously, we defined three specific "problems" in the text. To understand how theology can make a difference in what we learn from the text, we'll compare the way both traditional Torah study and biblical criticism make use of these three "problems."

I ANSWERS-Traditional Torah Study

PROBLEM 1 In the two creation stories, God is called by two different names. Each name has a distinct personality and style.
For the tradition, God has many names, and each name reflects aspects of God's personality. It was assumed that the Torah chose the particular name by which God was called to reflect the divine attribute which was being demonstrated.

> Elohim (God)...stands for *midat hadin* (God's attribute of justice).
> Adonai (the Lord) .stands for *midat harachamim* (God's attribute of mercy).

But does God's name change during the stories of creation? A midrash uses this insight into names to teach that the world was originally created by God (Elohim) as a place of justice. But later the Divinity is called the Lord-God (Adonai-Elohim) because God realized that the world could not survive without the added quality of mercy.

> To what can this be compared? To a king who owned expensive goblets of cut crystal. If he filled them with hot water, they would crack; and, if he filled them with cold water, they would shatter. So the king took two containers and filled the goblets with both hot and cold water. So it was when God created the world with both justice and mercy. Genesis Rabbah

PROBLEM 2 The two stories contradict each other, presenting the order of creation differently and sometimes repeating certain creative acts.
The tradition has two ways of resolving the contradictions: First, there is the rabbinic principle:

> ***En mukdam ume'uchar batorah*** - There is no before or after in the Torah.

Written order doesn't always mean chronological order.

Second, the rabbis found ways to explain individual contradictions. To our eyes, the creation of plants on the third day of creation (chapter I), and then the statement at the beginning of chapter 2- "and every plant of the field was not yet on the earth" presents a problem. For the rabbis, there was a simple explanation. In chapter I, God sets up the plants, and in chapter 2 they begin to grow.

> At the time when creation of the world was completed on the sixth day before people were created, no plant was "yet on the earth" because even though it says "The earth brought forth sprouts, etc.," on the third day...this doesn't mean that they came above ground- but they remained just at the surface till the sixth day. Adapted from Rashi

The tradition always finds ways of resolving each apparent contradiction.

PROBLEM 3 The two stories of creation present different explanations of when, how, and why people were created.
Story #I teaches us:

> People were created last to show us that, if a person gets arrogant or haughty, we can tell him/her: "The gnat, the fly, and the mosquito are older than you." Genesis Rabbah

Story #2 teaches us:

> God formed Adam out of dust from all over the earth: yellow clay, white sand, black loam, and red soil, so that no one can claim that a person does not belong somewhere. All soil is people's homes. Genesis Rabbah

For the tradition, both stories complement each other and each gives a different lesson.

II ANSWERS - Critical Torah Study

PROBLEM 1 In the two creation stories, God is called by two different names. Each name has a distinct personality and style.
Biblical criticism uses the documentary hypothesis to explain the differences in the two stories.

Story #2 uses Adonai (The Lord) and it can be considered a J text. It is a good story that has God and people talking to each other. Its characters are real (God has to improve the world, which was just created).
Even though it uses Elohim (God), **story #I is a P document**. Its major concern is order and it very carefully sets up the structure of life and defines people's roles.

PROBLEM 2 The two stories contradict each other, presenting the order of creation differently and sometimes repeating certain creative acts.
The documentary hypothesis has already taught us that these two stories come from two different sources. It is to be assumed that different people writing in different environments would have differing views of the genesis of creation. Critical text study has us look into the origins of these stories.
The Babylonians have a creation story found in an epic called the Enuma Dish. In it there are two gods, Apsu and Tiamat. Marduk, one of their offspring, eventually kills Tiamat and creates the world. This happens in seven steps.

1. Water chaos of Apsu and Tiamat (unformed and void).
2. Birth of Marduk, "Sun of Heaven" (creation of light).
3. Sky is made from half of Tiamat's body (creation of heaven).
4. Earth is made from the other half of Tiamat (gathering of waters forms earth).
5. Setting up the constellations (creation of lights in the firmament).
6. Making people to serve gods (people created to rule over creation).
7. Divine banquet (God rested - Shabbat).

Scholars have suggested that the biblical author reworked this pagan seven-step version of creation into a seven-step monotheistic creation epic in Genesis.
Other biblical stories also have their parallels in the literature of the ancient Near East. Some of these include: the Garden of Eden story and the story of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

PROBLEM 3 The two stories of creation present different explanations of when, how, and why people were created.
Critical Bible study leads us to accept the views of God's relationship to people as the result of two authors and two traditions which were woven together by R during his/ her time. Judaism needed both stories and both images.
The first story sees people distant from their Creator -but as a culmination of the creation process. They are created in God's image- and it was "very good." The second story sees people as part of a working, changing notion of creation- in dialogue with the Deity.
The exciting part of this kind of study is that we can watch the Jewish tradition take root in ancient Near Eastern myths- while adding its own unique value system.

III ANSWERS - Making a Synthesis

In both traditional Torah study and scientific criticism our beliefs about who wrote the Torah automatically suggest a way of learning. But, when we try to work with the assumption that both God and people wrote the Torah, we need to find a way to fuse the traditional insights into the text (Midrash, commentaries, etc.) with the analytic tools of scientific criticism (archeology, historical documents and events, form criticism, etc.).

We need to synthesize the traditional and critical answers to our problems.

PROBLEM 1 In the two creation stories, God is called by two different names. Each name has a distinct personality and style.
The tradition explains that each of the names used for God communicates a different attribute or understanding of God. Here we fuse a name which manifests justice with a name which manifests mercy; the conclusions: IT TAKES BOTH JUSTICE AND MERCY TO CREATE AND SUSTAIN THE WORLD.

Biblical criticism suggests that the two names were rooted in two differing source documents. Story # I uses ELOHIM and it is a P document (priests were formal and orderly) while story #2 (/ADONAI) is a J document and was probably the product of an author who lived in the Southern Kingdom. We know that R decided that both were important.

The **TRADITIONAL scholar** looks at these stories and teaches us that there are various ways of describing the relationship between God and people. We can relate to God in many ways. Similarly, the CRITICAL scholar sees the two stories and says that they reflect two different views of God that were important to the Jewish people. We learn similar lessons.

PROBLEM 2 The two stories contradict each other, presenting the order of creation differently and sometimes repeating certain creative acts.

The tradition, bothered by the contradictions in the two stories, goes to great effort to "cover up" the "contradictions" and show the consistency of the text. For the rabbis, each of these problems provided an opportunity for study and for expanding their belief that the whole Torah flows together.

Biblical criticism is secure in the knowledge that each story is constructed from ancient myths and finds no difficulty with the fact that the stories appear inconsistent. Yet, in the end, the central learning comes from R. Because the redactor chose to include both versions, weaving them together, both must be important. In the end, what emerges is an evolving but confluent Jewish tradition.

Both approaches suggest that, in spite of the "contradictions," we have something to learn from the totality formed by the "two versions."

PROBLEM 3 The two stories of creation present different explanations of when, how, and why people were created.
Through the Midrash we learn different messages about "people's nature" from the two creation stories. From one we learn that people were created last to teach them

humility, while from the other we learn that people are made from dust to show the common origins of all humankind.

Critical study showed us that these two world views- people as the culmination of an ordered creation, and people as partners of God in an evolving creation -are both part of the Jewish tradition.

Fill in your own synthesis of this third problem.....

BACKGROUND: SOURCE CRITICISM by Joel Lurie Grishaver

Learning Torah: A Self-guided Journey through Layers of Jewish Learning,
Torah Aura/UAHC Press (p. 192-195)

The answer to "Who Done It?" for the Bible according to "source criticism" is: **J, E, P, and D**.

Here is the way **Gunther Plaut** describes the present state of biblical source scholarship (The Torah: A Modern Commentary, p. xxi).

Doubts that the Torah was a book set down by one author, Moses, developed some centuries ago, but it was not until the nineteenth century that extensive investigations made the critical study of the biblical text a highly specialized discipline. The early critics noted the differential use of the names of God in various parts of the Torah, the discrepancies of certain accounts and figures, and different literary styles. Later scholars further analyzed the text so that they could discern many authors and several editors, and they theorized about the times and events when these sources and documents were created and finally combined into the Torah as we have it now.

The theory which continues to command general scholarly adherence is called the Documentary Hypothesis and is often referred to by two of its most prominent expositors, Karl Graf and Julius Wellhausen. In substance it says that there are four major sources or documents (called J, E, P, and D), the combination of which during the fifth century B.C.E. resulted in the creation of a single book, the Torah, which was declared a sacred text by official canonization about the year 400.

> *J is the name given by biblical critics to the author who used the divine name YHVH or YHWH and ...was responsible for most of Genesis.*
>
> *E uses (Elohim) and authored the binding of Isaac and other passages of Genesis....*
>
> *D is the author of Deuteronomy, which is said to be the book found by King Josiah in 621 B.C.E....*
>
> *P is the author of the first chapter of Genesis, the Book of Leviticus, and other sections characterized by interest in genealogies and priesthood....*

There are critics who find additional major sources:

> *S (for Seir, believed to be an author of southern, possibly nonIsraelite origin);*
> *K (originating with the tribe of Kenites); and*
> *L (a lay writer).*
> *Others detect several subsources in J, E, P, and D; and then there is R (the redactor/ editor of the final text).*

There is no agreement on when these documents were composed, but most adherents of the critical schools would give 950 through 450 B.C.E. as the years during which this literary process took place, that is, from the days of the divided kingdom of Israel and Judah to their destruction and the time of the exile and return.

Since Moses lived in the thirteenth century B.C.E., he had, in that view, nothing to do with the writing of the complete Torah. His name was attached to it as author at the time of the book's canonization. This whole analysis is vigorously disputed by those who attempt to show that Moses was indeed the author. They consider much or all higher literary criticism as erroneous and some of its foundations as infected by Christian bias.

More recently, increasing numbers of critical scholars have denied the basic validity of the GrafWellhausen approach. They say that the difference in the divine names in the text is not traceable to different sources, but rather represents a largely intentional, stylistic alteration. They see the first four books of the Torah to be one basic unified collection which comes from a "traditionalist circle," which they are willing to call P (for the priestly school). These scholars assign the Book of Deuteronomy to a second collection which reaches all the way to II Kings called the Deuteronomic School.

THE D-SOURCE

Over the next few pages, we are going to see the way scholars work with "source criticism" to try to "reconstruct" history.

This passage from the Book of Deuteronomy (11:26-28) is part of one of the last speeches that Moses delivered to the Jewish people just before his death.

> *See, this day I set*
> *before you blessing and curse:*
> *blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God*
> *which I enjoin upon you this day; and curse, if you do not obey the commandments*
> *of the Lord your God,*
> *but turn away from the path which I enjoin upon you this day and follow other gods,*
> *whom you have not experienced.*

1. A THEOLOGICAL IDEA

Theology deals with ideas about God. The theology of the above passage is tied to two words: blessing and curse.
You get *berachah* (blessing) if .....
You get *kelalah* (curse) if.....

In other words, it says:
God rewards people who ....
God punishes people who ....
Simply put, this is a Deuteronomic theology.

Do you have any problems with this theology? If so, what?

2. DEUTERONOMY

Look at the following passages. All of them deal with the idea of covenant (God's promise to Israel). Mark the ones that express a Deuteronomic theology. Circle their letters.

a *See, I place the land at your disposal. Go, take possession of the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give to them and to their offspring after them.* (Deut. l:8)

b *And now, O Israel, give heed to the laws and rules which I am instructing you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you.* (Deut.4:1)

c *And this is the Instruction-the laws and the rules-that the LORD your God has commanded [me] to impart to you, to be observed in the land which you are about to cross into and occupy, so that you, your son, and your son's son may revere the LORD your God and follow, as long as you live, all His laws and commandments which I enjoin upon you, to the end that you may long endure. Obey, O Israel, willingly and faithfully, that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly [in] a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, spoke to you.* (Deut. 6:1-3)

D *I am the Lord. I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from their bondage. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and through extraordinary chastisements. And I will take you to be My people, and I will be your God. And you shall know that I, the LORD, am your God who freed you from the labors of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land which I swore to give Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession, I the LORD.* (Exod. 6:6-8)

1- What ideas do all these passages have in common?
2- What idea is unique to the theology we are discussing?

3. THE D-SOURCE

T o continue our exploration of the Deuteronomic theology, we need to look at the following materials from 2 Kings, chapters 22 and 23. (23:1-6,8,24-25)

In two or three sentences, write down your version of this story.

Now go back and mark any portions of this text which express a Deuteronomic theology. For comparison you may want to look at Deuteronomy 6:1-9, 29:9-28, and 34:10.

LET'S SUM UP WHAT WE'VE JUST READ:

a. A king named Josiah orders the Temple to be fixed.
b. While fixing it, "a lost book of the Law" is found.
c. This book becomes the center of a "renewal" of the covenant.
d. As part of this renewal, Josiah destroys:
    1. All idols and non-Jewish worship practices.
    2. All forms of Jewish worship outside the Temple.

4. CONNECTIONS

a. All of the Torah sees the covenant between God and Israel as the central core of Jewish theology.
b. All of the Torah discusses Israel as a land promised to the Jewish people.
c. In the Book of Deuteronomy we get the concept of a "conditional covenant."
When Israel does 'good, "things will be "good."
When Israel does "bad," things will be "bad."

NOW ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

1. We know that there are some theological connections between Deuteronomy and the Josiah story in 2 Kings. List a few.
2. We know that there are some linguistic (language) similarities between Deuteronomy and the Josiah story. List a few.
3. Josiah's destruction of Jewish worship outside of Jerusalem seems to be following this law found only in Deuteronomy (12:2-6). Draw a conclusion.

You must destroy all the sites at which the nations you are to dispossess worshiped their gods, whether on lofty mountains and on hills or under any luxuriant tree. Tear down their altars, smash their pillars, put their sacred posts to the fire, and cut down the images of their gods, obliterating their name from that site.
Do not worship the LORD your God in like manner, but look only to the site that the LORD your God will choose amidst all your tribes as His habitation, to establish His name there. There you are to go, and there you are to bring your burnt offerings and other sacrifices, your tithes and contributions, your votive and freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and flocks.

Theologically and Ethically Problematic Texts
by Steve Israel

Barry Holtz in his book ***Textual Knowledge*** has summarized multiple approaches the problematic gap between the values of the reader and the text as first read. That gap gives birth to creative, critical or apologetic readings. Much of parshanut is generated by this tension.

SAMPLE: Genesis 21: 11- 13 - God Responds to the Initiative.

(יא) וַיֵּרַע הַדָּבָר מְאֹד בְּעֵינֵי אַבְרָהָם עַל אודֹת בְּנוֹ:
(יב) וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל אַבְרָהָם: אַל יֵרַע בְּעֵינֶיךָ עַל הַנַּעַר וְעַל אֲמָתֶךָ
כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר אֵלֶיךָ שָׂרָה שְׁמַע בְּקֹלָהּ כִּי בְיִצְחָק יִקָּרֵא לְךָ זָרַע :
(יג) וְגַם אֶת בֶּן הָאָמָה לְגוֹי אֲשִׂימֶנּוּ כִּי זַרְעֲךָ הוּא:)

And the thing was very grievous in Avraham's eyes because of his son.
And God said to Avraham, Let it not be grievous in your sight
because of the lad, and because of your bondwoman.
In all that Sarah has said to you, hearken to her voice,
for in Yitzchak shall your seed be called.
And also for the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation,
because he is your seed.

God's part in the story is very disturbing for once again, as in Gen. Ch.16, God appears to side with Sarah. In Gen. Ch.16, God's intervention in the desert is mediated by an angel telling Hagar to return to the oppression of Sarai, while in Gen. Ch.21 God speaks directly. When Avraham is caught in a difficult position and hesitates about how to respond to Sarah's demand, God (uncalled, unrequited) tells Avraham to listen to Sarah and to do as she said. And Avraham does.

We will shortly examine first God's and then Avraham's reaction to Sarah's harsh initiative. The major questions are:

How can we understand God's role in this story? This is the same God who responded positively to Avraham's begging for mercy for the righteous in the case of Sodom, and to his people's outcry in Egypt. But here the God of Mercy, (אל מלא רחמים) silences the voice of conscience of Avraham the father, hesitant to banish his son and wife into exile and possible death.

Three major explanations may illuminate God's behavior.

1. God backs Sarah for God accepts the logic of Sarah's position because it is clear that circumstances justify her. Her concerns (pagan practices, inheritance, sexual immorality – each commentator and his own preferred interpretation) are correct and thus, even if the tone is questionable, her decision was justified. God assuages Avraham's doubts and confirms the essential rightness of Sarah's decision. The

similarities in tone between God's words in Gen. 21:12 and Sarah's words in Gen. 21:10, can certainly back up this point of view. Moreover, according to ANE law Sarah had every legal right to do what she now does.

2. **God appears to back Sarah's solution, yet God has no intention of letting Hagar and Ishmael going to their death.** Sarah has thoroughly depersonalized Hagar and Ishmael; she cares not about their death. They are problems and must be got rid of in one way or another. However God is the force that personalizes the exiles and responds to their suffering. God does care and God is working according to a certain logic and a definite plan. God has already promised (in Gen. 16) that Hagar will be the mother of a great multitude of people, so there is no intention of letting mother and child starve. Rather the Divine perspective demands that **people and peoples are strengthened by trial.** The parallel moment in the life of Am Yisrael is God's decision to allow the Jewish people to go down to slavery. Before redemption comes suffering and this stage of the Hagar story is the time of pre-redemptive suffering.

3. The story needs to be understood not so much in personal terms but rather, in **national terms**. There is a message here about conflict and the way to deal with it. **The resolution of conflicts in Genesis is connected with the idea of separation**. People and peoples need to be separated in order for conflict to be controlled. In Genesis we see this time after time: Cain and Hevel (the ultimate archetypal descent into violence and murder) is ultimately resolved by the Divine sentence of expulsion and wandering. There will be no more violence within that family. Cain will wander and settle, east of Eden. Avram and Lot parted from each other at Avram's initiative (אל נא תהי מריבה ביני ובינך...כי אנשים אחים אנחנו...הפרד נא מעלי (Genesis 13: 8-9) creating a major paradigm of conflict management. Avraham sent the sons of Ketura, his other wife, to the east, to avoid conflict with Yitzchak (Genesis 25: 1-6). The story of Ya'akov and Esav likewise shows the same pattern with Ya'akov escaping eastwards to avoid conflict and Esav subsequently settling in the land of Edom rather than in Canaan Genesis 36: 6-7).

This recurring pattern is a positive recipe for normative non-violent relationships between individuals or peoples, especially recommended where there is clear danger of strife and warfare. From this perspective, the banishment of Hagar and Ishmael can be seen as another example of managing the potential conflict between peoples, in this case the Hebrew and the Ishmaelites. Both Sarah and Hagar will have produce great and powerful nations whose period of power will be preceded by educational suffering. However to forward this goal God takes precautions to avoid future tension and potential violence between two groups. **Preemptive separation and the creation of borders between peoples may be the best way of dealing with national conflicts**.

EXERCISE: A Godly Response?

- READ Gen. 11-13 in pairs and analyze God's response to Sarah's initiative. LIST three adjectives that describe God's behavior and include them in a written description of God's behavior.

- REACT and evaluate as a group God's actions? How many have serious reservations about God's role?

- DEBATE the proposition:

THIS HOUSE CONDEMNS GOD'S BEHAVIOUR IN THE CASE OF THE BANISHMENT OF HAGAR AND ISHMAEL.

- Choose two students from among the most critical to speak for the motion and against God's conduct. Choose two others to speak against the motion and to explain/defend God's conduct. Give the latter two students the three suggestions above and allow them to choose their defense. They must use at least two of the three suggestions.

- The rest of the students should begin the debate seated between the two debating positions which should be at different sides of the room. Before the first debater (for the motion) begins to speak, students are allowed to move towards one of the two sides of the room, according to their sympathies. After the conclusion of every major speech and afterwards at regular intervals once the debate is opened to the floor, there is a chance for students to change their seating to express their opinion.

- VOTE and then discuss the crucial points that swayed your opinion.

Writing a Sermon: Developing a Moral Message: Taking a Tip from the Chassidim

Rabbis in synagogues now and then have used the Dvar Torah to send a contemporary moral message to their congregations. Torah was alive because it spoke to them with a voice of moral authority. The idea that each comment or midrashic statement is capable of providing a message is rarely shown better than in the specific layer of Hassidic midrash or story. The Chassidim were among the greatest of darshanim and their use of the Biblical text to squeeze out contemporary messages for their times is almost unparalleled. As such it is useful to bring an example of the kind of way that they developed their insights from the texts. Let us take two small examples from the Genesis 4 text that we are currently examining.

> *Rabbi Yitzchak Meir of Ger (1799-1866) was asked: What is the meaning of God asking Cain why his face has fallen? How could his face not fall since God had not accepted his gift? The Rabbi replied: God asked Cain, "Why has your face fallen? Because I did not accept your sacrifice or because I accepted your brother's?"*
>
> Martin Buber, Tales of the Hasidim II, *p. 308;)*

> *God did not ask Cain about his sins that had prevented his sacrifice from being accepted. Rather, he asked why Cain was drowning in grief. Excessive grieving over a transgression is worse than the transgression itself since it drags one into even more transgressions.*
>
> Rav Y. Y. Trunk of Kutno, *1820-1893)*[1]

Professor Shai Cherry explains:
"Both comments are motivated by God's seemingly insensitive comment that follows on the heels of God's rejection of Cain and his sacrifice. If one reads God's words (Genesis 4: 6) as though delivered in a taunting tone, we have to ask why God would be rubbing Cain's rejection in his downfallen face? The Chassidic Rabbi Yitzchak Meir suggests that God was emphasizing the *Why* of the question. " *Why* has your face fallen?" How difficult it is to be happy for one's brother when one is not enjoying similar success! A Chassidic addition to the Decalogue might be: *Thou shalt not begrudge your neighbor.*

Our Chassidic master is very sensitive to the wording of the verses. Cain first responds to God's rejection with distress or anger (Genesis 4:5), and only after with embarrassment or a sense of humiliation. Rabbi Yitzchak Meir assumes that God's second question in verse six is not redundant. First Cain is angry at being rejected. He then feels humiliated when Abel's offering is accepted.

In his comment, Rav Trunk (1820-1893, Poland) highlights the focus on joy and ecstasy that one finds in much, though by no means all, of Hasidic literature. There is a tendency among religious personalities to abuse themselves over their imperfections. Rav Trunk here suggests that self-flagellation is self-defeating. Rav Trunk's reading of

[1] *Itturei Torah*, p. 44.

verse six emphasizes the word *so*. "Why are you *so* distressed?" It is entirely appropriate to be upset if the emotion facilitates self-improvement. The problem here is that Cain is *so* upset that his emotions are themselves a barrier to moral progress.

On Yom Kippur, in addition to forgiving those who have wronged us (including God), Chassidic wisdom suggests we need to forgive ourselves, too. The beauty of Rav Trunk's comment is that it not only gets God off the hook for being insensitive, it makes God both insightful and caring."

EXERCISE: MESSAGES FROM THE TEXT.

- Examine the two Chassidic texts on Gen. 4: 6, brought here. Next to each of them write the message that you think that the particular Chassidic commentator is trying to put over. Write, too, how you relate to the message. Is it a good message in your opinion, worthy of being transmitted or not? Why? Why not? Write also whether or not you think that the message actually appears in the original text. Has the writer genuinely inferred it from the text (*parshanut*) or has he imposed on the text a message that he wanted to put over anyway, using the text as an opportunity to do so (a form of *darshanut*)? Is the second technique an acceptable use of the Biblical text? Why? Why not?

- Construct around part or all of verse 6 a scenario that transmits a message that you think is a good one that you would like to get over to others.

Get the students together and let volunteers read out their version of verse 6 including the messages that they have selected. After each reading, discuss with the class what the message of the writer was. After taking sufficient examples, discuss generally the validity of such messages that are at least partly imposed on the text. Are they legitimate? Is it permissible to use the Bible for such purposes? Talk about the Chassidim as great practitioners of this practice but point out the common nature of the practice at all levels of commentary from the Midrash onwards and point out and discuss the issue of peshat *and* derash *in the exegetical tradition.*

B. The Pedagogical Challenge of Difficult Texts
by BARRY HOLTZ

(*Textual Knowledge: Teaching the Bible in Theory and Practice*, JTSA, p. 129ff)

If we see the Bible as representing **truth,** of course, we will soon come face-to-face with certain **biblical texts that disturb us**, that force us to ask, What truth can be found here? These are difficult texts to teach, and every Bible teacher is likely to have his or her own personal collection of challenging passages. In this chapter; I want to examine the problem of difficult texts, asking why we as teachers find them hard to teach and exploring how we might think about our difficulties.

The Bible is an old and "foreign" book, and part of our difficulty has to do with the way we approach any work from the distant past. …The Bible presents a conception of reality in which the very **structure of the physical universe is different from our own**. When the rains deluge the earth in Genesis, they emanate from *arubot*, "sluices," in a typical translation (Gen. 7:11), windows that open to let in the cosmic waters within which our world is more or less suspended. Beyond its conception of the physical world (its "science," we might say), the Bible confronts us with a reality in which **ideas of causality and the divine** challenge our own perspectives.

Reading and teaching the Bible confront us with examples of both **cultural and philosophical distance**. From the point of view of the teacher, **cultural distance** is the easier problem to address. We can, in essence, "footnote" the lesson. We can explain allusions and explicate the cultural underpinnings of the texts that we teach. In the same way that we can tell English literature students about carriages, hacks,. coaches, and traps - and the social distinctions that they imply - we can explain the social significance of the Levirate marriage or the importance of the Bible telling us that Saul came from the tribe of Benjamin arid David from the tribe of Judah.

Nonetheless; even here we should be careful not to underestimate the pedagogic difficulties that face us, particularly when teaching children. **A cultural allusion (in any culture) works through its essential immediacy.** If I read a novel today that says, "After all that, he traded in his Taurus for a Mercedes convertible," we know what is implied about class, about ambition, about pretension. True, as a teacher I can draw

analogies from the automobiles of today to the horse-drawn vehicles in a nineteenth-century novel, but the layer of explanation undercuts the rapidity by which cultural allusions are grasped. A recent news report told of a judge in a small town who sentenced a noisemaking teenager to listen to 100 hours of Wayne Newton music over the course of a week. How could I explain the meaning of that punishment to a visitor from Sri Lanka, or even from London? Teachers of Bible are faced with similar distances. By the time the teacher is finished providing the footnotes, as it were, the point of the text may be lost. It is not unlike the experience of having to explain a joke to someone who doesn't get it at its first telling.

The issue of cultural distance also applies to the student's perception of the way the Bible written. The **devices** employed by the text may make the text feel different from the literature that students generally read. This is particularly striking in narratives in which typical features include the repetition of speech or events either directly or in less obvious ways. In doing so, the Bible creates a kind of **intertextual experience** for the aware reader through which different parts of the text comment interpretively upon one another. Commentators both ancient and contemporary have noticed the prevalence of these characteristic narrative devices, and part of the challenge of teaching the Bible is helping students both recognize and resonate with these dimensions of biblical storytelling.

Though cultural distance may present challenges for the teacher, **philosophical distance** is even more problematic. At least two kinds of problems are presented to the teacher:. first; we find texts that are difficult because their point of view is just plain different from our own. The Bible has **a symbol system and ideational framework** that require explication and understanding. Its concepts of holiness, covenant, divinity, prophecy, and law are all very different from those of our contemporary world.

But the second type of philosophical gap is more disturbing: In the Bible, we encounter texts that go beyond "different," or unintelligible, into the realms of being bothersome, unpalatable, or even offensive to our contemporary sensibility. These are texts in which the **moral perspective of the Bible is unacceptable**, as judged by our own standards. What might "unacceptable" mean? A range of difficulties may be identified. There are texts that make the **reader feel that the Bible is a harsh**

and brutal document, wrapped up in vengeance and violence: "The righteous man will rejoice when he sees revenge; he will bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked" says Ps. 58:11. Saul is punished for not executing Agag, king of Amalek, an act carried out by the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 1S). God hardens the heart of Pharaoh and then destroys the firstborn of Egypt in the Book of Exodus. There are places in which the moral compass of the Bible feels askew to the modern reader: we see Jacob stealing his brother's blessing, Israel devastating the peoples of Canaan, violators of the Sabbath being
put to death. Less violent, but disturbing nonetheless, are texts about the treatment of women and institutions such as slavery.

In what ways can the teacher deal with these difficult texts?
Let me suggest five approaches that teachers may find helpful, five ways of thinking about difficult texts: I am going to focus particularly on difficulties arising out of what I have called philosophical distance.

First Approach: The Principle of Charity

The first approach is perhaps more of an attitude than it is a way of working. Namely, one goal that teachers need to work toward, it seems to me, is **helping students de-emphasize their evaluative faculties, their desire to leap to judgment, and put more of a focus on understanding the texts that they study**. …The "me-focus" of contemporary America and American spirituality is a version of the "culture of narcissism" that has been the topic of much discussion in recent. Part of that narcissism is a focus on my reaction, and my likes and dislikes. This is true in the marketplace and has become equally true in the world of ideas. As teachers, we see students (of all ages -adults, too, certainly) whose first reaction upon seeing any piece of literature, particularly something distant from themselves, is to talk about their reactions to the text. What we see is a kind of **intellectual consumerism** in which the customer is always right. It is an ailment that the literary scholar Eugene Goodheart has characterized as the situation in which

> if the classic does not speak to our immediate concerns, then it can make no urgent claim on our attention. We make a classic relevant by projecting our interests into the work. Every reading becomes a reading of ourselves.

In place of this kind of attitude, wouldn't it be possible for teachers to lead students away from judgment and toward a kind of humility before the text? As Goodheart puts it, "A reader may decide that a particular classic is not for him, that it is deficient in rewards- not, however, before the work has been given a chance. Its alienness should not be a mark against it."

This approach would, in short, mean trying to help, students learn to read ancient texts like the Bible in the spirit of the "principle of charity," a notion associated with the philosopher Willard Quine….Quine's original conception is merely "shedding light" on a confusing statement or text so that the text does not appear to be meaningless. Moshe Halbertal uses the principle of charity to mean that **a text can be "read in the `best' possible light in order to redeem it**." …As Halbertal points out, the situation in thinking about a sacred text is complicated by the fact that in this case, unlike with secular legal materials, the Bible traditionally has been viewed as a text in which

> the speaker is God and [the text] is thus by definition perfect; not only can no contradictions exist but the text is the best possible. . . . Reading a holy text requires using the principle of charity as generously as possible m interpreting it, since it is inconceivable that such a text could err. . . . In the case of the Scriptures, there is an a priori interpretive commitment to show the 'text the best possible-light…. **The more canonical a text, the more generous its treatment.**

But what happens when we find ourselves in conflict with what the text says? Halbertal shows that that issue is an old and complicated one in Jewish intellectual history. He brings as an example Maimonides' discussion of what would happen if what he believed to be true from (here I use a somewhat anachronistic, term) a "scientific" point of view conflicted with the teachings of Scriptures. Such an issue would be, for example, the question of whether the world was created or eternal. "**Maimonides," Halbertal notes, "states that if it were clear to him in a metaphysical sense that in truth the world was eternal rather than created, he would interpret the Scriptures in harmony with this truth."**'

…"Maimonides' view that a holy text necessitates maximal charity in its interpretation is opposed by [a different traditional] view that a holy text must be interpreted with minimal charity."" Ironically, "minimal

charity" is seen as a necessity (according to this view) in order to preserve the ultimate authority of the sacred text:

> According to the radical approach, it is the text that must determine the interpreter's concept of charity. He cannot postulate a conception of justice or truth that he formulated before his encounter with the text and still interpret the text in the best possible light. **The holiness and authority of the text is so all-encompassing that it alone determines the concepts of good and evil, truth and falsity; no other criterion exists by which it can be interpreted."**

From a pedagogical perspective, the teacher today might well lean toward Maimonides' "moderate" position concerning interpretive charity, from two different vantage points.
First, in keeping with the moderate view, students can deal with difficult texts, as Maimonides does, through a strategy of interpretation, modifying perhaps the original intent of the text to make sense in a contemporary world.
Second, as I have suggested earlier, the principle of charity plays another role as well - the need to teach students a kind of respect or the text. **Perhaps the model should be that we treat the text as a wise older relative -it is true that we might disagree with what the elder says, but we must at least listen carefully before judging.**

Second Approach: Using the Classical Commentators

Second, from the teacher's point of view it is helpful to remember that at least some of the difficulties that we encounter in biblical sources were also **viewed as problematic by commentators in the past.** One strategy in dealing with these. difficult texts, therefore, is **to explore with students the ways that the Jewish hermeneutic tradition dealt with these same matters.**

So, for example, consider how one might teach Genesis 27, the episode in which Jacob pretends to be his brother, Esau, and in doing so deceives his blind father, Isaac, and steals the blessing intended for Esau. How might a teacher deal with the moral difficulties associated with Jacob's actions? Turning to traditional exegesis may help us discover some insights. For example, by looking at a recent article by the Bible scholar David Marcus, the teacher can discover various interpretations offered by the classical Jewish commentators on this story. Marcus shows two main tendencies in the interpretative tradition,

> "one holding that the deception was not justified while the other held that it was. Those who acknowledged that the deception was wrong offered a moral interpretation or attempted to shift the blame from Jacob to Rebecca or even to Isaac himself."

> (1) Jacob, according to some interpreters of the first tendency, "did deceive his father but he was punished for his deception later in life," particularly in the story of Jacob and Laban.

> (2) Others, such as Josephus, saw Rebecca as the main culprit in the story, letting Jacob off the hook, but still viewing the text through a moral lens.

> (3) An even more complex view, raised by the medieval commentators David Kimchi (twelfth-thirteenth century) and Samuel Ben Meir ("Rashbam," eleventh-twelfth century), saw Isaac himself as deeply involved in the incident, making the "deception" either not a deception at all but a duping of Esau or viewing the deception as self-deception, Isaac believing what he subconsciously wanted to believe about what was going on.

(4) At the same time, a different interpretive approach denies that there was any moral wrong in the deception at all; rather, this view justifies what Jacob did either on the legal grounds that the sale of the birthright by Esau in Genesis 25 had given Jacob rights to the blessing, or by arguing in theological terms that "the blessing had already been prenatally promised by God to Jacob when Rebecca consulted the oracle." Such arguments, Marcus points out, can be found in David Kimchi and in Ibn Ezra (twelfth century), among others.

The teacher who turns to traditional commentators such as these has a number of advantages. This approach gives students a sense of connection to an interpretive tradition in which they become participants. It helps students recognize some of the enduring dilemmas of biblical studies and allows them to see that **raising such questions - as they themselves may have done-should not disconnect them from the tradition, but may in fact link them to that tradition.**

Nonetheless, we should also recognize that this approach to problematic texts has very specific *shortcomings* that cannot be underestimated.

(a) First, the kinds of problems that the classical commentators raise may, at times, differ from those that students today will raise. The case about stealing the blessing, explored above, is an example of the tradition being troubled by an issue that a contemporary reader may also find bothersome.

(b) Other problems. that students might raise (such, as the role of women in certain biblical texts) are. less likely to be discovered in the commentators. We may be delighted to find examples of such concerns in the tradition, but intellectual honesty will require us to note that such examples may be the exception rather than the rule.

(c) We also encounter difficulties with the specific answers that they give. In the case above, for instance, the second approach to the text essentially argues that "the goal justifies the means." For teachers to use commentaries that justify immoral behavior on these grounds is likely to raise considerable difficulties.

(d) And even if one could negotiate those tricky waters (for example, an adroit teacher could use this case as an opportunity to discuss the larger moral issue - are there ever times in which the goals justify the means?), we are in the position of essentially taking an attitude of **defensive apologetics** vis-a-vis the biblical texts. …

> (e) These commentaries are themselves products of a particular milieu and intellectual framework. Reading the Bible through the eyes of classic midrashic or medieval interpreters may get the teacher entangled in questions of what the Bible is trying to say versus what the commentator is seeing in the Bible. …Historical scholars of the Bible, for example, point out that the notion of an eternal soul and therefore a division between body and soul is not a biblical notion (at least in the vast majority of the Bible). According to this view, later biblical commentators, influenced by Greek culture, read this idea into the biblical text. The teacher working on the opening of Genesis would have to consider if he or she read *nefesh hayya* as (in the King James version of Gen. 2:7) "man became a living soul" or as (in the NJPS) "man became a living being."

Classical commentaries are an important resource. They help us understand the way that the Bible was understood in the past and can offer many opportunities to rethink problematic biblical texts in different ways, but they are not necessarily going to help the teacher out of the dilemma of teaching challenging texts.

Third Approach: To Explain, Not to Defend

The third approach is represented by the distinguished Bible scholar Moshe Greenberg… [His is] the best articulation of a role for the teacher that we might call **"dispassionate explainer**" of the Bible's point of view:

> It order to carry out his duty the teacher is not required to assent personally to the answers given by the Bible, or to the manner in which it deals with the issues it raises: He may have a different viewpoint, or he may not yet have reached sure ground in his own mind on these matters. This does not disqualify him from teaching. **For the basic requirement of a Bible teacher is not faith, but understanding; not assent, but recognition of the profound issues of which the Bible treats.**

Greenberg's view, unlike what one may see in typical traditional commentaries, does not seek to defend. the Bible; rather, he is interested in taking seriously the **"profound issues"** that lie behind the biblical text. The teacher, says Greenberg, does not need to agree with

what the Bible presents, but the teacher "must comprehend [the Bible] thoroughly enough **to make clear the problems that have agitated the faith in question, and to give the color of plausibility to the solutions it has found."**

Greenberg's view emanates out of two important assumptions, both with serious implications for biblical pedagogy. First is his view of the ultimate goal of teaching the Bible, specifically to students younger than those in university courses. **Greenberg sees the task of Bible teachers as "to convey the religious significance of the Bible, and they can do this only after having gotten hold of the great spiritual issues that animate it."**… Unlike university scholars "who can content themselves with the Bible as literature or archaeology without responsibility for its religious reaching," **the teacher must be able to present the Bible's religious message as convincingly and powerfully as possible, without acting as a defensive apologist for the material on the one hand or as a proselytizer on the other.**

For Greenberg, the key is placing the Bible before the students and ***letting the Bible speak for itself.*** It is not the teacher's job to take the student to the next level, to religious commitment. "The step beyond [presenting the Bible as best as can be done], from understanding to conviction and faith, must be left to the effect of the material itself." Greenberg has a great deal of **confidence in the power of the Bible to operate on the student's soul** as long as the teacher does his or her job well . Green berg's position frees the teacher from a kind of "clerical" burden, we might say, but it is a demanding role nonetheless. It is far more challenging than the university scholar's situation. As he puts it, quite movingly:

> The one commitment that may be fairly expected of a teacher of Bible is to the contemplative and reflective life.. This commitment is sufficient, is indeed a warrant – the only possible warrant - that his teaching will not be trivial. This much may be expected of the teacher, since it is in the hope that his students will themselves be directed toward making a similar commitment that they have been entrusted to him.

Greenberg has laid out a serious challenge about what it means to be a teacher of Bible. He goes beyond the problem of how to deal with difficult texts to look at the underlying goals of the entire enterprise. What is the "orientation" presented here? It is squarely in the camp of

Bible as a religious text meant to speak to the lives of contemporary people **The means by which the teacher is to accomplish this goal have nothing to do with simplifying, missionizing, or manipulating either students or the text**. It centers on understanding, and Greenberg believes that the text itself, well presented by the "contemplative" teacher, will be able to work its own magic.

Fourth Approach: The Strangeness of the Text

Eugene Goodheart criticizes Gary Wills' argument that the fundamental characteristic of a classic is "its capacity to renew itself in every age." This concept, according to Goodheart, weakens the power of the classic, since it "dissolves its core identity, so that it becomes whatever its readers wish to make. it." What Goodheart argues, in fact, is that **the very quality that readers - particularly teachers n students - in difficult about "classics" is what they should be embracing! What makes the classic hard is what matters most:**

> **[A] classic may resist the interests and fashions of the age, even offend against them, and yet persist in being lively to us because of the imagination, intelligence, and force of the resistance: . . . The resistance forces us, to examine what we have perhaps repressed in ourselves.... A classic does not necessarily convert us to its form of wisdom, but if it possesses the power implied by its status in the culture, it forces us to think about our resistance to it and to strengthen or overcome that resistance,**

The teacher's approach to the Bible would be to use the flip the side of the principle of charity is **the principle of strangeness**. As Goodheart puts it:

> **If education is a discovery of things one doesn't already know, we should not be looking in the works we read or a reflection of our own already formed understandings. If we do so, we may never hear the voices that speak a language that addresses our convictions in unfamiliar ways and perhaps unsettles them....**

> The reader who approaches a work with the aim of demystifying it is quite different from the open reader who may be discovering himself in the strangeness of the classic.

The teacher, following this approach, would push students to confront the biblical text in all its alienness. Students would need to take the point of view seriously and ask what that text might demand of the listener who really embraces its concerns.

Fifth Approach: The "Genetic" Alternative

The notion expressed here is that an appeal to "genetic understanding" is a kind of last-resort effort to find meaning in the text. "Genetic" would mean exploring the context in which the biblical text originally appeared in an attempt not to justify the text in question but to view it sympathetically within the context of its own times. Here a turn to historical biblical scholarship would be the obvious move. [For example, the Torah condones slavery but softens it and becomes a progressive force for viewing the slave as a human being, not merely property].

C. Between Angels and Mere Mortals: Nechama Leibowitz's Approach to the Study of Biblical Characters

by Howard Deitcher

abbreviated from article in Journal of Jewish Education

During her life and up to the day after she left us, Nechama Leibowitz was known as the "teacher of teachers." ...Leibowitz (1995) formulated the overall purpose of her approach as follows:

> It is not our intention to have the students through their discussion decide between these two interpretations and give one priority, rather it is to have them understand each one, provide each one with evidence from Torah and Chazal (the sages) and approach the roots of each opinion and its consequences. We have seen that the value in studying two (conflicting) interpretations is not only in stimulating students and motivating them to argument and discussion, but it is capable of broadening their horizons in general by entering them - via a single verse- into the realms of beliefs and opinions.

Implicit in the statement are the two main approaches that stand at the center of Nechama Leibowitz's educational work. The first approach is a **normative ideational** one, according to which principles and ideas shape the educational enterprise and its content. Alternatively, there is the **deliberative-inductive** approach, which regards coping with problems as the main factor in instruction. ... In contrast to the normative-ideational approach, the deliberative-inductive orientation is concerned with helping people understand reality, relate to it, make the necessary adaptations and help them shape the environment whenever necessary....

> The educated person is one who is equipped to solve problems. Achievement in education is to locate a problem, to find a tentative solution to it, and to have both the ability to implement the solution and the courage to abandon it when it loses its relevance or effectiveness (Rosenak, 1987, p. 17).

Leibowitz's [second] goal here is to help her students use the biblical text as a **source for**
personal reflection, and a means to influence their everyday behavior. She argues:

> One must explain, clarify and emphasize over and over that Genesis is not a history book and its purpose is not to survey the life stories of people in these ancient periods; rather, it has its own purpose: **Torah is meant to teach a lesson and a way of life**, and the whole selection of events and places where the text is abbreviated or issues have been elaborated, was made according to this purpose (Leibowitz, 1997, p. 155).

How should the teacher relate to deeds of the forefathers that appear to be misdeeds?

How can one plant in the hearts of the students' values that contradict the values of the society in which she lives? What ideological and normative questions should the teacher consider before presenting these biblical characters?

This discussion leads us to examine **4 different pedagogic approaches** that address this problem, and their underlying assumptions.

(1) The first approach focuses on the unique nature of the forefathers and their superhuman qualities. We call this approach **"the forefathers as angels,"** since it highlights the forefathers' special level of spirituality and holiness, while also emphasizing the reader's cognitive and spiritual limitations in understanding and assessing their deeds.

> Rabbi Aharon Kotler summarizes this approach as follows:
> Therefore, when we teach an episode in the deeds of the fathers we must explain to the
> students that we are not speaking of ordinary of people with attributes and desires, but rather of people whose level we cannot attain at all, free of all selfish ambition and desire, and that since we are incapable of assessing angels we are thus incapable of assessing or achieving the level of the forefathers (p. 403).
>
> And as a rule, the deeds of the forefathers, which, as we have noted, were fundaments of the structure of the Jewish people and of the whole world, could not be influenced whatsoever by selfish inclinations and desires. To understand this matter, according to the quantity and quality of our attainment, one must know that there are but three patriarchs, and that if there had been any defect whatsoever, even the slightest of slightest of defects, the reality of the Jewish people would also have been different.

This approach fervently believes that the modern reader of the biblical text cannot understand, and is not permitted to criticize the deeds of the forefathers. Their spiritual level and idealism are beyond our grasp; hence, from a pedagogic standpoint, we cannot question nor raise reservations about their actions. Indeed, according to Kotler, the forefathers were immune to human weaknesses, devoid of all selfish aspiration and desire, and in that regard, similar to angels. The reader's capacity to understand, let alone analyze the behavior of these characters is quite limited, and there is no need to devise an educational approach that attempts to comprehend them.

(2) The second approach can be called "**justification of the forefathers' deeds**." Aryeh Zuta, one of the supporters and promoters of this approach, posited that through a process of inspiring the student with the national, moral, and aesthetic values of the Bible as a means to creating an Israeli-Jewish identity, the reader will maintain a link with their forefathers and their way of life.

> And because we are dealing with the lower grades, everything is true: Moses is real and his Torah is true; the prophets are men of truth and their miracles are the simple truth. However, when the child begins to become aware and to ask questions ...then, too, the teacher should not reveal all of the truth that is apparent to him, but may answer ...indeed, thus it is written, thus we learned in the book, thus it was imparted to us ...it was possible thus (p. 19).

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(3) We refer to the third approach as **"value judgments" of biblical persons**. This approach is typical of educators who favor a literary-humanistic approach to education by means of the Bible; its most loyal exponents were Zvi Adar and Ben-Zion Dinur. Talmon (1969) aptly defined this form of **Israeli humanism** as "a system of thought and educational trend that rebelled against religious Jewish authority and tried to find pathways to human values, and within them values of Judaism as well, on the basis of the axiom of Pythagorus: `Man is the measure of all things. "'

In advocating this approach, Adar broadly relies on the Book of Amos. Adar reads Amos as representing a clear and explicit idea that is common to all of the great prophets (excluding Ezekiel): the emphasis on the distinction between cultic religion and real religion. Adar (1967, p. 25) in this context, argues that **morality became the substance of true religion**. God's power, furthermore, is no longer ordinary power that one must fear but power that acts for the good and the just.

Adar (1967) maintains that the **Bible takes an open approach, nondogmatic about its beliefs, and he regards the wisdom literature as a paradigm of this approach:**

> To sum up: the wisdom literature arose out of man's desire to see and judge for himself. Man speaks by right of his independent personality, arriving at his own conception of God and the world (p. 351).

Hence, according to Adar, the teacher's mission is to arouse a sense of judgment in his students, so that they will be capable of engaging in a critical encounter with the values presented in the Bible.... The biblical story is the story of the deed alone; the reader is the judge and evaluator of behavior and deeds. Adar claims:

> The biblical narrative offers an objective and realistic portrait of the heroes; it does not judge them directly, nor in most instances, even indirectly. This absence of evaluation in the stories does not result from their shallowness, but from their fullness, from their comprehensive view of all the heroes' different aspects. But if we do not find explicit evaluations, all the material for them lies before us to make our own. Since man's sense of values is tested and refined through his evaluating others, we have here a perfect opportunity to develop the student's ability to evaluate, and to clarify the criteria implicit in the evaluation (1967, p. 100).

(4) Having surveyed three different approaches, we now turn to a discussion of Leibowitz's response to the pedagogic question: how do we effectively portray the character of the biblical heroes? In dealing with this question, Leibowitz (1968) points out:

> Our honored Talmudic sages are hard as nails with our forefathers. If they find a defect in them - they point to it immediately, and they find that subsequently in the text the righteous one is punished for the injustice that he performed, and is not excused (p. 231).

Leibowitz contends that in scrupulously examining the forefathers behavior, the Sages always sought the highest standards of righteousness and justice. They never compromised these principles in order to defend the deeds of a great and important person. In this sense, Leibowitz rejects Kotler's suggestion that we are incapable of criticizing the actions of our forefathers.

D. Rabbinic Midrashic Strategies
Case study: Redeeming David's Reputation from the Batsheva Affair

by Steve Israel and Noam Zion

Steve Israel offers three rabbinic strategies for dealing with the difficulties of having our greatest national hero, the writer of our religious poetry and our model of the messiah and the progenitor of the messianic line involved in such a terrible scandal as the Batsheva affair.

Then we add more strategies brought by Avigdor Shinan, from "Al Demuot shel Hamelech David bSifrut Hazal" in Yair Zakovitz's David – MeiRoeh L'Melech.

1. THE PREDESTINATION STRATEGY: A MODEL FOR BAALEI TESHUVAH

> David was not the sort of man to do the act with Bathsheba...Why then did he act in this way? **God predestined it** so in order to teach that if an individual has sinned and hesitates about the effects of repentance, he could be referred to the example of David. (Talmud; Avodah Zarah)
>
> Neither David nor Israel were deserving of such an event...So why did they do it [Israel did the Golden Calf and David did the Batsheva affair]?
> To teach that teshuvah is possible. So if an individual sin, we tell him to go learn for an individual [from David that one can repent and be accepted] and if a whole community sins, we tell them go learn from a community [Israel who sinned at the Golden Calf and then repented and were accepted]. (TB Avodah Zara 4b-5a)

In this approach, David is chosen for this act by God because of his saintliness. David is chosen as an example to future generations and in order that the example be effective, it was necessary for God to choose the LEAST LIKELY person to be caught in sin. This is an effective line of defense which clears David of all responsibility.

2. THE HUBRIS STRATEGY

> Rav said: Never put yourself into a trial [of virtue] for David the king put himself to the test and failed. David the king of Israel went to God and said: King of the world, why do we say in prayer "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob," but not the God of David?
> God replied; They were tested by me, but you were not.
> To this David replied; King of the world, examine me and try me.
> God answered him: I will test you, but I will grant you a great privilege, for I did not inform them of the nature of their trial beforehand but I inform you that I will try you in a matter of adultery.
> [David prepared himself for his trial] as it is said; "and it came to pass one evening that David arose from his bed".

> Rabbi Yochanan explained this to mean that he changed his night couch to a day couch [and made love to his wives during the day, so that he might be free of desire during the night] but he forgot the rule that a man's small organ [his phallus] satisfies him in hunger, but makes him hungry again when satisfied!
>
> (Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 107a)

This extraordinary piece is a classic example of the apologetic approach, which is prepared to go to quite extraordinary lengths to take away any blame from David. In this piece, it is David's determination to be included among the patriarchal figures in the prayer formula that makes him vulnerable to the sin, which once again, is sent from God. And then, as he tries to prepare himself for his test, it is his enthusiasm to pass the test that proves his undoing, since he underestimates the power of biological drives!

There is an interesting continuation to this story from the same place in the Talmud:

> After he had committed adultery, David pleaded before God, and said; You know very well that had I wished to suppress my lust I could have done so, but I thought that it would be wrong to show that the judgment of the Lord was faulty so that people would say; "The servant triumphs against his master". (Talmud; Sanhedrin)

Once again an extraordinary piece, but one that has perhaps an implied criticism of David for his conceit, a motif that appears a number of times in the rabbinic literature concerning David. Nevertheless, it has to be accepted that criticizing David for pride is not as harsh as criticizing him for murder and adultery.

3. THE REPENTANCE AND REMORSE STRATEGY

> These are the last words of David. It was said of him that for twenty-two years prior to his death, the joy of life was taken from him. Every single day, he would cry rivers of tears and eat his bread of ashes. As it is written in Psalm 102:2 - "I have eaten ashes like bread," and these are David's last words. (Seder Eliyahu Rabba 1)

[Here, the question of David's guilt is accepted and no excuses are used to downgrade his responsibility. David wants to take responsibility and he is not looking to exempt himself from guilt.
David is judged not for his initial sin, for his lack of purity, but for the greatness of his desire to atone. **Repentance** is David's virtue but that is reserved only for sinners. In the place that Baalei Teshuvah stand even a pure Tzaddik cannot stand.

[This is also the strategy of the editor of Psalms who entitled **Psalm 51 "*Lamnatzeiach Mizmor l'David* when Nathan came to him after He came into Batsheva."** Here David confesses and asks for forgiveness].

4. "IT NEVER REALLY HAPPENED" STRATEGY

Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi who descends from the house of David, turns the verses upside down to give David the benefit of the doubt.
God challenges David: "Why did you despise the word of God to do evil (*laasot ra*)?" (II Sam 12:9).
Rabbi (Yehuda HaNasi) said: This evil is different than every other report of evil in the Torah, for in all the others it says *vayaas* = "he did" (in the past tense), but here it says *laasot hara* (in the future) which must mean that David intended to do evil but never actually carried it out. (TB Shabbat 56a)

5. LEGAL LOOPHOLE STRATEGY

God said: "*You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword of Amon*" (II Sam. 12:9).

But that only means David should have executed him by trial of the Sanhedrin, but David executed him without trial.

God said: "*His wife you took for yourself as a wife.*"

But that means the "taking" counts as a valid legal act of "taking in marriage" [while adultery can never be a valid marriage]. That is according to Rav Shmuel bar Nachmani in the name of Rabbi Yonatan who said: Every soldier going to war for the house of David would write a *get* for his wife [so technically Bathsheva was divorced when David had intercourse with her].

God said: "*You killed him with the sword of Bnai Amon.*"

Just as no one is legally responsible for death at the hands of the enemy, so you are not legally culpable for him. Why? Because Uriah is legally a rebel against the king's authority [for which the penalty in the Sanhedrin is death] for Uriah refused the direct order of the king to go to his wife. (TB Shabbat 56a)

6. THE IRRESTIBLE SEDUCTRESS STRATEGY

Every day [Batsheva] would wear sheer silk, a thousand in the morning, a thousand in the afternoon and a thousand at dusk; dress herself up with 150 perfumes and wrap herself in 1080 gold bracelets. Then she would stand opposite David [window?] in order that he would see her and smile at her.
Since he did not pay any attention, she went up to the roof and sat there in the nude washing on the roof.
(Geniza fragments of Louis Ginsberg, p. 166)

In the Qur'an

The only passage in the Koran which has been brought into connection with the story of Bath-sheba is sura xxxviii. 20-25:

> "And has the story of the antagonists come to you; when they climbed the wall of the upper chamber, when they came in to David? And when he feared them, they said, 'Fear not; we are two antagonists, one of us has wronged the other, so judge justly between us:. . . . My brother had ninety-nine ewes and I had one. Then he said, "Give me control of her," and he overcame me in his plea.'
> David said, 'Truly he has wronged you by asking for your ewe as an addition to his ewes, and truly most partners act injuriously the one to the other, except those who believe and work righteous works; and such are few.'
>
> David supposed that we had tried him; so he sought pardon of his Lord and fell, worshiping, and repented. And we forgave him that fault, and he has near approach to us and beauty of ultimate abode."

From this passage one can judge only that some similarities of Nathan's parable. The Moslem world has shown an indisposition, to a certain extent, to go further, and especially to ascribe sin to David. As the commentator Baidawi (in loc.) justly remarks, this passage signifies only that David desired something which belonged to another, and that God rebuked him by a parable. At the very most, Baidawi continues, he may have asked in marriage a woman who had been asked in marriage by another, or he may have desired that another should abandon his wife to him—a circumstance which was customary at that time. The story of Uriah is regarded as a slander, filled with unnecessary violence and immorality, not the sort of thing that would happen to a man who is close to God.