

# RECLAIMING OUR LEGACY

מרבה תורה, מרבה חיים

MARBEH TORAH, MARBEH HAYYIM

THE MORE TORAH, THE MORE LIFE

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האוניברסיטה העברית בירושלים

הרשות לספריות

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## INTRODUCTION

The title of this book may be overwhelming to you, the reader--as it is to the author--for it embodies everything there is in Judaism. *Talmud Torah* (the study of Torah) encompasses all of our traditions, literature, lore, law, rituals, history, and national being. That's obviously too big a subject for any one book or any one author, so I shall define a more limited scope for this volume. The purpose of the source book you are about to read is, to some extent, an outline of what makes up the world of Talmud Torah and how you can set out on a lifelong effort to engage yourself in it. The goals of this book include techniques, suggestions, and skills to help you become a better learner.



more enriched by our heritage, and to enable you to feel more a part of being authentically Jewish. We will not attempt to teach you particular texts and how to study all of their nuances, except by way of example. There are many wonderful volumes which give very careful step by step instructions for studying a particular piece of classical Jewish text or procedures in exploring Jewish literature and tradition. Our method here is to provide more of a handbook to direct you to sources, show you what encompasses the study of Torah in its broadest sense, and give you some practical suggestions of how you can begin your own study. This approach will enable you to increase your own level of knowledge, commitment, and involvement with the most important *mitzvah* (religious obligation) of our tradition.

We are blessed with a system that is an organic whole, that is, one in which all of the aspects are related to each other. Therefore, it almost doesn't matter which sources we select from the Jewish tradition to exemplify the study of Torah, because any source can be a jumping off point for all the others. Any entry point into our tradition can, and should, lead you to every other part of that tradition. This is part of what is implied by the

following rabbinic statement from the **Mishnah**:<sup>1</sup>

בן בג בג אומר: הפך־בה והפך־בה דכלא בה, ובה  
תחזא, וסיב ובלה בה, ומנה לא תווע, שאין לך  
מדה טובה הימנה.

Ben Bahg-Bahg said, "Turn it [Torah] and  
turn it thoroughly, since everything is in  
it. Look into it, grow old and gray in it,  
and don't turn away from it, for there is  
no better measure than it."

(Pirkei Avot 5:24)

This statement urges us to look at a text or source, look at it again, reevaluate it, and continually reinterpret and study it again. All through our school careers we have been presented with subject matter in a spiraling way. When we were in our first year or two of school, we studied mathematics using manipulative materials: we counted numbers by working with shapes that we could touch and feel. By the time we got to high school, trigonometry and algebra were really just more sophisticated versions of what we had done in

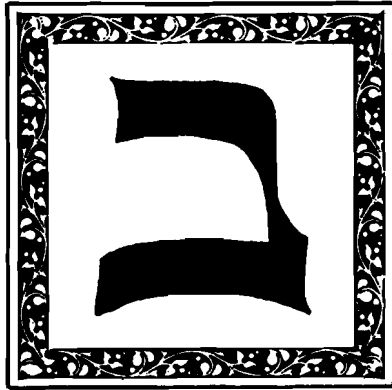
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<sup>1</sup> Classical Jewish texts which appear in bold print are listed as part of "Great Jewish Books" in Chapter 1, where further information about their contents and authorship may be found. Such sources are indicated the first time they appear in the body of the source book and whenever they are given as the source of a quotation.

those early years. At a certain basic level, all knowledge is interrelated. All parts of Jewish life and the study of Torah are interrelated, as well. Therefore, as we mature and dig deeper and deeper into the wisdom of the past, we begin to understand what is important in life.

Perhaps the biggest task of this volume will be to convince you that the lifelong study of Torah is as important a part of your life as any other aspiration, goal, or enjoyment you may currently possess. This book will be a success if, after you have dug deep into it, you sense the treasure which is there for you to seek throughout life and the legacy which will be yours if you do.

## CHAPTER ONE THE RICHES OF TALMUD TORAH



### A Personal Legacy

Suppose you received a registered letter from a lawyer telling you that you had been named in the will of someone for whom you did a favor many years ago. As a result, were about to receive a very precious legacy, one that would change your life style and open up worlds of discovery, excitement, pleasure, and riches unimagined to you up till now. At first you would probably be very skeptical, but after investigating further and realizing that indeed you *had* been left this precious inheritance,

you would probably become quite enthusiastic. I bet as you just read the previous sentence you imagined a legacy that was something tangible—great wealth, stock portfolios, companies that might have been bequeathed to you, precious gems, gold, or silver. That's the way most of us would probably fantasize a precious legacy, but legacies of silver and gold or other material objects somehow don't always have the permanence that riches of another kind seem to grant us. Look at the following story:

אמר רבי יוסי בן-קסמא: פעם אחת הייתי מהלך בדרך ופגע בי אדם אחד ונתן לי שלום, והחזרתי לו שלום. אמר לי: רבי, מאיזה מקום אתה. אמרתי לו: מעיר גדולה של חכמים ושל סופרים אני. אמר לי: רבי, רצונך שתדור עמנו במקומנו, ואני אתן לך אלף אלפים דינרי זהב ואבנים טובות ומרגליות. אמרתי לו: אם אתה נותן לי כל-כסף וזהב ואבנים טובות ומרגליות שבעולם, איני דר אלא במקום תורה. ולא עוד, אלא שבשעת פטירתו של אדם אין מלוין לו לאדם לא כסף, ולא זהב, ולא אבנים טובות ומרגליות, אלא תורה ומעשים טובים בלבד...

Rabbi Yose ben Kisma related: Once I was traveling on a journey. A certain man met me and extended greetings. I greeted him in return. He inquired, "From where do you come?" I replied, "I come from a great city of scholars and sages." He said, "Rabbi, if it would please you to live with us in our community, I would give you thousands of

gold *dinarim*, as well as the most precious stones and pearls in the world." I replied, "Though you give me all the silver, gold, precious stones, and pearls in the world, I would not live anywhere except in a community where there is Torah." Moreover, at the time of a person's death, neither silver, gold, precious stones, nor pearls will accompany him, only his Torah and his good deeds.

(Pirkei Avot 6:9)

There are gifts and legacies in this world which we must watch over, protect, worry about, and defend in order to enjoy them. There are other gifts which "protect" us or "watch over" us; they fulfill our lives with riches beyond measure and do more to preserve us than we them. Such is the gift of Torah. Such is the gift of accessibility to a richness of knowledge, life, practice, and wisdom of centuries that embodies the study of Torah for the individual Jew. As someone about to embark on a new life experience, such as graduating from high school and going into college, you are probably beginning to formulate the goals and aims and lifelong desires you wish to achieve in the coming years. Up to now you have probably been more or less protected and sheltered by your parents and your home situation, but before very

long you will go out and make a life for yourself. The freedom of interaction with other people, the freedom to choose profession, life style, and values will soon be yours. Presumably your past experiences will influence you, and hopefully you will make choices that will lead to a good life, one filled with richness of spirit, not only material richness.

There are many overall goals that we might choose for ourselves. We could choose to be important people, to whom many would pay homage and give great respect. We could choose to be people of great wealth and privilege, able to do whatever we want because we have the wherewithal to do it. Along with these preferences we could also choose to be good Jewish human beings, filled with a love of others and a caring concern to improve everyone's lot here on earth. Many opportunities are a matter of chance; some are a matter of choice. Not all of us can become wealthy and powerful. Not all of us have the abilities to create great new projects and inventions. However, all of us can achieve personal feelings of self-worth, importance and control when we decide to possess the treasure and legacy which is the right of every Jew. That legacy is involvement with and the study of Torah.

בשלשה כתרִים נכתרו ישראל. כתר תורה וכתר כהנה וכתר־מלכות. כתר כהנה זכה בו אהרן. שנאמר, והיתה לו ולזרעו אחריו ברית כהנת עולם. כתר מלכות זכה בו דוד. שנאמר, זרעו לעולם יהיה וכסאו כשמש נגדי. כתר תורה הרי מנח ועומד ומוכן לכל־ישראל. שנאמר, תורה צוה־לנו משה מורשה קהלת יעקב. כל מי שירצה יבא ויטל.

The people of Israel were given three crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of royalty. Aaron acquired the crown of priesthood, as it is written: "It shall be for him and his descendants after him a pact of priesthood for all time" (Numbers 25:13). David acquired the crown of royalty, as it is written: "His line shall endure forever, his throne like the sun before Me" (Psalm 89:37). The crown of Torah, however, is designated for all Israel, for it is written: "The Torah which Moses handed down to us is the heritage of the community of Jacob" (Deuteronomy 33:4). Whoever desires it may come and get it.

(Mishnei Torah, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 3:1)

Though many other opportunities in life are a matter of being at the right place at the right time



or having the right background, training, talent, or money, the ability to achieve the "crown of Torah"--to identify with a precious legacy which originated thousands of years ago--is yours by right.

It is a joy that may be difficult to understand until you reach out and grasp hold of it, but it is yours for the asking. The Rabbis even interpreted the biblical verse "All who are thirsty, come for water" (Isaiah 55:1) as meaning that anyone may come to "drink" the waters of Torah. Truly the study of Torah, unlike the teachings of certain other religions, is entirely democratic and open to any Jew who chooses to avail himself or herself of it. It can grant you a richness of spirit, growth of mind, and sense of rootedness that probably no other endeavor in your life can ever give you. Trying to convince you that the material trappings of American society which entice many people (possessions such as wealth, clothing, beautiful homes, and cars) are only a small part of what can make life worthwhile, is a difficult task. It's hard to sell someone on a notion that they haven't tried or felt for themselves.

Unfortunately, for many people reading this book, past experience with the study of Torah in Hebrew school and Jewish education has not been all that positive. This may be primarily because of the problems of language and the time of day you

were asked to claim this special gift which you have inherited. We hope to show in the coming pages that there are many ways of claiming your legacy, ways which are pleasant and personally stimulating, ways which can help you combine your personal growth as a sensitive and loving individual with career and professional achievements.

Ultimately, Talmud Torah is the study of Jewish literature in all of its forms, diverse origins, different styles and techniques. The study of literature (taking the term "literature" in a broad sense) is an essential discipline, since it helps us to understand ourselves and others. Thereby, it enriches us and makes us feel more human:

One of the major aims of literary education is to train young students--who have not as yet acquired life experience and a developed sense of observation--to penetrate into the inner life of others, to understand each detail in the description of a person in order to see him as a whole. After they have passed this stage, they have to face another task--that of evaluating and of judging the depicted character.<sup>1</sup>

In the end, only you can choose to claim your

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<sup>1</sup> Zvi Adar, HUMANISTIC VALUES IN THE BIBLE (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1967), 91.

heritage. Only you can accept the gift which has been offered by generations of Jews who came before you. Only you can take that lawyer's letter and openly and willingly receive what is rightfully yours. As the following story about the Hasidic Rabbi of Kobryn explains, only when the heart is open to listen can words enter.

After the rabbi had finished giving his interpretation of something in the Torah, he thought that no one in the congregation really accepted what he said. He explained why he felt that way: "Words that come from the heart go to the heart in all their truth. But if they find no heart that will receive them, then God shows mercy to the person who spoke them: He does not let them wander about in space, but they all return to the heart from which they were spoken. That is what has happened to me. I felt something like a thrust--and all the words thronged back into my heart."<sup>2</sup>

I hope that there is someone to talk to in you, the reader, so that the legacy which has such great potential to enrich your life in so many ways will be available to you and be heard by you.

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Martin Buber, TALES OF THE HASIDIM: THE LATER MASTERS (New York: Schocken Books, 1948), 132.

## QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

To help you think about Talmud Torah and what's in it for you, try some of the following exercises:

1. For you, what is success? List the five biggest successes of your life and discuss why you feel they were successes. Then list what would you like to be the five biggest successes in your future and why.

2. List your strengths and shortcomings. In *Column A*, list what you like best about yourself, the characteristics, talents, skills, and personality traits. In *Column B* make a listing of those things you would wish to improve, change, or acquire to make yourself a better human being. Once you've done this for general characteristics, do it again in terms of your "Jewish self." In *Column A* list those things you do as a Jew well, competently, or enjoy doing; in *Column B* list those things you would wish to do if you had the choice or opportunity.

*Column A*  
(strengths)

*Column B*  
(shortcomings)

("General self")

- |    |       |       |
|----|-------|-------|
| 1. | _____ | _____ |
| 2. | _____ | _____ |
| 3. | _____ | _____ |
| 4. | _____ | _____ |
| 5. | _____ | _____ |
| 6. | _____ | _____ |

("Jewish self")

- |    |       |       |
|----|-------|-------|
| 1. | _____ | _____ |
| 2. | _____ | _____ |
| 3. | _____ | _____ |
| 4. | _____ | _____ |
| 5. | _____ | _____ |
| 6. | _____ | _____ |

3. We hope you will live a very long and productive life. Nonetheless, what would you like to have said about you after you die, either as an epitaph on a memorial tablet or as an obituary in the newspaper. Write down how you would like people to remember you or eulogize you after you are gone.

## Problems of Motivation

As noted briefly already, America holds out many exciting opportunities, most of which seem to be centered around the fact that the "good life" is achieved through wealth, status, and material comfort. Our educational system seems to work because we often need a degree to get a good job to make the money to buy the "good life." Learning for learning's sake (*Torah Lishmah*, in Hebrew), the joy and beauty of study itself, is not considered of value in itself, but only a means to an end. This is hard for the Jewish people to understand, because for Jews learning has always been its own reward. Knowledge is its own goal; study has its own intrinsic worth. I would predict that if tomorrow all high school students were guaranteed admission to the colleges of their choice regardless of what they did in high school, most kids would run out of their classrooms screaming from boredom.

Motivation is not a problem only in Jewish education, but in secular education as well. However, Jewish education is also asked to do something not asked of other systems of education. It must "sell" Judaism and a different "good life" which nobody really wants because we're all buying the American dream that we see on television! In contrast, most American schools are selling a product which many people want to buy: education for job attainment and material comfort in a very

materialistic society. But you may still be a long way from worrying about exactly how you will make a living or how big a house or how many television sets you will need. You may still have the time and life space to enjoy whatever you choose to learn for its own sake. The next few years of your life will probably be the freest for you to enjoy learning those things which you choose to learn and, to some extent, those things which you are required to learn. It is important for you to realize that you are the master of your own intellect; you can decide how to use your mind and toward what ends. As a matter of fact, on many occasions you've decided that already by choosing to pursue certain extracurricular activities in addition to (or, perhaps, in place of) parts of the formal school curriculum.

You have probably come to realize that activities worth doing require hard work, effort, and, very often, pain. If you are an athlete, you know that athletic competition requires tremendous emotional, psychological, and physical sacrifice. You might work for months or years on end in a pool for one minute of glory in the spotlight at the Olympics. If you are involved with track and field, you can practice for countless hours, pushing your body to its limits for that one chance to jump farther than anyone has jumped before. If you are a musician, think of how many hours of effort you have put in to your piano studies, for example, in

order to give an audience one aesthetic experience at a recital. Our Rabbis understood the pain involved in acquiring an important skill when they wrote the following:

... לפי שאינו נותן את התורה אלא למי  
שמצטער עליה.

God gives Torah only to one who puts himself in pain for it.

(Tanna d'vei Eliyahu, Ch. 28 [30])

Previously we mentioned that Talmud Torah is really the study of all of Jewish literature. As you have probably experienced from courses you've had in English literature or foreign languages, the study of language itself may be very "painful." It demands constant attention and concentration to detail which must be followed to derive meaning from very complex art forms and ideas. The analogy between what you've done as an athlete or a musician and what anybody studying language does is presented neatly in the following passage:

Poets are the athletes of language. What we call poetic skill is the ability to get the most out of certain capacities of language that we all use in less interesting ways--just as athletic skill in boxing, baseball, dancing, swimming, or tennis is the ability to get the most out of certain bodily capacities we all use every day but not so powerfully or so gracefully.



The secret of both kinds of skill, the poet's and the athlete's, is coordination. Many elements must be made to cooperate to a single end. In the poet's case, the elements that must enter into cooperation are (1) the subject, (2) the situation, (3) the patterns of rhythm and sound, and (4) the various verbal patterns and techniques that evoke a maximum of significance from a minimum of words.<sup>3</sup>

These similarities may underscore the difficult nature of the tasks, but the point is that the study of Torah--a term we shall define in the next section--is worthwhile in and of itself and needs to lead to nothing else but further study. As a side benefit, study may lead to actions which make the world a better place. But study for its own sake, knowledge for its own sake, learning for its own sake, is an ultimate goal.

... לאהבה, שמא תאמר הריני למד תורה  
 בשביל שאיקרא חכם בשביל שאשב בשיבה  
 בשביל שאאריך ימים לעולם הבא תלמוד לומר  
 לאהבה.

"Out of love." Perhaps you might say, "I will study Torah so I may be called wise, or so I may sit in the Academy, or so I will lengthen my days in the world to

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<sup>3</sup> Robert W. Boynton, INTRODUCTION TO THE POEM (Hasbrouck Heights, N.J.: Hayden Book Company, 1965), ii.

come." Therefore the verse says [that you should study Torah only] "out of love" [of God].

(*Sifrei D'varim, Egev*, [Finkelstein, 113])

The Rabbis went so far as to say that learning for its own sake is the ultimate path to intellectual freedom:

רבי מאיר אומר: כל העוסק בתורה לשמה זוכה לדברים הרבה; ולא עוד, אלא שכל העולם כלו כדי הוא לו: נקרא רע, אהוב, אוהב את המקום, אוהב את הבריות, משמח את המקום, משמח את הבריות. ומלבשתו ענוה ויראה, ומכשרתו להיות צדיק, חסיד, ישר ונאמן; ומרחקתו מן החטא, ומקרבתו לידי זכות: . . . ונותנת לו מלכות וממשלה, וחקור דין. . . אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי. . . והלחת מעשה אלהים המה, והמכתב מכתב אלהים הוא, חרות על הלחת. אל תקרא חרות אלא חרות, שאין לך בן-חורין אלא מי שעוסק בתלמוד תורה.

Rabbi Meir taught: Whoever engages in the study of Torah for its own sake achieves a host of merits; moreover, it was worth creating the world for his sake alone. He is called: beloved friend, lover of God, lover of humanity, a joy to God, a joy to humanity. Torah clothes him with humility and reverence, it equips him to be righteous, saintly, upright and faithful. It keeps him far from sin and draws him near to virtue. . . .It endows

him with sovereignty, with authority, with power of keen judgment. . . . Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi taught: It is written, "And the tablets were the work of God graven (*harut*) upon the tablets" (Exodus 32:16). Do not read *harut* (graven) but rather *herut* (freedom), for no person is free except one who engages in the study of Torah.

(Pirkei Avot 6:1)

Of course the commitment to study for its own sake and the pursuit of intellectual ideas for their own sake are not limited to Jewish tradition and practice alone. As a matter of fact, some of the most important advances in ever made, especially in the fields of science and technology, have come from abstract study and research for its own sake, rather than from attempts to solve a particular problem. The following excerpt from one of the most popular physics courses in modern American high schools shows that the pursuit of knowledge for its own understanding can often lead to profound new discoveries. The text makes that point in general and continues by quoting the physicist H. B. G. Casimir:

One might ask whether basic circuits in computers might have been found by people who wanted to build computers. As it happens, they were discovered in

the 1930's by physicists dealing with the counting of nuclear particles because they were interested in nuclear physics. . . . Or whether, in an urge to provide better communication, one might have found electromagnetic waves. They weren't found that way. They were found by Hertz who emphasized the beauty of physics and who based his work on the theoretical considerations of Maxwell. I think there is hardly any example of twentieth-century innovation which is not indebted in this way to basic scientific thought.<sup>4</sup>

Just as the scientist loves his work, pursuing it diligently for years on end, every Jewish person is also encouraged to pursue Talmud Torah for its own sake, with every ounce of his being. When you really immerse yourself in the tradition of Talmud Torah, you become, to some extent, a revolutionary in the modern world.

However, the Rabbis realized that it would not be realistic for everyone to spend day and night studying, and they provided guidelines about the need to balance one's occupation with study (some of which we shall examine later in the source

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<sup>4</sup> Gerald Holton, et. al., PROJECT PHYSICS (New York and Toronto: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970), 6.

book). They also perceived another tension relating to Talmud Torah. On one hand, study is desirable since it is enjoyable; intellectual games and pursuit of ideas can be stimulating and pleasurable. But on the other hand, there is an obligation to study which must be undertaken regardless of one's willingness to do so. This ambiguity was already dealt with in the **Talmud**:

דאמר ר' שמואל בר נחמני א"ר יונתן פסוק זה אינו לא חובה ולא מצוה אלא ברכה ראה הקב"ה את יהושע שדברי תורה חביבים עליו ביותר שנאמר ומשרתו יהושע בן נון נער לא ימיש מתוך האהל אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא יהושע כל כך חביבין עליך דברי תורה לא ימוש ספר התורה הזה מפריך תנא דבי ר' ישמעאל דברי תורה לא יהו עליך חובה ואי אתה רשאי לפטור עצמך מהן.

Rabbi Sh'muel bar Naḥmani quoted Rabbi Yoḥanan that the verse ["You shall recite it (the Torah) day and night" (Joshua 1:8)] is not an obligation or a command, but a blessing. The Holy One, blessed be He, saw that Joshua loved the words of the Torah so much, and that. . . "he didn't move out of the Tent" (Exodus 33:11). So the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Joshua, "Since these words are so dear to you, 'the Torah will never depart from your mouth'" (Joshua 1:8). Rabbi Yishmael

taught, "The words of Torah are not an obligation for you, but you are not permitted to exempt yourself from them."

(*Menahot* 99b)

However, Jewish tradition goes even a step further. All things that are really important in life, could not be put in the realm of convenience or personal choice. They had to be elevated to the level of obligation, and so the Rabbis enunciated what appears to be the following enigmatic and rather principle:

דא"ר חנינא גדול מצווה ועושה יותר ממי שאינו מצווה ועושה.

Rabbi Hanina said, "One who is commanded to do something and does it is greater than one who is not commanded and does it."

(*Kiddushin* 31a)

One might assume that a person who fulfills a *mitzvah* voluntarily, that is, out of the goodness of his heart, would be considered of greater piety than a person doing the exact same act because he or she was obligated or commanded to do so. Not so, says Jewish tradition, since the person who decides to perform a deed voluntarily on one occasion might decide on another occasion--when the act was not so convenient--not to do the same act

of lovingkindness. But, by contrast, a person who acts out of obligation to perform the *mitzvah* is obligated to do it even when it's not convenient, even when other priorities are pressing. You may find it easier to understand this concept by applying it to *tzedakah* (the obligation of helping others in financial need). You may also note that the idea of being obligated to perform an act helps explain part of the uniqueness of Talmud Torah.

Thus, the study of Torah has to work on two levels. On one level, it comes to us as an enjoyable treasure into which we delve and derive personal riches and meaning. On another level, it is an obligation by which to enact our Jewishness on a daily basis. The ultimate expression of the combination of the extrinsic obligation to study Torah and the intrinsic need to feel free through such study is found in the following narratives about studying Torah under Nazi oppression:

Notwithstanding the much more difficult conditions in the concentration camps, many Jews fulfilled the *mitzvah* of Torah study there, too. There were no volumes of the Talmud available in the camps, but there were Jews who knew large portions of the Talmud by heart and thus it became once again "Oral Torah," but in a manner and in circumstances never imagined before. The best opportunity for this kind of "Oral

Torah" learning and teaching was on the way from the camps to the place of work outside and again on the road back. In the Eichenwald camp near Posen, for instance, one had to get up at three o'clock in the morning and walk eight kilometers to work. On the way back, though the prisoners normally had to carry the bodies of those people who had perished during the day, they would repeat by heart sections of the Mishnah or recite aloud chapters from the Book of Psalms. . . . [Some of the Jews] utterly disregarded the German commands, retaining even their traditional hasidic garb. Rabbi Avreimele [Weinberg] continued his regular discourses on the Talmud and its commentaries. Day and night the voice of Torah study could be heard in their hiding place. After they were discovered and taken away, the volumes they had been studying were found open on page 19 of tractate *Bekhorot* of the Talmud, as if waiting for others to come and complete the study of that tractate.<sup>5</sup>

There are many aspects of our lives in which

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<sup>5</sup> Eliezer Berkovits, *WITH GOD IN HELL: JUDAISM IN THE GHETTOS AND DEATHCAMPS* (New York: Sanhedrin Press, 1979), 7-9.



we feel both a push from the outside (being obligated) and a push from the inside (a desire to achieve). The study of Torah, as with other such special activities, must combine both the extrinsic obligation and the intrinsic motivation. Each human being has to find his or her own balance, since Jewish tradition views the study of Torah as a way of supporting us and making our lives more noble. This is one interpretation of the verse "It [Torah] is a tree of life for those who grasp it, and all who hold on to it are happy" (Proverbs 3:18). More than we give to Talmud Torah, it gives us back.

### QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Make a list of all of the activities in your life which you feel obligated to do at the current time. Make a second list of all of the things you enjoy or would do if you could. Compare these two lists and see what they say about what makes you happy and what makes you sad. Realizing that our lives are filled with things that we must do as well as things we like to do, see if you think the balance between the two sides should change as you get older. Then, do an honest assessment of how the things you must do interfere with things you want to do and how the "want to"s might be reshaped in order to permit you the time and the

energy to do them along with the "must do's". Rewrite the list as you think it will look in three years.

## 2. Pie of Life.

### current activity      idealized activity

Above are two "pie of life" circles. In the first circle create a pie graph showing the percentages of your daily or weekly life devoted to different activities; i.e., twenty percent to sleep, fifty percent to school, thirty percent to study, five percent to television watching, one percent to *t'fillah* (prayer), and so on. In the second pie graph, project an idealized version of your life schedule. Then, below, project how would your "pie of life" graph might look a year or two from now if you could take control over the things you must do and those you want to do.

**projected activity (in a year or two)**

## The Extent of Talmud Torah

שאלולי תורתי שקבלתם לא הייתי מכיר אתכם  
ולא הייתי מביט בכם משאר עובדי כוכבים,  
לפיכך 'ברתי אתך ברית ואת ישראל.'

If it were not for My Torah<sup>6</sup> which you accepted, I would not recognize you and would not regard you as any more than the idolatrous nations of the world. Therefore, "I have established a covenant with you and with Israel."

(*Shemot Rabbah, Ki Tissa 47:3*)

It is Torah and study which give the Jewish people its identity, mission, self-image, and worth to the world. It is not that Jews were chosen to be better than anyone else, but rather that we were chosen for responsibility to understand what God desires of us and to grapple with the questions that such an understanding may provoke. In order to be a "light unto the nations," Jews must be responsible, more than any other nation, to the best of themselves as they perceive it according to God's will.

Since all of life is holy, and no detail of life is

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<sup>6</sup> This source is usually cited in reference to the system of law, but is used here to refer to study because of the word "Torah."

unimportant, the study of Torah sees all aspects of life as perfectly valid subject areas—from intimate details of personal hygiene to the grandest questions of life and death, good and evil. Talmud Torah encompasses all these. Since Judaism is not a religion (in the limited sense of the term) but a "civilization," it must look at every aspect of life. This is one aspect that makes Judaism unique, and it is what gives such a wide scope to Talmud Torah. As Louis Jacobs explains, what is essential in Talmud Torah is not merely, or even primarily, the end results of studying, but the process of study itself:

The thought that the search for *Torah* is itself *Torah* is not really so novel. It is surely implied in the whole process of early Rabbinic investigation known as *Midrash* (from a root meaning 'to search', 'to inquire'). . . . Even if the student's success in arriving at the truth is limited, the attempt itself is the fulfilment of the religious duty of *Torah* study.<sup>7</sup>

Jacobs, quoting an explanation of Rabbi Judah Löwe of Prague, strengthens this point by emphasizing the precise wording of a *b'rachah* (blessing) recited every morning. The blessing is

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<sup>7</sup> Louis Jacobs, *THE BOOK OF JEWISH VALUES* (Chappaqua, N.Y.: 1960), 17.

"Praised are You, Lord our God. . . who has commanded us to study the words of Torah," rather than ". . . commanded us to study Torah." Thus, the extent of Talmud Torah does not take "Torah" in any limited sense.

Even before further discussing the values of Talmud Torah, we must consider its "contents." In other words, what is the subject matter of Talmud Torah? While the definition of Talmud Torah already given ("the study of all Jewish literature") is correct, it is too general for our purposes at this point. The subject matter of Talmud Torah can be roughly divided into two areas: *aggadah* and *halachah*. *Aggadah* (sometimes also known as *haggadah*)<sup>8</sup> comes from the Hebrew root "to tell"; it comprises the non-legal aspects of life. *Halachah*, coming from the Hebrew root "to walk," signifies the legal material, the "way in which to walk." Sometimes the two realms appear to be in conflict with each other, as in a talmudic story about Rabbi Abahu (who specialized in *aggadah*) and Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba (who specialized in *halachah*).

When everyone had left Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba to go to Rabbi Abahu, Rabbi Abahu offered the following analogy. This situation is like that of two salesmen.

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<sup>8</sup> This use of the term should not be confused with the "Haggadah" that is the book used at the Passover Seder.

One has cheap goods to sell, which everyone can afford; the other (in this case, Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba), sells precious gems. The wares of that salesman are available only to a very special group.

(Based on *Sotah* 40a)

Yet, in reality, the two types of literature together make up the whole of what Judaism is all about. This has been expressed by Abraham Joshua Heschel, in his typically poetic style:<sup>9</sup>

*Halacha* represents the strength to shape one's life according to a fixed pattern; it is a form-giving force. *Agada* is the expression of man's ceaseless striving which often defies all limitations. . . . *Halacha* deals with details, with each commandment separately; *agada* with the whole of life, with the totality of religious life. *Halacha* deals with the law; *agada* with the meaning of the law. . . . *Halacha* gives us norms for action; *agada* vision of the ends of living. *Halacha* prescribes, *agada* suggests; *halacha* decrees, *agada* inspires; *halacha* is definite; *agada* is allusive. *Halacha* without *agada* is dead, *agada* without *halacha* is wild.

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<sup>9</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, "A Time for Renewal," MIDSTREAM MAGAZINE (May, 1972), 47-48.

Aggadah seeks, through legends, stories, and philosophical inquiry, to derive meaning about life and living. The realm of aggadah, therefore, also provides an intellectual and emotional framework for halachah, which seeks to translate those feelings, emotions and speculations into everyday modes of behavior. It has often been said that Judaism is a religion of doing and not of believing. That is only partly true; it is correct to say that for the Jew actions do speak louder than words. Therefore, for instance, we are admonished to repent one day before we die, living each day as though it were our last. This is based on the view that it is our actions which count. Rabbinic tradition also saw that human beings had weaknesses, and that even the best of intentions could be deterred by circumstance. Often we want to act properly towards a friend or fellow human being, but selfish needs and desires get in the way.

The Rabbis wanted to bring out the best in people and, therefore, legislated on all levels the kind of behaviors which people were expected to embody. Whereas Christianity spent much of its time and energy philosophizing about the nature of God and discussing what people should believe or must believe, Judaism devoted the overwhelming amount of its literature to what people should do and how they should behave. It is obvious that we are not all philosophers, but since we all act in this world on a daily basis our actions really reflect our



basic beliefs and values. Both realms, halachah and aggadah, must unite to create a whole and happy Jewish human being.

## QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Look back over the classical Jewish sources which have been presented so far (and peek ahead at a few of the texts still to come). See if you can classify which texts seem to fall into the realm of halachah and which fall into the area of aggadah.

2. Consider the following three sources, each intent on shaping a part of life:

a. The "Thirteen Principles of Faith" of Maimonides (a 12th century Spanish philosopher and codifier of Jewish law). This is an abstract, philosophical summary of why and what we should believe. The First Principle is cited here, followed immediately by *Yigdal*, the poetic formulation of the Principles:

אני מאמין באמונה שלמה שהבורא יתברך שמו הוא בורא ומנהיג לכל-הברואים והוא לברו עשה ועושה ויעשה לכל-המעשים.

יגדל אלהים חי וישתבח נמצא ואין עת אל מציאותו. אחד ואין יחיד כיחודו נעלם וגם אין סוף לאחדותו. אין לו דמות הגוף ואינו גוף לא נערוך אליו קדשתו. קדמון לכל דבר אשר נברא ראשון ואין ראשית לראשיתו. הנו אדון עולם וכל נוצר יורה גדלתו ומלכותו. שפע נבואתו נתנו אל אנשי סגלתו ותפארתו. לא קם בישראל כמשה עוד נביא ומביט את תמונתו. תורת אמת נתן לעמו אל על יד נביאו נאמן ביתו. לא יחליף האל ולא ימיר דתו לעולמים לזולתו. צופה ויודע סתרינו מביט לסוף דבר בקדמתו. גומל לאיש חסד כמפעלו נותן לרשע רע כרשעתו. ישלח לקץ ימין משיחנו לפדות מחכי קץ ישועתו. מתים יחיה אל ברב חסדו ברוך עדי עד שם תהלתו.

I believe with complete faith that the Creator, blessed be His Name, creates and guides of all that has been created, and that He alone made, makes, and will make all things.

There is a Creator who alone created and creates all things. He is one, unique. He has no body, no form. He is eternal. He alone is to be worshipped. The words of the prophets are true. Moses was the greatest prophet. The source of the Torah is divine. The Torah is im-

mutable. God knows the deeds and thoughts of men. God rewards and punishes. The Messiah will come. God, forever praised, will resurrect the dead.

b. *Aseret Haddibrot*, the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:2-14), direct legal injunctions regarding how we should behave and what we should and should not do:

א. אנכי ה' אלהיך, אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים, מבית עבדים לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים על פני.

ב. לא תעשה לך פסל וכל תמונה אשר בשמים ממעל, ואשר בארץ מתחת, ואשר במים מתחת לארץ. לא תשתחוה להם ולא תעבדם, כי אנכי ה' אלהיך אל קנא, פקד עון אבת על בנים, על שלשים ועל רבעים, לשנאי. ועשה חסד לאלפים, לאהבי ולשמרי מצותי.

ג. לא תשא את שם ה' אלהיך לשוא, כי לא ינקה ה' את אשר ישא את שמו לשוא.

ד. זכור את יום השבת לקדשו. ששת ימים תעבד ועשית כל מלאכתך. ויום השביעי שבת לה' אלהיך; לא תעשה כל מלאכה, אתה ובנך ובתך, עבדך ואמתך ובהמתך, וגרך אשר בשעריך. כי ששת ימים עשה ה' את השמים ואת הארץ, את הים, ואת כל אשר בס, וינח ביום השביעי; על כן ברך ה' את יום השבת ויקדשהו.

ה. כבד את אביך ואת אמך, למען יארכון ימך על האדמה אשר ה' אלהיך נתן לך.

ו. לא תרצח.

ז. לא תנאף.

ח. לא תגנב.

ט. לא תענה ברעך עד שקר.

י. לא תחמד בית רעך; לא תחמד אשת רעך, ועבדו ואמתו ושורו וחמרו וכל אשר לרעך.

I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage; You shall have no other gods beside Me.

You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. For I the Lord your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and fourth generations of those who reject Me, but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments.

You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God; for the Lord will not clear one who swears falsely by His name.

Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God: you shall not do any work--you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the seventh day and hallowed it.

Honor your father and mother, that you may long endure on the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

You shall not covet your neighbor's house: you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female slave, or his ox or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.

c. a brief midrashic passage from the Talmud (*Shabbat* 119a), a story which gives meaning to our belief, our practice, and the specialness of being a Jew:

א"ל קיסר לרבי יהושע בן חנניא מפני מה תבשיל של שבת ריחו נודף אמר לו תבלין אחד יש לנו ושבת שמו שאנו מטילין לתוכו וריחו נודף אמר לו תן לנו הימנו אמר לו כל המשמר את השבת מועיל לו ושאינו משמר את השבת אינו מועיל לו.

The Emperor (Hadrian) asked Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananiah, "Why does the Shabbat meal have such a lovely aroma?" He said, "We have a spice, called Shabbat, which we put into it, and the fragrance spreads all around." The Emperor said, "Give us some of the spice." He responded, "The spice works for one who observes Shabbat, but for one who

does not observe Shabbat, it does not work.”

These are various approaches to describing the meaning of life, and they are all components which are included as parts of Talmud Torah.

## Great Jewish Books

Now that we have discussed the two general categories of Jewish literature, halachah and ag-gadah, we are ready for a brief overview of the specific works which make up "classical Jewish literature." The very selective summary which follows, partly based upon the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, is presented in essentially chronological order although several entries overlap. Though it is impossible to survey so many centuries of Jewish writing in just a few pages, even the short explanations which follow will be useful.

Additional information about translations and particular editions of many traditional texts may be found in Sharon Strassfeld and Michael Strassfeld, compilers and editors, *The Second Jewish Catalog* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1976), 246-52; and Francine Klagsbrun, *Voices of Wisdom* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 524-31. Further information about the classical texts can be found in the **Appendices** of this volume.



**BIBLE**--A collection of canonized (officially recognized and accepted) sacred writings, from approximately 11th-2nd centuries B.C.E. In Hebrew this work is called *Tanach*, an abbreviation of the initial letters of its three sections: *Torah*, *Nevi'im*, and *Ketuvim*. The Bible consists of 24 books (according to the traditional Jewish count which considers each of the following as one book: the two parts of Samuel, the two parts of Kings, the twelve "Minor" Prophets, Ezra and Nehemiah, and the two parts of Chronicles; taking each part separately yields a total of 39 books).

The *Torah* (also called *Humash*, Five Books of Moses, or "Pentateuch") begins with a prologue about the creation of the world and then outlines the development and history of the Israelites from the period of the Patriarchs and their sojourn in Egypt to the Exodus, receiving the Torah, and wandering in the desert, just prior to entering into Canaan. Sections of law, social behavior, theological statements, details of worship and the tasks of the Priests are all enumerated.

The *Nevi'im* section (Prophets) is divided into two parts. The "Former Prophets" are historical works describing the settlement of Canaan and the periods of the judges and monarchy in Israel. The "Latter Prophets" discuss themes including the nation's relationship to God and their faithfulness to the "covenant," the nature of true worship, and ethical behavior.

The *Ketuvim* section (Writings or "Hagiographa") consists of a collection of poetic works and wisdom literature. It discusses the relationships of individuals to each other and to the world around them and considers questions of good, evil, and justice. The section concludes with historical works, completing the chronological framework of the whole *Tanach*.

**APOCRYPHA**--These sacred works of approximately 3rd-1st centuries B.C.E., were not included in the canon of the Bible; the Hebrew term, *S'farim Hitzonim*, means "excluded" or "hidden" books. They include wisdom literature, such as Ben Sira; historical writings, such as the Books of the Maccabees and some material found in the Dead Sea Scrolls; and historical allegory, such as the Book of Judith. Some Apocryphal works deal with arguments about religious practice, theology, and the emergence of new ideas involving messianism and Jewish relations with the Hellenism.

**APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE**--These books, approximately 200 B.C.E. to 100 C.E., deal with the future "end of days" and with heroic or holy individuals and messianic visions. Generally not included in the biblical canon, though preserved in parts of the Apocrypha and by Christian tradition, these works often make elaborate use of allegory. Examples include the Book of Jubilees, the Book of Enoch, and the Dead Sea Scroll, "The War of the Children of Light and the Children of Darkness."

**HELLENISTIC LITERATURE**--Jews living in Greek-influenced sections of the world, including Alexandria and Eretz Yisrael, produced writings in the 3rd-1st centuries B.C.E. Translations of the Bible were produced in Greece along with written interpretations to meet the needs of Jews dispersed in Hellenistic lands. These writings, which often tried to justify Judaism under assault by surrounding cultures, gave rise to increasing writings of Jewish philosophy.

The Greek translation of the Torah, the *Septuagint*, was the first translation of the Bible; at roughly the same time in Palestine, the Bible was being translated into Aramaic, the *Targum*. *Targum Onqelos* (which is now printed in many editions of the Bible) was also a kind of commentary, often read in conjunction with the biblical text. To this day, it is used as an interpretation of the Bible in some Yemenite communities. The Hellenistic period saw much great exegesis of the Bible, including Philo of Alexandria. Philosophy written by Philo (and by Aristobulus of Paneas) defended the Jewish world view against the surrounding Greek culture.

**HISTORICAL LITERATURE**--During the period of 200 B.C.E. to 100 C.E. much was written about Jewish life and civilization. The most famous writings are the multi-volumed works of a Jewish historian, (Flavius) Josephus: *The War of the Jews*, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, and *Against Apion*.

These books defended Judaism against negative reactions in the pagan world and justified Josephus' involvement with the Romans during the rebellion.

**HALACHAH AND AGGADAH**--The varied legal and folkloristic literatures (of approximately 500 B.C.E. to 500 C.E.) developed to interpret the Torah, enlarge upon it, and make it applicable to the life of the people. Both categories of literature comprise the **Midrash, Mishnah, and Talmud.**

**MISHNAH**--This is an official compilation of laws, edited finally in the 2nd century C.E. by Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi ("The Prince" or "President"). The Mishnah contains six sections (*Sedarim* or "Orders") as follows:

- *Zera'im* ("Seeds"), about agricultural law and related topics such as prayer and blessings;
- *Mo'ed* ("Festival"), about holidays and Shabbat;
- *Nashim* ("Women"), about marriage, divorce, and family law;
- *Nezikin* ("Damages"), dealing with civil and criminal law and court procedures;
- *Kodashim* ("Holy Things"), about the Temple service and sacrifices as well as laws of *kashrut*;

- *Tohorot* ("Purifications"), dealing with ritual impurity and purity.

The six Orders are divided into a total of 63 (or, by some counts, 60) smaller sections known as *massechtot* ("tractates"). They are subdivided into *perakim* (chapters) and, further, into individual *mishnayot* (laws). One of the best known tractates of the Mishnah is **Pirkei Avot** ("Chapters [or 'Ethics'] of the Fathers"); it consists of brief sayings about the nature of ethical and moral behavior.

**TOSEFTA**--This is a compilation of legal statements which were not included in the **Mishnah**. The statements, called *baraitot* (literally, "outside things") often parallel, interpret, or contradict mishnaic laws. The Tosefta (literally, "addition") was probably not edited before the end of the 4th century C.E.

**TALMUD**--The term (from Hebrew *lamad*, "to learn") is used to refer either to the *Gemara* (from Aramic *gamar*, "to learn")--explanations and interpretations of the Mishnah--or to the Mishnah plus the Gemara. In addition to discussions of *mishnayot* based on other sources, the daily experiences of a changing society and the problems of living in Babylonia created the need to broaden the scope of rabbinic law. Two *Talmudim* were developed: a shorter Palestinian work known as the **Jerusalem Talmud**, and a much longer work, the product of Babylonian scholars, known as the **Babylonian**

**Talmud.** The pattern in the Talmud is to present a mishnah and then to follow it with intense discussion trying to explain, amplify, or interpret it.

**MIDRASHIM**--This collection of literature which interprets the Bible consists of two categories. The smaller, **Midrash Halachah**, interprets biblical verses to justify or establish a law. It is found mainly in works on four books of the Bible (excluding Genesis, which contains very few laws) and falls into two groups or "schools":

	Rabbi Yishmael	Rabbi Akiva
Gen.	---	---
Ex.	<i>Mechilta</i> of R. Yishmael	<i>Mechilta</i> of Shimon b. Yoḥai
Lev.	---	<i>Sifra</i> (= <i>Torat Kohanim</i> )
Num.	<i>Sifrei B'midbar</i>	<i>Sifrei Zuta</i>
Deut.	<i>Mechilta</i> on <i>Devarim</i> (= <i>Midrash Tannaim</i> )	<i>Sifrei Devarim</i>

The larger category, **Midrash Aggadah** sought to provide enlightenment of non-legal material through story, metaphor, imagery, and folklore. Based on earlier sermons or sermonic ideas, the works of Midrash were generally compiled during the 5th-12th centuries, although midrashic anthologies were compiled even later. A few major

midrashic works are listed below:<sup>10</sup>

**Early Period (400–640)**

*Bereshit Rabbah*

*Vayikra Rabbah*

*Pesikta D'rav Kahana*

**Middle Period (640–1000)**

*Tanna D'vei Eliyahu*

*Pirkei D'rabbi Eliezer*

*Devarim Rabbah*

*Tanḥuma* (or *Yelammedenu*)

*Tanḥuma Buber*

*B'midbar Rabbah II*

*Pesikta Rabbati*

**Late Period (100–1200)**

*Bereshit Rabbati*

*B'midbar Rabbah I*

**Period of Anthologies (1200–1550)**

*Yalqut Shimoni*

*Ein Ya'aqov*

**CODES OF JEWISH LAW**--Since Jews dispersed in many places didn't always have access to rabbinic authorities and weren't necessarily able to make decisions about Jewish law on their own, two other forms of literature developed. One type is

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<sup>10</sup>For a more complete listing, see Benjamin J. Segal, *MIDRASH: THE SEARCH FOR A CONTEMPORARY PAST* (New York: United Synagogue Youth, 1972), 77–79; or M. D. Herr, "Midrash" in *ENCYCLOPAEDIA JUDAICA* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1971), vol. 11.

known as **responsa literature** (singular, **responsum**), or *sh'eilot uteshuvot*. It consists of questions about the law and the answers given by rabbinic authorities, beginning primarily in the 8th century during the part of the period of the *geonim*, the heads of rabbinic academies.

Another way of organizing legal material was by the preparation of **law codes**. Early works of this type include the *Halachot* of Isaac ben Jacob Alfasi or the famous **Mishnei Torah** of Rambam (Moses ben Maimon, or Maimonides). Sometimes the codes were not accepted because they did not conform to the particular view of the local Jewish community and, thus, often stirred controversy. In the later Middle Ages, books summarizing halachah for the laity (i.e., non-experts) included *Sefer HaHinnuch* ("The Book of Education"), a work of uncertain authorship which arranged the mitzvot according to the weekly Torah portions. Another famous law code, the *Arba'ah Turim* (literally, "the four rows") written by Jacob ben Asher in the 14th century has four sections:

- *Orah Hayyim*, dealing with daily ritual such as prayer, Shabbat, and festivals;
- *Yoreh Deah*, dealing with dietary laws, vows, and mourning;
- *Even Ha'Ezer*, dealing with family law, marriage and divorce;



- *Hoshen HaMishpat*, dealing with civil and criminal law.

It, particularly, along with the earlier codes, led Joseph Caro, a Spanish rabbi, to write his famous 16th century work, the *Shulhan Aruch* ("The Prepared Table"), presenting the views of the Sephardic community. However, Moses Isserles, a Polish rabbi added his notes--the *Mappah* ("The Tablecloth")--to Caro's code. Together, the final work, incorporating the practices of both the Sephardic and Eastern European communities, became a turning point in the codification of Jewish law. Legal authorities (*poskim*) prior to it are known as *rishonim* ("early authorities"), and those after it are called *aharonim* ("later authorities").

**MEDIEVAL LITERATURE**--The period of Jewish literature spanning 500-1750 saw a tremendous expansion of writing in all areas populated by Jews, including North Africa, Babylonia, Spain, France, Germany, Italy, and Turkey. There are many diverse aspects of the literature of this time: some works concentrated on exegesis (interpretation of the Bible); some dealt with Hebrew grammar and lexicography (dictionaries); others treated philosophy, mysticism, or poetry, both liturgical and secular. During this time, the "Massoretic Text" of the Bible was developed. Through a carefully annotated system of vowels and cantillation notes (*te'amim* or "trope") it showed how to write, read, accent, and chant the words.

**Exegesis** included four major modes of interpreting the Bible: *peshat* (the contextual meaning), *derash* (an interpretive approach which ignored context), *remez* (allegorical and philosophical explanations), and *sod* (mystical interpretations). The degree to which commentators stressed one method or another depended on their locale and time. Some of the well-known commentators are listed below; they are often known by their initials:<sup>11</sup>

- Rashi [Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac] (11th century France);
- (Abraham) ibn Ezra (12th century Spain);
- Rashbam [Rabbi Solomon ben Meir] (12th century France);
- Radak [Rabbi David Kimḥi] (12–13th centuries France);
- Ramban [Rabbi Moses ben Nahman, or Nahmanides] (13th century Spain);
- Ralbag [Rabbi Levi ben Gershon, or Gersonides] (14th century France);

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<sup>11</sup> To learn more about the methods of these, and other exegetes, see Louis Jacobs, *JEWISH BIBLICAL EXEGESIS* (New York: Behrman House, Inc., 1973).

- (Don Isaac) Abravanel (15th century Portugal)
- (Obadiah ben Jacob) S'forno (16th century Italy)

The Middle Ages also witnessed the tradition of **ethical wills**, communications similar to wills with which we are familiar today. However, in these documents the heirs, usually the children and spouse, were not bequeathed financial wealth. They were given instructions about proper values and guidelines for behavior as the most valued possessions of the individual writing the will.

**Philosophical literature** developed in a number of areas. Mystical works (part of the *Kabbalah*) included *Otiot d'Rabbi Akiba* (8th century), *Sefer Hasidim* (an ethical work of the 13th century) and the best known, the *Zohar* (13th century). In the non-mystical realm, Maimonides' *Moreh Nevuchim* ("Guide for the Perplexed") sought to find philosophic rationales for religious ideas and beliefs. By the 17th century, the philosopher Baruch Spinoza applied general philosophy to Jewish thought, with some startling results.

Also during the Middle Ages, Arabic poetry greatly influenced the newly developing school of Hebrew poetry, encouraging both rhythm and rhyme. Many of the liturgical poems--*piyyutim*--of the *Mahzor* (the prayer book for festivals) were written

during this period as were some of the greatest secular poems in Spain.

Miscellaneous literature of the Middle Ages includes books on travel and geography, biographies and autobiographies, as well as fables and novellae designed to inform and teach. Jewish communities also developed literature in languages other than Hebrew. Literature in Ladino (a combination of Hebrew and Spanish) began in the 13th century with various commentaries on traditional texts. Beginning in about the 14th century, Yiddish commentaries on the Bible, such as *Tz'edah Ur'edah*, developed; later, other works, such as plays and dramas were also written in Yiddish.

**SIDDUR**--Although prayer was already part of ancient Israel during the biblical period, prayers and a full liturgy took on added centrality during the talmudic era. By the 8th century, the prayer book took on a written form which continued to develop. Since the **Siddur** embodies and reflects many Jewish values, individual communities have always created their own versions of the Siddur. This practice has continued to the present time with the publication of *Siddur Sim Shalom* (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly and The United Synagogue of America, 1985), by the Conservative Movement.

**MODERN TALMUD TORAH**--The last centuries have witnessed the growth of **ethical literature** by German and Spanish pietists, and the *Musar* Move-

ment in which ethical and moral issues were pursued. Scientific works in areas such as medicine, natural history, astronomy, and mathematics were written in Hebrew by Jewish authors, continuing the precedents of earlier times. In addition, **modern critical approaches** are now being applied to many classical Jewish texts, providing new insights from and about Jewish tradition.

Believe it or not, although we have summarized a great deal of material which makes up the subject matter of Talmud Torah, we have not mentioned nearly all of it. As you can see, one could easily devote a lifetime to learning what exists in the literature of Talmud Torah, let alone studying it all! We hope, however, that this summary will give you a taste for the richness of classical Jewish texts-- texts which are ever expanding as new commentaries and interpretations are being written.

## QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Make a master plan of Torah study for yourself, beginning with the current year. Select one or two areas from the books listed in this chapter with which you would like to start. For example, you might choose Bible, Mishnah, Midrash, or philosophy. Then make an even larger master plan for the next five years. Do the same for secular books that you want to study. Once you've made your choices, put each choice into an envelope marked with the date that you want to begin that part of the project. You may then keep the envelopes in a "time capsule" which should be checked from time to time to see if you are adhering to your plan. It will also be of interest, as time passes, to see if your goals about learning change.

2. Go to a Jewish book store or your synagogue library to get a Hebrew-English version of one or more of the books from a subject area listed above. (You may find it helpful to get some guidance from your rabbi or other educator in the community.) Become an expert in one limited area, and read the book(s) cover to cover, backwards and forwards, until you are very familiar with the particular topic or author. Your expertise should give you great joy and enable you to contribute authoritatively to discussions.

3. Make a list of the books of the Bible which you have read or with which you have some familiarity and another list of the biblical books you have not read. Make a priority order of the books that you haven't read and work out a time plan for yourself to complete reading those books. Set up a schedule based on the number of chapters you will read each day or each week.

4. Decide what area of life or law interests you most: civil law, damages, laws concerning property, interactions among people, rituals, architecture, or any other topic. It doesn't matter what topic you select, but then get some advice from your rabbi or a teacher on which section of the Mishnah or Talmud deals with your particular area of interest. Begin to read through the material associated with that area. As questions arise, become familiar with some of the standard reference sources.

### The Role of Hermeneutics in the Development of Judaism

Hermeneutics [her-men-oo-tiks] is a fancy term which describes the reinterpretation of text and the tools of logic and intellect which are used to derive meaning from the text. Our tradition, at its heart, has developed as a result of teachers and scholars reading classical texts (such as the Bible) and applying specific methods of analysis to their reading. It has been a process of interpreting and reinterpreting those texts through the ages. Most of you have had some experience in the world of hermeneutics when you've been asked to explicate a poem or to find out what a *pasuk* (verse) in the Torah means. Some of you may have studied works of great commentators--such as the most famous, Rashi, who lived in France in the 11th century--who find a question or difficulty with the text and seek an answer. As the years went on, the interpretations of the original text were themselves analyzed and reinterpreted by scholars. Those interpretations were then reinterpreted once again, and so Jewish texts grew and branched out to form the great body of hermeneutic literature that was outlined in the first chapter.

The goal was always to make the traditional text applicable to the present situation, to make it understandable to the people reading it any given time or place. Sometimes, the interpreters (also



known as *exegetes*, "those who draw something out of the text) tried to understand the text as the person who first read or wrote it might have understood it, but often they derived meaning from that text for themselves. At its heart, the hermeneutic tradition sought to reinvigorate and refresh Jewish law and life. This very point can be seen along with the process of reinterpretation at work in the following comment:

בחדש השלישי לצאת בני ישראל מארץ  
מצרים ביום הזה באו מדבר סיני... לא היה  
צריך לכתוב אלא "ביום ההוא", מהו: ביום  
הזה, שיהיו דברי תורה חדשים עליך כאלו  
היום נתנם.

"On this day Israel came to the wilderness of Sinai" (Exodus 19:1). Why does the verse say "on *this* day"? Because when you study Torah, don't let the commands seem old to you; regard them as though the Torah were given on *this* day. Therefore, it says "on *this* day," and not "on *that* day."

(Tanhuma Buber, *Yitro* 38b)

The interpretive tradition, known as *parshanut* or *midrash*, continually looked to the source materials to find new meaning and new delight. For, after all, if God revealed His word to humans, the words themselves must be filled with unending sources of information and meaning.

נמשלו דברי תורה לכלי זהב (מה כלי זהב) כל זמן שהוא ממרקן הם מצחצחין ומאירין פניו של אדם. כך הם דברי תורה שכל זמן שאת שונה בהן ומשלוש בהן מצחצחין ומאירין פניו של אדם שנאמר מצות ה' ברה מאירת עינים (תהלים י"ט:ט'). ישב לו מהן נוחין לאבדן ככלי זכוכית שנאמר לא יערכנה זהב וזכוכית (איוב כ"ח:י"ז).

Words of Torah are like golden vessels: the more you scour them and rub them, the more they glisten and reflect the face of the person who looks at them. So with the words of Torah, whenever you repeat them, they glisten and lighten the face, as it says, "The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes." However, if you neglect them, they become like vessels of glass which are easily broken, as it says, "Gold and glass cannot be put side by side" (Job 28:17).

(*Avot d'Rabbi Natan* [B], 3l:34b)

Based on the assumption that God wouldn't have included anything unnecessary in the Torah, the Rabbis looked at a word or even a single letter which seemed superfluous to them and used it as a jumping off point to make a new interpretation. The following midrashic comment exemplifies this technique:

ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום הששי, הוסיף ה' בששי  
 בגמר מעשה בראשית, לומר שהתנה עמהם על  
 מנת שיקבלו עליהם ישראל חמשה חומשי  
 תורה.

"And there was evening, and there was morning the sixth day" (Genesis 1:31). The text adds the letter *hay* [making "*the* sixth day" in contrast to the previous verses, "*a* fourth day," "*a* fifth day"] at the end of creation to indicate that God had made a stipulation with them [that the world would stay in existence] if Israel would accept the five books of the Torah [since the numerical value of the letter *hay* is five].

(*Rashi* on Genesis 1:31)

In other cases, the Rabbis commented on the particular order of words, why something they expected was not in the biblical text, or why an idea was expressed using one term rather than another. Very often, such matters prompted them to use their imaginations to "fill in the gaps" of a biblical text. In the following example, Rashi cites a conversation between God and Abraham at a very poignant moment. However, only "one side" of the conversation is found in the Torah:

ויאמר קח נא את בנת את יחידך אשר אהבת את יצחק... את בנך, אומר לו: שני בנים יש לי, אמר לו: את יחידך, אמר לו: זה יחיד לאמו וזה יחיד לאמו, אמר לו: אשר אהבת, אמר לו: שניהם אני אוהב, אמר לו: את יצחק, ולמה לא גילה לו מתחלה, שלא לערבבו פתאום, ותזוח דעתו עליו ותטרף, וכדי לחבב עליו את המצוה וליתן לו שכר על כל דבור ודבור.

And [God] said, "Now take your son, your only son, whom you love, even Isaac, and get you into the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering. . ." (Genesis 22:2).

God, "Your son."

Abraham, "I have two sons."

God, "Your only son."

Abraham, "Ishmael is my only son born to Hagar, and Isaac is my only son born to Sarah."

God, "Whom you love."

Abraham, "But I love them both."

God, "Even Isaac."

But why didn't God say "Isaac" right away? In order not to upset Abraham suddenly, that he would become disturbed and confused. (It was also) to endear God's commandment to him and

to reward him for fulfilling each word of it.

(*Rashi* on Genesis 22:2)

To be more precise, by means of the hermeneutic tradition, the Rabbis took the architypical events described in Jewish literature and enlarged upon them to find additional meanings.

The Rabbis used certain principles of exegesis; these rules, or *middot* (literally, "measures" or "norms"), were formulated in three different versions--the seven rules of Hillel, the thirty-two of Rabbi Eliezer ben Yose Hag'lili, and the thirteen of Rabbi Yishmael. The excerpt which follows is from the formulation of Rabbi Yishmael, at the beginning of the midrashic work *Sifra*. Since it is also found as part of the daily service, the editors of the *Siddur* must have thought it important enough to be the basis of daily study. You will note that some of the *middot* do not necessarily follow our rules of logic, in part because the rabbinic principles assumed the Torah to be written in a unique language (i.e., "God-language"):

רבי ישמעאל אומר: בשלש עשרה מדות  
 התורה נדרשת:  
 א. מקל וחמר;  
 ב. ומגזרה שוה;  
 ג. מבנין אב מכתוב אחד ומבנין אב משני  
 כתובים;  
 ד. מכלל ופרט;  
 ה. ומפרט וכלל;  
 ו. כלל ופרט וכלל אי אתה דן אלא בעין  
 הפרט;  
 ז. מכלל שהוא צריך לפרט, ומפרט שהוא  
 צריך לכלל;  
 ח. כל דבר שהיה בכלל ויצא מן הכלל  
 ללמד, לא ללמד על עצמו יצא, אלא ללמד על  
 הכלל בלו יצא;  
 ט. כל דבר שהיה בכלל ויצא לטעון טען  
 אחר שהוא כענינו יצא להקל ולא להחמיר;  
 י. כל דבר שהיה בכלל ויצא לטעון טען  
 אחר שלא כענינו יצא להקל ולהחמיר;  
 יא. כל דבר שהיה בכלל ויצא לדון בדבר  
 החדש, אי אתה יכול להחזירו לכללו עד  
 שיחזירנו הכתוב לכללו בפרוש;  
 יב. דבר הלמד מענינו, ודבר הלמד מסופו;  
 יג. וכן שני כתובים המכחישים זה את זה,  
 עד שיבוא הכתוב השלישי ויכריע ביניהם.

Rabbi Yishmael says: The process of interpreting the teachings of the Torah follows thirteen rules:

1. A law that applies under certain conditions will apply in more extreme situations.

For example,<sup>12</sup> if an action is forbidden on a regular festival, it is certainly forbidden on Yom Kippur; or if an action is permitted on Yom Kippur, it is certainly permitted on a festival.

2. A law that applies in one situation will also apply in another situation, if both use identical terms.

3. A general principle contained in one or two biblical laws applies to all related laws.

4. When a general statement is followed by a detail, only what is specified in the detail applies.

5. When a specific statement is followed by a generalization, everything implied in the generalization applies.

6. When a general statement is followed by a detail which is then followed by a generalization, the law is applied only to the specific cases.

In Exodus 22:8 we are told that someone who embezzles shall pay double to his neighbor "for anything embezzled (generalization), for ox, or ass, or sheep, or clothing (specification), or any article lost" (generalization). Since the details include only movable property and objects of intrinsic value, the fine of double payment would not apply to embezzled real estate or to notes and bills, which have only symbolic value.

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<sup>12</sup>The examples are based on Philip Birnbaum, ed. and trans., DAILY PRAYER BOOK (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1949), 41-42.

.....

12. An unclear word or passage is explained from its context or from the following expression.

13. Contradictions between biblical passages may be resolved by the appearance of a third passage.

As complex as these rules of interpretation may seem, there are also general principles for interpretation of law in the Mishnah and Talmud. For example, when Hillel and Shammai (two rabbinic leaders around the beginning of the Common Era) or their disciples disagree on legal interpretation, the law follows the view of *Beit Hillel* ("the School of Hillel") in almost all cases. As you could probably predict, some scholars have spent their lifetimes establishing general principles in order to understand the conclusions of the dialectic arguments made by the Rabbis.

There are also many commentaries--explanations, clarifications, and refutations--which have developed in response to almost any source which was studied. So vast was the interpretative literature, that the original text became only a very small part of what made up any particular book of the Talmud Torah tradition. By the time the printing press was invented in the late 15th century, the "original" text was presented as but a portion of a page, with the various commentaries printed all



around it, as you can see from the examples in **Appendix B**. Such an arrangement in the compilation of text, commentaries, and commentaries on the commentaries was "a kind of gathering of the minds, each with its own personality and contribution to make to the enterprise of discussion and interaction."<sup>13</sup> The standard page set-up reflects two important points: "The difference between the margin-text (commentary) and the main-text (Talmud/Torah) is preserved; yet the margin continues to grow. . ."<sup>14</sup>

This Judaic tradition of text interpretation was mirrored, to a degree, by some western approaches to looking at great texts. For instance, just as Jewish scholars scrutinize the Bible and Talmud, Shakespeare scholars pondered over every word of Shakespeare's poetry. They created a *variorum* edition of Shakespeare, in which the commentaries of many literary critics were compiled together with Shakespearean text. The following excerpt shows an example of such an edition on the famous

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<sup>13</sup> Barry W. Holtz, editor, *BACK TO THE SOURCES: READING THE CLASSIC JEWISH TEXT* (New York: Summit Books, 1984), 17-18.

<sup>14</sup> Geoffrey H. Hartman, "On the Jewish Imagination," *PROOFTEXTS* 5 (September, 1985), 209.

words of Hamlet, "To be or not to be":<sup>15</sup>

### Variorum Edition of Shakespeare

*Enter HAMLET.*

*Ham.* To be, or not to be,—that is the question;

46. *loneliness*] *lowlines* Q<sub>2</sub>Q<sub>3</sub>. *lowlin-*  
*nesse* Q<sub>4</sub>Q<sub>5</sub>.

*We're*] *We're* Pope+, Jen. Dyce  
ii, Huds.

*to blame*] *too blame* QqF<sub>1</sub>F<sub>2</sub>.

48. *sugar*] *surge* Ff. *Suger* Rowe,  
Pope.

49. 50. *O...smart*] One line, Cap.  
Steev. Var. Cald. Coll. i, White.

49. *'tis too*] *'tis* Ff. *it is but too* Han.

50. [*Aside*] Pope+, Coll. El. White,  
Ktly, Huds. Before *O, tis too true!* or  
as including the whole speech, Cap. Jen.  
Steev. Var. Cald. Knt, Sing. Dyce, Sta.

Glo.+ , Del.

51. *plastering*] *plastring* Qq. *plaiſt'*  
*ring* F<sub>1</sub>. *plaiſtring* F<sub>2</sub>F<sub>3</sub>. *plastring* F<sub>4</sub>.

52. *ugly*] *ougly* Q<sub>2</sub>Q<sub>3</sub>Q<sub>4</sub>.

54. *O...burthen*] Om. Seymour.

55. Pol.] Erased in Coll. (MS).

*let's*] Om. Qq.

[*Exeunt...*] Cap. *Exeunt*. Ff.  
Om. Qq. *Exeunt* all but Ophelia.  
Rowe+.

56. SCENE II. Pope+.

*Enter Hamlet.*] Ff. After *bur-*  
*then*, line 54, Qq.

47. *too much*] JOHNSON: It is found by too frequent experience.

47. *visage*] BAILEY (ii, 341): Can anything be more preposterous than to talk of *sugaring over* the devil with a *visage*? What Sh. meant to say is clear enough: we too often disguise the devil himself with devout looks and pious acts. To express this, read: 'with devotion's *vizard* . . . we do *figure o'er*,' &c.

48. *action*] SINGER: This indicates that it was a book of prayers, which agrees with Hamlet's 'Nymph, in thy orisons.'

52. *to*] See I, ii, 140.

53. *painted*] CALDECOTT: Falsely colored. CLARENDON: Fictitious, disguised. Compare *King John*, III, i, 105.

56. JOHNSON: Of this celebrated soliloquy, which bursting from a man distracted with contrariety of desires, and overwhelmed with the magnitude of his own purposes, is connected rather in the speaker's mind than on his tongue, I shall en-

<sup>15</sup>

Horace Howard Furness, ed., A NEW VARIORUM EDITION OF SHAKESPEARE (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1877), HAMLET, vol. I, 204-205. There are variorum editions of the works of other authors and poets such as Thomas Hardy, John Milton, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

## Variorum Edition of Shakespeare

ACT III. SC. i.]

HAMLET

205

[56. To be, or not to be.]

deavor to discover the train, and to show how one sentiment produces another. Hamlet, knowing himself injured in the most enormous and atrocious degree, and seeing no means of redress but such as must expose him to the extremity of hazard, meditates on his situation in this manner: *Before I can form any rational scheme of action under this pressure of distress, it is necessary to decide whether, after our present state, we are to be, or not to be.* That is 'the question, which, as it shall be answered, will determine *whether 'tis nobler, and more suitable to the dignity of reason, to suffer the outrages of fortune patiently, or to take arms against them, and by opposing end them, though perhaps with the loss of life.* If *to die were to sleep, no more, and by a sleep to end the miseries of our nature, such a sleep were devoutly to be wished;* but if *to sleep in death be to dream,* to retain our powers of sensibility, we must pause to consider in that sleep of death *what dreams may come.* This consideration *makes calamity so long endured; for who would bear the vexations of life, which might be ended by a bare bodkin,* but that he is afraid of something in unknown futurity? This fear it is that gives efficacy to conscience, which, by turning the mind upon *this regard,* chills the ardor of *resolution,* checks the vigor of *enterprise,* and makes the *current* of desire stagnate in inactivity. We may suppose that he would have applied these general observations to his own case, but that he discovered Ophelia. MALONE: Dr Johnson's explication of the first five lines of this passage is surely wrong. Hamlet is not deliberating whether after our present state we are to exist or not, but whether he should continue to live, or put an end to his life; as is pointed out by the second and the three following lines, which are manifestly a paraphrase on the first: 'Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer, &c., or to take arms.' The question concerning our existence in a future state is not considered till the tenth line: 'To sleep! perchance to dream!' &c. See *R. of L.* 1154. COLERIDGE: This speech is of absolutely universal interest,—and yet to which of all Shakespeare's characters could it appropriately have been given but to Hamlet? For Jaques it would have been too deep, and for Iago too habitual a communion with the heart; which in every man belongs, or ought to belong, to all mankind. LAMB (*Works*, vol. iii, p. 88. London, 1870): How far the very custom of hearing anything *spouted*, withers and blows upon a fine passage, may be seen in those speeches from *Hen. V.*, &c., which are current in the mouths of schoolboys, from their being to be found in *Enfield's Speaker*, and such kind of books. I confess myself utterly unable to appreciate that celebrated soliloquy in *Hamlet*, beginning, 'To be, or not to be,' or to tell whether it be good, bad, or indifferent; it has been so handled and pawed about by declamatory boys and men, and torn so inhumanly from its living place and principle of continuity in the play, till it has become to me a perfect dead member. CALDECOTT, criticising Dr Johnson, says that the *train*

When I went to look for the lines beginning "To be or not to be" in *Hamlet*, I had forgotten the exact act and scene in which they occurred. However, I was fortunate to discover that there is a concordance for the works of Shakespeare. This, too, parallels another Jewish text--a concordance (for the Bible or Talmud).

A concordance is a volume which lists in alphabetical order every word (and each form of the word) used in a particular text or group of texts. A biblical concordance, therefore, is a tool to help locate any verse in the Bible when you don't know an exact citation; it can also lead you on a discovery of what the Bible has to say about any particular topic. Using a concordance can save a great deal of time when searching for the source of a word or phrase. In addition, there are other reference works in both Judaic and secular disciplines which index material as a help in research.

On the next pages you will see examples of two concordances, one for Shakespeare and the other for the Bible.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Martin Spevack, *A COMPLETE AND SYSTEMATIC CONCORDANCE FOR THE WORKS OF SHAKESPEARE* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1970); and Abraham Even-Shoshan, *A NEW CONCORDANCE OF THE BIBLE* (Jerusalem: "Kiryat Sepher" Publishing House Ltd., 1983).

## Shakespeare Concordance

THAT HE WILL GIVE THEM MAKE I AS LITTLE QUESTION	COM	2.01.230		
NO QUESTION ASK'D HIM BY ANY OF THE SENATORS BUT		4.05.193P		
NOW QUESTION HE NO MORE, WE ARE ESPYD.	TIT	2.03. 48		
WAY I TO CALL MERS. REQUISITE, IN QUESTION MORE.	ROM	1.01.229		
STAY NOT TO QUESTION, FOR THE MATCH IS COMING.		5.03.158		
HE LAST ASK'D THE QUESTION.	TIM	2.02. 89P		
NIGHT CHANGE HIS NATURE, THERE'S THE QUESTION.	JC	2.01. 13		
THE QUESTION OF HIS DEATH IS ENROLL'D IN THE		3.07. 36P		
HERE, I AND CALL IN QUESTION OUR NECESSITIES.		4.03.165		
OR ARE YOU AUGHT I THAT MAN MAY QUESTION?	MAC	1.03. 63		
WHEN I BURNT IN DESIRE TO QUESTION THEM FURTHER,		1.05. 4P		
AND QUESTION THIS MOST BLOODY PIECE OF WORK,		2.09.128		
GROWS WORSE AND WORSE, I QUESTION ENRAGES HIM.		3.04.117		
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- שָׁאֵל פ' ארמית חקר, בקש: 6-1
- שָׁאֵל 1 כָּל-מֶלֶךְ... מֶלֶךְ כְּדָנָא לֹא שָׁאֵל דְּנִיָּאל כּוּב  
שָׁאֵלְנָא 2 אֲדִין שָׁאֵלְנָא לְשִׁבְיָא אֲלֶיךָ עזרא 9  
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שָׁאֵל 5 רְזָא דִּי-מֶלְכָּא שָׁאֵל דְּנִיָּאל כּוּב  
שָׁאֵלְכֹן 6 כָּל-דִּי יִשְׁאֵלְכֹן עֲזָרָא... יִתְעַבֵּד עֲזָרָא כּוּב 211
- שָׁאֵלְהָ 1' ב' בקשה, משאלה: 1-14
- שָׁאֵלְהָ אַחַת 3, 2; שָׁאֵלְהָ קְטֹנָה 3
- שָׁאֵל שָׁאֵלְהָ 1, 4; כָּאָה שָׁאֵלְתוּ 8; נָתַן שָׁאֵלְתוּ  
1, 7, 13, 14
- שָׁאֵלְהָ 1 אֲשָׁאֵלְהָ מִכֶּם שָׁאֵלְהָ וְתִגְוִלִּי... שׁוּפְטִים 24  
שָׁאֵלְהָ 2 שָׁאֵלְהָ אַחַת אֲנֹכִי שָׁאֵל מֵאַתָּךְ מ"א 16  
שָׁאֵלְהָ 3 שָׁאֵלְהָ אַחַת קְטֹנָה אֲנֹכִי שָׁאֵלְתָּ מ"א 20  
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שָׁאֵלְתֶךָ 11 מֵה-שָׁאֵלְתֶךָ... וַתִּתֵּן לְךָ אסתר 21  
שָׁאֵלְתֶךָ 12 וּמֵה-שָׁאֵלְתֶךָ וַיִּתֵּן לְךָ אסתר 12  
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שָׁאֵלְתֶם 14 וַיִּתֵּן לְהֵם שָׁאֵלְתֶם תהלים קו 15
- שָׁאֵלְהָ 2\* ב' ארמית [בידוע: שָׁאֵלְתָא] ענין, חוק
- שָׁאֵלְתָא 1 וּמֵאִמֵּר קְדִישֵׁין שָׁאֵלְתָא דְּנִיָּאל כּוּב 147

## QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. As the "next step," in many regards, after reading this source book, you will find great benefit in the recently-published volume by Barry W. Holtz, editor, *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Text* (New York: Summit Books, 1984). In it, vibrant scholars lead you through the great works of Jewish literature, point by point, sentence by sentence, principle by principle. It is a text to read, savor, and digest as you continue your studies of Talmud Torah.

2. Consider the benefits and drawbacks of using a concordance. To see how it actually works, look at the excerpts on the previous page. From the concordance for Shakespeare, look up the citations of "question." For the biblical concordance, find all the verses using the word *sh'eilah* ("question"). To find a particular source, the technique to remember is to pick a word from the verse which seems to be the least common. That should help you find the source more quickly.

## Overriding Concerns of Talmud Torah

By now the point which has been made several times in this volume should be obvious to you: Talmud Torah encompasses every aspect of life. There is nothing which effects humans or the world which has not been sanctified through its inclusion in Talmud Torah. If God created the world, then everything in creation takes on an importance because of the originator of that creation. Therefore, anything that impinged upon life in this world was to be studied, grappled with, and understood. Rabbinic literature and the study of Torah sought to build a good society, or to "perfect the world under the kingship of God." To do so we need to confront every aspect of life economic, social, moral, ethical, communal, and individual. In fact, the world of Talmud Torah ultimately broadened to seek a balance between the needs of the community and the needs of the individual, the need to find a source of authority beyond humans to which we can look for guidance and direction.

The Rabbis weren't expecting to create a utopia, but rather to help humanity move towards greater understanding, sensitivity, and cooperation in a search for peace and relationship with God. We must use our minds and our hearts so that our intervention in the world will be guided by an understanding of why we are doing what we are doing. At the same time, we must not let philosophical in-



ertia or mental struggles paralyze us from taking the actions necessary to help "perfect the world under the kingdom of God." The following traditional sources provide insight into the Rabbis' overriding concerns; they show what the Rabbis felt the study of Torah is all about. These--and many other sources not cited--emphasize that study must lead to action and that action must be informed by study. The first text below raises the potential conflict between study and action; the next four also try to clarify the relation between them:

וכבר היה רבי טרפון וזקנים מסובין בעלית  
 בית נתזה בלוד נשאלה שאילה זו בפניהם  
 תלמוד גדול או מעשה גדול נענה רבי טרפון  
 ואמר מעשה גדול נענה ר"ע ואמר תלמוד  
 גדול נענו כולם ואמרו תלמוד גדול שהתלמוד  
 מביא לידי מעשה.

Rabbi Tarfon and the Elders were already sitting in the upper chamber of Bet Nitza at Lydda when this question was posed to them: Which is of greater merit, study or action? Rabbi Tarfon answered that action was greater. Rabbi Akiva answered that study was greater. They all answered that study is greater, since study leads to action.

*(Kiddushin 40b)*

ושמתם את דברי אלה על לבבכם, מגיד שנמשלו דברי תורה בסם חיים משל למלך שכעס על בנו והכהו מכה רעה ונתן רטיה על גבי מכתו ואמר לו בני כל זמן שרטיה זו על גבי מכתך אכול מה שהנאך ושתה מה שהנאך ורחוץ בין בחמין בין בצונן ואין אתה נוזק כלום אבל אם הגבהת אותה מיד הוא מעלה נומי כך אמר להם הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל בני בראתי לכם יצר הרע שאין רע הימנו הלא אם תטיב שאת היו עסוקים בדברי תורה ואינו שולט בכם ואם פורשים אתם מדברי תורה הרי הוא שולט בכם שנאמר לפתח חטאת רובץ.

The words of the Torah are likened to a medicine of life. This is like a king who inflicted a big wound upon his son and put a compress on it. He said, "My son, as long as this compress is on your wound, eat and drink what you like, wash in cold or warm water, and you will suffer no harm. But if you remove it, you will get a bad boil." So God says to the Israelites, "I created an evil inclination within you, but I created Torah as a medicine. As long as you occupy yourselves with Torah, the inclination will not rule over you. But if you do not occupy yourselves with Torah, then you will be delivered into the power of temptation and all its activity will be against you."

(Sifrei Deut., Ekev 45, [Finklestein, 103])

הלמד שלא לעשות נוח לו שלא נברא. אמר ר' יוחנן: הלמד שלא לעשות נוח לו שנהפכה שליתו על פניו ולא יצא לאויר העולם. אמר ר' אחא: הלמד על מנת לעשות זוכה להקביל רוח הקדש.

[Rabbi Ḥiyya said:] If someone studies Torah without the intention of fulfilling it, it would have been better for him never to have been born. And Rabbi Yoḥanan said: If someone studies Torah without the intention of fulfilling it, it would have been better for him never to have seen the light. Rabbi Aḥa said: One who learns in order to do is worthy to receive [God's] Holy Spirit.

(Vayikra Rabbah, *Behukotai*, 35:7)

אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם לעשותה, למה נאמר לפי שנאמר כי אם שמור תשמרון שומע אני כיון ששומר אדם דברי תורה ישב לו ולא יעשה תלמוד לומר לעשותה תשובתה לעשותה, למד אדם תורה הרי בידו מצוה אחת למד ושמר הרי בידו שתי מצות למד ושמר ועשה אין למעלה הימנו.

"... which I command you to do" (Deut.11:22). This is included since the verse also states, "you shall certainly guard" [the commandment]. Thus, one might suppose that if he guards the words of the Torah, he can sit quietly

and not do them. Therefore, it says, "To do them." If one studies words of Torah, he has fulfilled one command; if he learns and guards them, he has fulfilled two; if he learns and guards and does them, there is no one greater than he.

(Sifrei Deut., Ekev 48, [Finklestein, 159])

אדם שונה מדרש, הלכות ואגדות; ואם אין בו יראת חטא, אין בידו כלום. משל לאדם, שאמר לחברו: יש לי אלף מדות של תבואה, יש לי אלף מדות של שמן ואלף של יין. אמר לו חברו: יש לך אפותיקאות לתן אותם בהן? אם יש לך כן — הכל שלך, ואם לאו — אין בידך כלום. כן אדם שונה הכל, אמרו לו: אם יש לך יראת חטא — הכל שלך.

A person may learn *halachot*, *midrashim*, and *aggadot*, but if he has no fear of sin, he has nothing. It is like someone who says to his neighbor, "I have a thousand measures of corn, wine and oil." His neighbor says to him, "Do you have storehouses in which to put them? If yes, you have all, if no, you have nothing." So with the person who has learned everything; only if he has the fear of sin is it all his.

(Shemot Rabbah, *Mishpatim*, 30:14)

Finally, one of the summaries which best gives a succinct overview of the concerns of Talmud

Torah is found in *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*, by the late Rabbi Isaac Klein. This statement from the Introduction was written by Dr. Gerson D. Cohen, Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. It not only summarizes the major concerns of Talmud Torah, but also puts forward the position of our movement regarding the importance and development of Jewish law and its study in our own time.

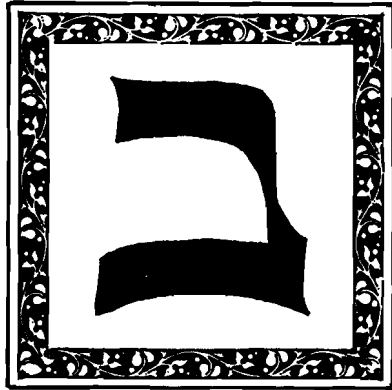
Classical Judaism has no word for "religion." The closest counterpart in classical Jewish vocabulary and, hence, *in the Jewish mind*, is Torah. Torah, however, includes far more than what we moderns understand by "religion." Torah encompasses and seeks to regulate every moment of life, including even its termination in death. Nothing human is beyond the scope of its concern and accordingly, of its scale of judgment and its program of prescription. . . .

Given the consequences of constant change in the form and content of life--technologically, politically, economically, and even changes in the perception of human dignity--each generation requires a code or guide which responds to its geographical, social and temporal peculiarities. Each era of Jewish history has produced such condensed codes, from the Mishna, redacted *circa* 200

C.E., to Maimonides *Mishneh Torah* of ca. 1180, to the famous *Shulhan Arukh* of Rabbi Joseph Karo, published in the sixteenth century. Needless to say, every one of these codes has reflected the social, political and scientific milieu of its time. But until now, the Jews of America, especially those who hold a developmental view of Jewish law, have not produced a digest of their own, reflecting both the realities of twentieth century America and a commitment to tradition. . . . We present [this volume] not as an official credo or guide to Conservative Jewish practice, nor even as the position of the Seminary, but rather as a traditional yet modern interpretation of *halakha* by one of the truly competent Jewish legal masters of our time. It is one legitimate synthesis which does not preclude others.

RECLAIMING OUR LEGACY: MARBEH TORAH, MARBEH HAYYIM

## CHAPTER TWO TORAH AND KNOWLEDGE



### The Uniqueness of Talmud Torah

Pretend you are a painter working quite intensely on a canvas, stepping back to see how the various components fit together and whether your creative idea is developing as you had imagined. Look back over Chapter 1 and "step back" from it; from the issues raised and from the sources, you may be able to determine for yourself what Talmud Torah embraces and what makes it special for the Jew. Talmud Torah and access to it is more than just another piece of growth in one's development



over the course of years; it entails more than merely increasing your intellectual prowess or enriching your cultural milieu. It's a special, even unique, way that Jews have approached the world.

There is probably no other religious tradition which combines placing such a high value on the act of study, such a wide range of literature and law, and the close relation between study and action. These values were already articulated long ago in a well-known rabbinic statement:

שמעון הצדיק היה משירי כנסת הגדולה. הוא היה אומר: על שלשה דברים העולם עומד: על התורה, ועל העבודה, ועל גמילות חסדים.

Shimon Ha-Tzaddik was one of the last members of the Great Assembly. This was a favorite teaching of his: The world rests on three things--on Torah, on service of God, on deeds of love.

(Pirkei Avot 1:2)

As you may have seen from the first chapter of this volume, and as you can readily see from the maxim just cited, three items are inseparable for the Jew: studying Torah, worshipping God, and performing mitzvot. They are an organic whole; you cannot exclude any of these fundamental principles from what makes Judaism special. What's even more amazing is that each one of them is translat-

able into the other. So, for example, studying Torah is considered a form of worship. It's also considered one of the highest mitzvot, if not *the* highest. Additionally, when we worship God using the Siddur, we come across passages included specifically for the purpose of study in addition to selections from the Torah (such as *Shema*) which are part of the actual ritual of prayer. Prayer, of course, is also a mitzvah. Finally, acts of lovingkindness, should be informed by Torah as well as the positive intention that show one's devotion to the service of the Jewish people and to God. Also special in the study of Torah in the modern world--whether it is unique can be argued--is the uplifting quality that association with Jewish texts gives us. Our literature is indeed great. Knowledge of that literature, and how to study it may sharpen our intellectual skill and our sense of what is good and what is bad in terms of language, art, and literature since so much of modern writing is geared to the lowest level of taste and propriety. Is it not possible, as in the following Hasidic story, that involvement with Talmud Torah might raise our standards?

For almost two days a poor man had been starving himself and was about to faint from weakness. However, since he was certain that he would be invited to his rich relative's wedding, the poor fellow had gone hungry so that he might

properly enjoy the wedding feast. He saw messengers delivering invitations to his neighbors, but no one knocked on his door. He was so overcome by hunger that he prepared a meal from what was in the house. There was nothing in the pantry but some stale bread, sharp onions and bitter greens, but he was so starved that he ate this simple meal with great eagerness. No sooner had he finished eating when a messenger arrived with an invitation to the wedding.

Now, at last, he was seated at one of the splendidly set tables awaiting the first course. As he tasted the baked fish he began to have doubts about the ability of the famous chef. The taste was so bitter that he decided to leave it and wait for the next course, but the soup and roast beef didn't agree with him either. He sat through the meal with the taste of onions and greens in his mouth and no appetite for the food put before him.

On the way home from the wedding this poor fellow overheard the other guests raving about the delicious food. "I tasted all of the food, too," he cried to them, "but found it to be terribly bitter." They all looked at him with amazement until one wise man explained the mystery: "I saw him eating loads of sharp and bitter vegetables before coming to the wed-

ding. It's no wonder that someone who fills his belly with such crude foods is not able to appreciate the taste of delicious dishes afterwards."<sup>1</sup>

Listening to the words of some of today's most popular rock music or looking at some of the most popular movies, it is hard to suggest that the intellectual level or use of language points to the values toward which we strive at our best. This is not to say that people shouldn't enjoy pop music or appreciate pop culture. However, there must be more to one's life and sense of taste than the lowest common denominator. The Jew's concern--in fact, it's almost an obsession--about raising his or her intellectual level and acumen in the study of Torah has, doubtless, been one of the major factors in Jewish achievement throughout history.

The study of Torah is also stimulating from another point of view. It challenges us because it is a *creative study*. It involves us in the tension of question and answer, argument and dialectic, and requires constant interaction between reader and text. The thrust of Jewish law and tradition necessitates, in fact requires, considering every possible option in all areas of life. It entails argumentation, pro and

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<sup>1</sup>Based on a story of the Maggid of Dubnow cited in Mendel Weinbach, *On Wings of Prayer* (Jerusalem: Nachat Publications, 1970), 174-75.

con, to evaluate all sides of an issue. This is consistent with the democratic principles and critical ideas that are generally presented as the ideal in modern western education. Torah study is primarily not a system of dogma or a catechism to be memorized without question, but rather a system of seeking answers (which may be challenged) to ultimate questions. Those questions are often reflected in everyday situations stemming from the way people interact one with another. Thus the details of Torah study are a way of approaching some of life's great issues which otherwise would be unanswerable and unfathomable. Therefore, the study of Torah is seen as life-giving:

תנו רבנן פעם אחת גזרה מלכות הרשעה שלא יעסקו ישראל בתורה בא פפוס בן יהודה ומצאו לרבי עקיבא שהיה מקהיל קהלות ברבים ועוסק בתורה אמר ליה עקיבא אי אתה מתירא מפני מלכות אמר לו אמשול לך משל למה הדבר דומה לשועל שהיה מהלך על גב הנהר וראה דגים שהיו מתקבצים ממקום למקום אמר להם מפני מה אתם בורחים אמרו לו מפני רשתות שמביאין עלינו בני אדם אמר להם רצונכם שתעלו ליבשה ונדור אני ואתם כשם שדרו אבותי עם אבותיכם אמרו לו אתה הוא שאומרים עליך פקח שבחיות לא פקח אתה אלא טפש אתה ומה במקום חיותנו אנו מתיראין במקום מיתתנו על אחת כמה וכמה אף אנחנו עכשיו שאנו יושבים ועוסקים בתורה שכתוב בה כי הוא חיך ואורך ימיך כך אם אנו הולכים ומבטלים ממנה על אחת כמה וכמה.

Our Rabbis taught: Once the wicked [Roman] government decreed that Israel should no longer be involved with the study of Torah. Then Pappus ben Yehudah came and found R. Akiba publicly gathering great assemblies and studying Torah. He said to him, "Akiba, aren't you afraid of the government?" He replied, "I will tell you a parable. What is the matter like? It's like a fox who was walking along the river bank, and saw some fish gathering together to move from one place to another. He said to them, "From what are you fleeing?" They answered, "From nets which people are casting after us." He said to them, "Would you like to come up on the dry land so we, I and you, may live together, even as my fathers lived with yours?" They replied, "are you the one they call the shrewdest of animals? You're not clever, but a fool! For if we are afraid in the place where we live, how much more so in a place where we would die!" So is it with us: If fear now is our condition, while we sit and study Torah, of which it is written, 'For that is your life, and the length of your days' (Deut. 30:20), how much more so, if we neglect it."

*(Berachot 61b)*

Finally, the overwhelming centrality and special character of Talmud Torah in Jewish life may be seen in the way Torah study traditionally began for children in many European shtetls:

The child was taken to the first day of school by a parent, even one who was very elderly or greatly respected. Along the way, the youngster was to be shielded from seeing anything unclean in the world. Once at school, the child was placed on the teacher's lap, and the teacher read the letters of the *aleph-bet* from a slate to the child, with the student repeating each letter. After the recitation of several verses, some honey was put on the slate so the child could lick the honey from the letters.

Thus, the child's formal introduction to Talmud Torah was shown to be very important--and very sweet.

### Universal or Particular Values

The following text from the mystical tradition uses a powerful metaphor for the relationship of the Jew to Talmud Torah:

משל למה"ד לרחימתא דאיהי שפירתא בחיזו  
 ושפירתא בריוא ואיהי טמירתא בטמירו גו  
 היכלא דילה ואית לה רחימא יהידאא דלא ידעין  
 ביה בני נשא אלא איהו בטמירו. ההוא רחימא  
 מגו רחימא דרחיס לה עבר לתרע ביתה תדיר  
 זקיף עינוי לכל סטר. איהי ידעת דהא רחימא  
 אסחר תרע ביתה תדיר מה עבדת פתחת פתחא  
 זעירא בההוא היכלא טמירא ראייה תמן וגליאת  
 אנפאה לגבי רחימאה ומיד אתהדרת ואתכסיאת.  
 כל אינון דהוו לגבי רחימא לא חמו ולא אסתכלו  
 בר רחימא בלחודוי ומעוי ולביה ונפשה אזלו  
 אבתרה. וידע דמגו רחימו דרחימת ליה אתגליאת  
 לגביה רגעא חדא לאתערא ליה. הכי הוא מלה  
 דאורייתא לא אתגליאת אלא לגבי רחימאה.  
 ידעת אורייתא דההוא חכימא דלבא אסחר לתרע  
 ביתה כל יומא מה עבדת גליאת אנפאה לגביה  
 מגו היכלא וארמיזת ליה רמיזא ומיד אהדרת  
 לאתרה ואתטמרת. כל אינון דתמן לא ידעי ולא  
 מסתכלי אלא איהו בלחודוי ומעוי ולביה ונפשיה  
 אזיל אבתרה. וע"ד אורייתא אתגליאת  
 ואתכסיאת ואולת ברחימו לגבי רחימאה  
 לאתערא בהדיה רחימו.



There is a parable of what Torah is like. She is like a beautiful and stately young woman, who is hidden in a secluded chamber of a palace and who has a lover of whom no one else knows. Out of his love for her, he constantly passes by her gate, turning his eyes toward all sides (of the palace) to find her. She, knowing that he always passed the palace, what does she do? She opens a little door in her hidden palace, shows her face to her lover for a moment, and then quietly hides again. No one notices except him, but his heart, soul, everything within him are drawn to her, knowing as he does that she has revealed herself to him for a moment because she loves him. It is the same with the Torah, which reveals her hidden secrets only to those who love her. She knows that one who is wise passes the gates of her house every day. What does she do? She shows her face to him from her palace, making a sign of love to him, and immediately returns to her hiding place. No one understands her message except him, and he is entirely drawn to her with heart and soul. Thus the Torah reveals herself momentarily in love to her lovers in order to awaken fresh love in them.

(Zohar, *Shemot, Mishpatim*, 99a)

Have you ever had a special relationship with another person, a friend or some more intimate? What made that relationship special? There is much in our tradition to teach us that friendship involves intimacy with another person--spending time together, eating and studying together, revealing one's secrets, and so on. We can make similar generalizations about the relationship between people who love one another. Yet, though there are many traits which typify the relationships of friends or those in love, each relationship is different and, in fact, unique. The ties that bind friends, the life experiences, the words that are shared, the gestures and glances, the common perceptions and ability almost to read each other's mind, make your relationship with your friend unlike that of anyone else's. That's a part of why friendships and love relationships are so special and incredibly important. However, the actual relationships are not expressed as general terms or abstract concepts. They happen and are expressed by what one human being is and does to another.

We can make all the generalizations and philosophical statements we want about being good, noble, and caring people, but in the end that nobility and concern are shown through specific visual, touchable, audible actions, deeds, and words.

Similarly, there are other traditions and religions in the world what have great literary texts and wonderful value systems, which hold the principles of justice, right, and goodness as their highest ideals. While the values of the Jewish tradition do not necessarily, in and of themselves, have more merit than those of certain other traditions, Judaism is different from them. We, as Jews, act out the lofty values in very specific ways--ways regulated by Jewish law--since only through one's actions can a human being demonstrate the acceptance of those lofty values. The study of Torah is designed, at its very heart, to give us the tools, knowledge, wisdom, direction, and vehicles for putting the abstract values into concrete practice.

Even if you don't want to be told what to do every minute of the day, especially at this stage of your life, the dialectic process of Talmud Torah--that is, *the process of give and take with the Jewish tradition* will provide guidance about the particular Jewish way of enacting our values. Jewish texts, developing over the ages, give us a framework for our actions and lay out the specific patterns to enable us to act out our particular value system in very tangible, specific ways. So, for example, though Jews and non-Jews alike may all agree that the wanton taking of life is abhorrent, Jewish law prohibits hunting animals for sport, whereas most other religious traditions do not make it illegal. We could list many other examples of

Jewish law turning values into actions--ranging from the obligation to help those in financial need to the requirements for returning a lost article. The point, here, however, is that the full extent of such examples is what makes up Talmud Torah; by studying the Jewish texts we should be moved to act in accordance with them.

Why is this discussion important? We must remember that people tend to perceive the world differently because of their life experiences and their people's experience. Thus, for example, it is the Jewish tradition, and no other, which stresses the specific actions which are prohibited on Shabbat, listing thirty-nine major categories of work, and many minor ones. It is often said (especially by students going off to college where they are exposed to new ideas and cultures) that there is nothing in Judaism that isn't found in many other traditions. However, one of the great insights to be gained from the study of other cultures of the world is to learn the ways in which one's own culture is like others *and the ways in which it is different*. A textbook series used many in high schools puts it this way: "Self-knowledge is the ultimate justification for studying about other people."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Leon Clark in Peter J. Seybolt, *THROUGH CHINESE EYES* (New York: Center for International Training and Education, 1983), 12.

The Rabbis were fearful of the prospect of Jews studying non-Jewish culture and traditions. They believed that it would lead to relinquishing one's connections with the Jewish people and with the observance of mitzvot. Therefore, they admonished that someone involved with non-Jewish pursuits should return to the wellspring of our tradition:

ללכת בהם עשם עקר ואל תעשם טפלה ללכת  
בהם שלא יהא משאך ומתנך אלא בהם שלא  
תערב בהם דברים אחרים בעולם שלא תאמר  
למדתי חכמת ישראל אלמוד חכמת אומות  
העולם ת"ל ללכת בהם אינך רשאי ליפטר מתוכן  
וכן הוא אומר יהיו לך לבדך וגו'...

"You shall keep My ordinances to walk in them" (Lev. 18:4). In other words, you should make them the main purpose of your life, and not something subsidiary. Your business is only with them. Other matters should not be mixed up with them, so you don't say, "I have learned the wisdom of Israel, so now I will go and learn the wisdom of the other nations." Therefore, the Torah says, "To walk in them." You are not permitted to be separate from them, as it says, "Let them be your only ones" (Prov. 5:17).

(Sifra, *Aharei Mot* 9:11)

The overall question with which Talmud Torah is concerned is "what is the good life and how can it be achieved?" In other words, what goals are really worth pursuing and how should we pursue them? The arguments and debates which permeate all of Jewish literary tradition and which we call Talmud Torah, are literally the questions and answers of countless people over the years trying to teach us the best ways to live. Where and how should we spend our time on earth; with whom, what will we consider pleasurable, and what is our responsibility to others? In other words, how shall we decide what our priorities?

## QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Use the following list<sup>3</sup> to help you focus in on the Jewish values which are specific to your own life. You may note that there are many areas of daily life in which your Jewish values are tangibly expressed by the way you act.

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<sup>3</sup> These have been adapted from Dov Peretz Elkins, CLARIFYING JEWISH VALUES (Rochester, N.Y.: Growth Associates, 1977), 39-40.

Describe the following:

1. something that makes me proud to be Jewish.
2. a time I served my synagogue.
3. something I did for Israel.
4. a time I felt intensely Jewish.
5. a time I was very generous.
6. a time I felt very close to God.
7. something I did for one of my grandparents.
8. a time I had a meaningful experience.
9. a speech I gave on a Jewish topic.
10. a time I helped elderly Jews.
11. a time I enjoyed reading a literary classic.
12. something I did to make Judaism alive for me.
13. a time I acted with compassion.
14. a time I explained a Jewish practice to a non-Jew.
15. a time I was helpful to an animal.
16. a time I defended Judaism to a non-Jew.
17. a time I was very hospitable.

18. a time I helped my family observe Shabbat.
19. a time I visited someone sick.
20. a time I learned a lot about being Jewish.
21. something I did to promote Jewish education.
22. a time I read a Jewish book.
23. a time I was very generous.
24. something I did to help preserve Judaism.

2. Make a list of Jewish values which you want to implement in your life. Those values could be anything from giving tzedakah to comforting mourners, *niḥum aveilim* to making *aliyah*. Next, put the values in priority order, starting with the one that is the most important. Now look at your schedule for the next month or so and, using the following questions, plan how you can begin to implement these values.

- 1. Which goal or value should you work on tomorrow morning and each day for the rest of the month?
- 2. If you have time to do only a few of the values on your list in the next month on which ones will you concentrate?



- 3. Which value, if put into practice, will give you the most satisfaction, or highest payoff, in terms of your feeling good about yourself?
- 4. Which value might it be most important for other people to see you achieve?
- 5. What will happen if you don't act on any of these values? Who will know? Who might suffer?
- 6. Which is the most difficult value to achieve? Which one should you start first in order to "get it out of the way"?
- 7. What first step can you take to put each Jewish value on your list into practice?

Thus, as discussed further in the next section, Talmud Torah underscores a relationship with God, and singles us out, enabling us to make a rather remarkable contribution to society.

## The Authority of Talmud Torah

Studying Torah has been one of the chief methods by which the Jew has drawn close to God. At the same time the study of Torah involves the same kind of study skills, research techniques, and analytical work which are common to all fields of academic endeavor. So we approach the study of Torah with some ambivalence. On the one hand, we can use much of what we do every day and apply it to Torah. Yet, there is another dimension of Talmud Torah which goes beyond secular study into the realm of the sacred. The underlying question, of course, is whether Talmud Torah is somehow more important, valuable, or authoritative than any other study. There are a number of answers to this question in our tradition. Much of the answer depends on one's view of the source of authority for the Torah: who wrote it? who created it? where did it come from? and how binding is it--or its interpretations--upon our lives?

Talmud Torah includes the study of mitzvot. Mitzvot, or commandments, imply that there is a *commander* and that we are *commanded*. Each of us in the latter part of the 20th century, must grapple with the issue of the authority of Jewish tradition and the degree to which it is binding in our own lives. It may be helpful to learn about various views on the topic, to see which most closely reflects your own. An excellent outline of

the major views on "the nature of revelation and authority" and the ability of humans to change or interact with those laws appears in a previous USY source book by Elliot Dorff,<sup>4</sup> and the following represents a brief restatement of material found there.

In general, Orthodox scholars study the text with no difference between peshat (the contextual meaning the text originally conveyed) and derash, the interpreted meanings given to the text. Thus, for them, the biblical text means what it has been interpreted to mean by the talmudic rabbis. In other words, "the written Torah" is what "the oral Torah" says it is, and they are representations of exact words of God as he dictated them to Moses on Sinai. They are God's will, and we are not free to change them except when new situations arise. (These situations were also revealed at Sinai and can be interpreted within that body of tradition.) This viewpoint permits a choice when there are positions that are valued as to the interpretation of the Jewish law.

Regarding the process of Torah study in our own movement, the Conservative Movement has been committed to a historical method. That means

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<sup>4</sup> Elliot N. Dorff, CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM: OUR ANCESTORS TO OUR DESCENDANTS (New York: United Synagogue Youth, 1977), especially 110-157.

differentiating between peshat and derash through many techniques of analysis (some of which are explained in Chapter 3), seeking to use the text itself to teach us what it meant and to use additional tools of inquiry to better understand the text as it was interpreted over time. Even within the Conservative Movement itself, there is various viewpoints about the authority and source of the biblical text. One view that God dictated the Torah to Moses at Sinai, but it was written down by human beings. Therefore there are different traditions and styles in the Bible. Though the Bible is God's will, there are places where errors may have crept in because human beings make errors. Nevertheless, we are not free to deviate from what is basic and what is God's will.

A second position is called continuous revelation: people wrote the Torah, but that they were inspired by God to write it rather than having had it dictated directly. They were responding to what they thought was God's will, and therefore believed that the words of the Torah are God's will and the source of authority is God. This position accepts that humans can develop the laws, because rabbis over the centuries applied their own tools of interpretation and understanding to the needs of their own generation. Changing and developing the law, while remaining loyal to the tradition becomes a delicate balancing act.

A third position arising from the historical method of study, sees the Torah as a reaction of human beings to their perceptions of God and the divine will. The Torah is constantly being revealed. Since it was the reaction of human beings at any given time and place to what they thought God wanted of them, some of the laws may no longer be relevant or applicable--or may even be distasteful--because they are the product of another time and place. This point of view still sees the ultimate origin of the law as God's will, but it reflects a contract or covenant between God and the Jewish people in which both are partners. This view says that encounters with God continue, and that the law has to change to reflect new understandings of God's will and the nature of our own lives. The rabbis who represent us need to reconsider the laws continually, since the task of updating the law is in the hands of the communal leadership, not each individual's.

Yet another Conservative point of view studies the Torah through an historical methodology, but does not accept revelation at all. Rather it sees that human beings wrote the Torah and that it is purely a product of people's feelings and intentions. It is therefore authoritative only as tradition or custom that has been practiced for thousands of years, and because it has a worthiness of its own. In each generation, the authorities of the community, its thinkers and leaders, reevaluate and reconstruct

the observances and customs to fit their understanding. Observance is voluntary and can be changed at will by the community or individuals who seek to identify with these laws and customs.

Reform Jews also study the Torah in a very similar historical method and generally believe in a progressive revelation: the Torah was written by human beings and as time goes on human beings understand and react to God's will in different ways. There is a feeling that the ethical and moral principles of our tradition come from God, but that the ritual laws have no divine authority. This is based on the assumption that in the past, people like the prophets annulled certain laws and that the rabbis developed the interpretations of law for their own time and place. It is up to each individual to decide what and how much to obey of these laws.

Deciding where you fit on the spectrum of ideas is important because it affects your attitude, how you will observe Jewishly, and in what way you approach the study of Torah when you have questions arising in that study.

## Questioning and Belief

Although this volume is not designed to examine in depth Jewish attitudes and ideas about God, one cannot approach the subject of Talmud Torah without some discussion of faith and belief in God. Therefore, after citing the theological positions outlined in the previous section, we focus here on the issue underlying that multiplicity of positions: the dialectic which we have proposed as a basis of Talmud Torah. In other words, the issue of raising the questions--not necessarily finding of "the," or "an" answer--must be paramount. For a Jew to be religiously alive, he or she must ask questions constantly.

For centuries humans have questioned the nature of God, the authority of God, and even the existence of God. Questioning is important; it promotes interaction with our tradition. The fact that you don't have all the answers makes you similar to every other Jewish human being who came before you and who will come after you. The greatest scholars in our tradition don't have all the answers; the greatest writings in our tradition don't have all the answers. It is the constant search for truth which is the religious act of belief and faith common to us all:

"It is good that we should learn more about the universe and about ourselves, even although no other benefit than our

knowledge ever accrues to us and our fellow creatures. Knowledge is better than ignorance, even if that knowledge produced no further results. The man who understands the structure of a distant star-system, the man who finds an equation to describe the growth of a leaf, and the man who reveals a forgotten era of history need no further justification: their work may never be "used"; it will still be good. Some of the discoveries made in recent research have in fact been put to uses that many wise men think evil. The discoveries remain good." . . . And this is, too, precisely the attitude of the classical Rabbinit, with the addition that for him the ideal is not alone knowledge for its own sake but *Torah* for its own sake. . . . It is reported that the Gaon of Vilna once said that if he were offered infallible instruction in the *Torah* by an angel from heaven he would refuse the offer for he wanted to arrive at the truths of *Torah* through his own efforts.<sup>5</sup>

We can only seek to know about God through our experience in the world, the wisdom of our tradition, and the inspiration that God has given

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<sup>5</sup> Gilbert Highet cited in Louis Jacobs, *THE BOOK OF JEWISH VALUES*, 18-19; the last portion is by Jacobs.



humans through the traditions of Talmud Torah. The act of study, itself, is considered a religious task no less important than an act of lovingkindness. Expressing doubts and questions about the source of authority doesn't write you out of the Jewish people, but grappling with those questions through Talmud Torah puts you right in the middle of everything that is traditionally Jewish. When you make yourself a part of Talmud Torah, you identify yourself with a part of the God of Israel and with the people of Israel. You are a member of the family of Torah, God, and Israel:

ויש לך מקח שמי שמכרו נמכר עמו! ? אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל: מכרתי לכם תורתי, כביכול נמכרתי עמה, שנאמר: 'ויקחו לי תרומה'; משל למלך שהיה לו בת יחידה, בא אחד מן המלכים ונטלה, בקש לילך לו לארצו ולטל לאשתו, אמר לו: בתי שנתני לך יחידית היא, לפרש ממנה איני יכול, לומר לך: אל תטלה איני יכול, לפי שהיא אשתך, אלא זו טובה עשה לי, שכל מקום שאתה הולך קיטון אחד עשה לי שאדור אצלכם, שאיני יכול להניח את בתי; כך אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל: נתני לכם את התורה, לפרש הימנה איני יכול, לומר לכם: אל תטלוה איני יכול, אלא בכל מקום שאתם הולכים, בית אחד עשו לי שאדור בתוכו, שנאמר: (שמות כה, ח) 'ועשו לי מקדש'... אמר ר' ברכיה הכהן ברבי: בנהג שבעולם אדם מוכר חפץ בתוך ביתו הוא עצב עליו, והקדוש ברוך הוא נתן תורה לישראל ושמח, הוי: 'לקח טוב נתני לכם'; בנהג שבעולם אדם לוקח חפץ מצר לשמרה, אבל התורה משמרת בעליה, שנאמר: (שם ו' כב) בהתהלךך תנחה אתך בשכבך תשמר עליך; בנהג שבעולם אדם לוקח חפץ מן השוק, שמא יכול לקנות בעליו! ? אבל הקדוש ברוך הוא נתן תורה לישראל ואומר להם: כביכול לי אתם לוקחים, הוי: 'ויקחו לי תרומה'.

Can there be a sale in which the seller sells himself along with the object he sells? The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel, "I sold you my Torah; it is as if I sold Myself with it," as it says "You shall accept gifts for Me" (Ex. 25:2). This is like a king who had an only

daughter, and another king came, wanting to marry her and take her to his country. The father said, "My daughter is my only child; I cannot be apart from her, and yet I can't say to you, 'Don't take her away, for she is your wife.' Therefore, do me a favor: wherever you go, prepare a small room for me so I may stay with you, for I cannot forsake my daughter." So the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel, "I have given you my Torah; I cannot be apart from her; yet I cannot say to you, 'Do not take her'; therefore every place you go, make a house for Me in which I may dwell." . . . Rabbi Berechyah the priest said the following in Rabbi's name: When someone sells a valuable object he is sad about it, but when the Holy One, blessed be He, gave Israel the Torah He was happy. Therefore it says, "I have given you good instruction" (Prov. 4:2). When someone buys a desirable object in the market, is it possible to also buy its owner? When the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Torah to Israel, He said, "With the Torah it is as if you are also taking Me."

(*Shemot Rabbah Terumah* 33:1,6)

In the end, each one of us has to decide what questions we want to ask and how involved we

want to be with the search for faith and belief. Nobody can impose the quest; nobody can give it to you. Perhaps the most we can ask is for you to leave yourself open to the same wonder and awe that you would at a movie theater; there you have made a tacit assumption that what you are about to see is real in terms the picture's own world and what it seeks to portray. So, too, if we come to our traditional sources refreshed and renewed, pretending we have never read them before, we might find a world of intrigue, excitement, beauty, and meaning never revealed to us before.

### QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Write down all of the things you believe in. What is your concept of God and what about God troubles you?
2. Interview some friends about their belief or lack of belief in God. See what they hold sacred and what is a problem for them.
3. Look through a Siddur or Bible and compile a list of the names of God. See with which of those names you can identify or feel some type of personal relationship.

4. How do you feel when you have a question that has not been answered and why do you have that feeling? Do you believe that there is an answer to every question?

### **The Transfer of Skills**

Fundamentally, Talmud Torah concerns the study of written texts. The texts have appeared in many forms, over many time periods, in many styles, and in several languages. Sometimes, the very process involved in Talmud Torah is as important, if not even more important, than the actual information being learned or memorized. Much of what you will do for most of your academic career will also involve the study of texts, be they scientific, historical, anthropological, medical, legal, or other. In some professions, such as medicine or architecture, training also includes some "hands-on" training and, possibly, an apprenticeship. For the most part, however, western education entails the meeting of the mind with the printed word.

Anything you do to improve your skill at understanding texts and interpreting literature may, therefore, help you with your education in general. That is why in a Jewish Day School, where children learn both secular and Judaic studies, the two parts of the curriculum constantly reinforce each other. For example, the skills involved in a "great books

program" (in which students learn how to analyze and interpret some of the world's great literature) may be the same skills used to study classical Jewish texts, particularly as they are taught at most Conservative educational institutions. Close reading of the sources, seeking the basis of argumentation, comparing verses, trying to understand an author's intentions, finding the meaning of specific words in context, and similar patterns of research are all part of the enterprise of textual analysis. Some of the same skills and related ones can also be applied to the analysis of scientific texts, newspaper articles, novels, or investigative articles in law journals.

For most of your college career you will be called upon to demonstrate your knowledge of material by writing papers or making presentations which contain arguments and counter-arguments, evaluating the views of those who have written previously about your topic. You may be asked to demonstrate how one physicist's theory was shown to be false by a later theory; you may be required to demonstrate how several literary critics approached the character of Macbeth and to choose among them. Most of your academic work will involve a dialectic, arguing points pro and con, over a given issue. This is the style of academe, and is one way knowledge increases. One scholar refutes or contradicts another, each adding to the information of the other in a search for truths. Just as each academic discipline has its search for truths,

ultimately, Talmud Torah is the Jewish search for truths. The dialectic, the argument, the reasoning back and forth, is absolutely essential to the pursuit of knowledge. On even so basic an issue as the place of Talmud Torah, we find a conflict waiting

אלו דברים שאדם אוכל פרותיהן בעולם הזה  
והקרן קימת לו לעולם הבא: כבוד אב ואם,  
וגמילות חסדים, והבאת שלום בין אדם לחברו;  
והלמוד תורה כנגל כלם.

These are deeds which yield immediate fruit and continue to yield fruit in time to come: honoring one's father and mother, doing deeds of loving kindness, and making peace between quarreling people; but the study of Torah is as important as all of these put together.

(*Peah* 1:1)

אמר רבי אסי: שקולה צדקה כנגד כל-המצוות.

Rabbi Assi said, tzedakah [the obligation of giving "charity"] is as important as all the other commandments put together.

(*Bava Batra* 9a)

What is the single most important mitzvah? Even before trying to decide between Talmud Torah and tzedakah, based on the two sources just quoted, it should be noted that still other sources

offer other answers. One, for instance, suggests that burying the dead is the ultimate mitzvah because there is no personal reward in honoring a person who is deceased. The point is that it is the attempt to reconcile differing views that often helps lead people in the search for truth and in the search for understanding the hidden meanings behind our actions and our lives. Things that many of us take for granted are not taken for granted by scholars who are always open to question and need proof of arguments. Look, for example, at the following introduction to a leading high school pamphlet on the life and works of Shakespeare:

Was the William Shakespeare who wrote all the plays a real man? This is a puzzle many people have argued about. Some of them say that Shakespeare's plays were written by someone else. . . .Why is there a mystery about Shakespeare? The reason is that we do not know very much about his life. . . .Could this [the son of a glove-maker] be the man, people ask, who wrote all the marvellous plays. . . .As historians it is our job to ask how do we know?<sup>6</sup>

Our society has so abused words that we have become inured to their misuse. We often no

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<sup>6</sup> Jim Bradbury, SHAKESPEARE AND HIS THEATRE (England: Longman Group Limited, 1975), 5-6.



longer believe what we read, having had experiences in which the media have reported events inaccurately or have reported with a strong bias. While it is important to read with a critical eye, we must again be trained in the power of the written word. Immersing ourselves in classical Jewish sources can help resensitize us to the beauty of language, and to the richness the sources can convey. Moreover, the study of traditional literature gives us the tools to approach all literature. The modern short story at its best has many principles in common with biblical narratives. In an important work on the use of the Bible for teaching humanistic values, Zvi Adar gives an overview of the multi-leveled meanings to be found in the biblical text:

When seeking to educate through the biblical narrative, we have to enter into its spirit and climate. Yet this does not suffice. . . . When we penetrate into the spirit of a great literary creation, our personality changes and becomes directly enriched through it. Can the biblical narrative, then, be such an educational power? It is very encouraging to see that such an educational approach is inherent in the biblical stories themselves.

The educational power of the biblical narrative reveals itself even more clearly if we examine its different layers. In almost every story we find three different layers. The uppermost layer is the ac-

tion; the second, the meaning of the story and the feelings of the heroes; and the last, and deepest one, the explicit or implicit ideas. . . . As a result, the biblical story fascinates us at every age level, though it is understood by each age group differently. A child enjoys the actions of the story, an adolescent ponders the spirit of the heroes and the meaning of the story, an adult reflects upon the ideas which, like a series of links, bind separate chapters into one entity.<sup>7</sup>

As with many other spheres of study, many of these reading and analytical skills are easily transferable to any reading you will do. To summarize, then, the skills which are needed to pursue the study of Torah are the same academic and intellectual tools that you will need in any rigorous, educational environment. The skills which you have already learned in your secular educations can also be applied readily to the study of Torah. In Chapter 3 we will examine some of these tools, using skills of literary analysis, psychology, sociology, history, and science to see how similar tools can be used in both secular and Judaic studies.

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<sup>7</sup> Zvi Adar, HUMANISTIC VALUES IN THE BIBLE (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1967), 67, 69.

## Questions and Activities

Consider the subjects in your secular education which might have been integrated with your Jewish education, if you had thought about it previously. For example, when you did a paper on American history, could it not have been a paper on American Jewish history as well? Make a list of the areas in your education where you might have combined your Jewish values and understandings with the secular information you have been learning. For instance, if you were asked to study a scientific principle involving ecology in our local environment might you not have looked to Jewish sources and laws on the treatment of the environment and ecological responsibility? This approach can be especially important if you still have term papers to prepare in your high school or college years. It may help you considerably shorten and yet enlighten your intellectual workload by combining projects between your secular and Judaic course assignments, as in the list which follows.

### Sample Projects

1. Do some estimating and probability studies

on the frequency of Torah trope (cantillation note) patterns and appearance of trope signs in the Torah.

2. Investigate measurement and monetary systems in the biblical and rabbinic periods, comparing them to other systems at the same time period and in modern times.

3. Develop your own conversion tables from biblical measurements to modern measurement and finances.

4. "Guesstimate" what certain items would have cost in biblical times as compared to what they cost today. Costs should be relative to an investigation of salary levels during the time period under study.

5. Develop some computer programs in the following areas:

- Biblical trivia.
- Geography of Israel, e.g., a branching program in which the user can elect to move in different directions and learn information about the different parts of the country by selecting which direction to move on a master map.
- A treasure hunt in which the user is asked to find various words or verses throughout the Bible and then to solve

a sentence or paragraph by putting the found words in the right order.

6. Pick an element of the American Constitution, such as an item from the Bill of Rights or something to do with the structure of the government, and follow its development through Supreme Court decisions. Watch how it developed over time as American society changed. Find a similar aspect of Jewish law, either a particular law or the court process, and see how it developed. Make some projections for how the Constitution might be viewed two thousand years from now in terms of its source of authority.

7. As a biology project, investigate how specific diseases such as hemophilia, rabies, scurvy, or sunstroke, were dealt with in the Bible and Talmud. Compare that to the way some surrounding cultures and peoples dealt with the disease in the same historical period and then compare with more recent medical understandings of these problems. Where, for example, can you see that medical knowledge today has confirmed some of the ancient rites or superstitions regarding disease.

8. Compare Jewish sources on the physician and patient in Jewish law to modern medical practices and medical ethics.

9. Compare Maimonides' prayer for the physician with the Hippocratic oath. Interview physicians to see how they react to both of these documents.

10. To understand the process of interpretation and text analysis, write a poem or short story and then ask a number of your fellow students to write commentaries on sections of the story or on the meaning of specific sentences or words. Take the commentaries and place them on the page around your original work, indicating the particular word or sentence they described. A few months later, give this page of commentaries to another group and see what commentaries on the commentaries occur.

11. Pick a Psalm, such as the 23rd or 24th, and research which musical composers throughout history set it to music. Compare the approaches, tone, and musical feeling of each composer's work and how it interpreted the text that was set to music. Then compose your own version of the Psalm for whatever interpretation you prefer.

12. Investigate how various artists interpreted biblical stories in their paintings. Study the painting and the story, then try to describe what interpretation the painter gave to the particular text. Look at other great painters' versions of the same story and compare their works. Try your own hand at an artistic interpretation of the same biblical passages or figure.

13. Compare and contrast how various cultures of the world treat some of the following basic human needs with the treatment suggested in Jewish culture:

- human reliance upon nature in the process of survival;
- perpetuation of a culture's most important values and traditions;
- importance of the individual in society;
- concepts of life after death;
- family structure and organization.

14. Compare and contrast cross culturally, religious rituals conducted at home as opposed to in a sanctuary.

15. Study the construction and archeological excavation of a *tel*. Create a model of such a tel and involve friends in the excavation process, directing them to record their findings and draw implications about the civilization you have "buried" in your tel.

16. Analyze several of your favorite popular songs for the values that underlie them. Do you feel comfortable with those values, and do they express what you feel is the best towards which human beings should strive? Can you find a particular prayer in the Siddur which parallels the emotions, values or insights found in the popular song. After analyzing the values, purposes, and meaning of a prayer from the Siddur, try to transform it into a modern poem or song.

17. Analyze the biblical imagery used in such

works as Melville's *Moby Dick* or Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. See how the authors interpret and portray themes and people.

18. Compare aspects of ancient Egyptian civilization to the Exodus story and see where the biblical story is influenced by Egyptian culture and where it tries to embarrass or undermine the prevailing Egyptian culture of Moses' time.

19. Seek out Jewish authors who wrote in a foreign language you are studying and try to read some of their works. Get the feel for the particular Jewish concerns that were expressed in the foreign language under study. Learn somethings about these individuals and the times and traditions in which they lived.

20. Investigate the issue of the separation of Church and State. Where do you think the Jewish community should position itself in regard to this issue? How do you think the Jewish community should go about funding its essential educational operations such as Jewish education and community needs. Study recent Supreme Court decisions and compare them with attitudes of the various Jewish communal leaders who are grappling with this fundamental question of constitutional interpretation.



## Science and Religion

This section deals with what we believe to be a red herring: the supposed conflict between science and religion. Many people have been convinced that only the scientist is capable of proving anything and that the search for truth must be relegated to the scientific domain. It is also assumed that the religious search for truth is somehow not as "real" as the scientific search. We hope to dispel those myths. For Judaism, the search for truth is every bit as real as it is for the scientist. However, the two quests are markedly different.

The scientist asks the question "how" and the religious human being asks the question "why." Yet, both science and religion are based on faith. That religion has an element of faith is easy to understand, but where does it appear in science? Scientific method is based largely on the use of proof, or proofs, and on the ability to verify an experiment by duplicating its results. Both, however, rest on certain principles known as *axioms*. As you probably know, axioms are assumptions generally accepted by the scientific community. Assumptions, however, are a matter of faith; they cannot be proven. Interestingly, some of the great scientific advances result from an alternative to one or another of the assumptions that have been accepted for so long. Here are a few examples of axioms

from a textbook that will be used in many high schools.<sup>8</sup> Look at these statements to see if they are matters of faith or if you can prove them:

**Commutative properties of numbers:**

*Addition:* For all numbers  $a$  and  $b$ ,  
 $a + b = b + a$ .

*Multiplication:* For all numbers  $a$  and  $b$ ,  
 $a \times b = b \times a$ .

**Definition: Absolute Value**

The *absolute value* of a number is the distance of that number from 0 on a number line.

Scientists have even come to describe a law of uncertainty, the *uncertainty principle*, first stated by Werner Heisenberg:

We are unable to measure both the position and velocity of an electron to unlimited accuracy.

Now note the lack of surety with which a high school biology book treats the crucial questions of the origins and nature of life.<sup>9</sup>

Do not be surprised that we leave im-

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<sup>8</sup> Eugene D. Nichols, et. al., HOLT ALGEBRA I (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1986), 7.

<sup>9</sup> Stanley L. Weinberg, AN INQUIRY INTO THE NATURE OF LIFE (U.S.A.: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1977), 8.

portant questions, such as *What causes things to be alive?* and *How does life differ from nonlife?* only partially answered. Scientists do this all the time.

Another example for you to analyze is a discussion of scientific laws and theories found in leading high school textbook.<sup>10</sup> Note some of the vocabulary that is used: "reasonable explanation," "imaginary model," and "mental picture." Also note that scientists check the hypotheses or scholarship of others, much as in Talmud Torah, where each scholar must be aware of the work of other scholars on a particular issue:

Scientists are often interested in explaining how a set of observations occur. *A reasonable explanation of observations is called a theory.* . . . Theories often involve the use of an imaginary model, or a mental picture, that helps scientists explain the observed behavior. In [John] Dalton's atomic theory, matter is pictured as made of small particles called atoms. If the theory is true, matter should behave in certain predictable ways. Experiments based upon these predictions test the theory. For example, based upon the atomic theory, Dalton predicted the law

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<sup>10</sup>Clark H. Metcalfe, et. al., MODERN CHEMISTRY (U.S.A.: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1978), 17-18.

of multiple proportions. . . . He then experimented and discovered his prediction was right. If his predictions had not been right, his experiment might have been at fault. Or his theory might have needed changing. However, experimental support for this theory is one reason it was quickly accepted by other scientists.

Thus the scientific search for the truth is no more real or certain than is Judaism's search for the truth. While science looks for the "how," the process by which things occur, the Jewish tradition looks for the "why," or the meanings behind why the world is the way it is. In summary, then, scientific competence, based on certain assumptions, is restricted only to an analysis of what is or what could be without telling us what our values should be. Talmud Torah, on the other hand, makes assumptions of faith about the meaning of life and the values of life. Obviously, it is our task to combine scientific inquiry and growing control of technological processes with a value system and meaningful life goals derived from Talmud Torah.

The direction of the next great leap of imagination is guided as often as not by the scientist's vision of beauty. Einstein's highest praise for a theory was not that it was good, but that it was beautiful. His strongest criticism was, "Oh, how ugly!" He often spoke and wrote about the *aesthetic* appeal of ideas. "Pure

logic could never lead us to anything but tautologies," wrote the French physicist Henri Poincaré. "It could create nothing new; not from it alone can any science issue."<sup>11</sup>

The most complete human beings will be those who see in a scientific fact the awe, wonder, and beauty of the universe which God has created for us.

## QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Look at your high school science and mathematics textbooks with an eye towards finding statements which really are statements of faith and cannot be proven.

2. Look at your science and math textbooks and see if there is any discussion of the moral implications of the scientific knowledge which they convey. For example, is there a discussion of the

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<sup>11</sup> From "Noted With Pleasure," THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW, November 11, 1985, citing K. C. Cole, SYMPATHETIC VIBRATIONS: REFLECTIONS ON PHYSICS AS A WAY OF LIFE.

moral and ethical problems associated with nuclear power or with control over the environment?

3. The Bible is not a book of science but rather an answer to the questions of why we are here and what is our purpose in living. Now look at the creation story (Genesis 1-2) in a non-scientific way. Read those chapters asking the question "Why are we here?" rather than "How was the world created?" This reading should give you a different understanding of *Beresheet*.

4. List some of the ethical and moral problems that have been created by modern scientific achievement. Where will you look for a source to solve some of these critical issues?

5. Have you ever had an argument with a friend? How do you convince the friend that your position is the correct one? What kinds of reasoning, arguments, and proofs must you put forward to get your friend to accept your point of view. Now, perhaps, you have a better understanding of the problems of proof.

### The Need to be "Whole" People

Everything you have read so far should lead to the conclusion that rather than having a Jewish side and a secular side, ideally we should be "whole" people, comfortable in our Jewishness while contributing to the world around us. Ultimately, our conception of Talmud Torah applies the tools of secular studies to understanding what is uniquely Jewish at the same time that Jewish tradition gives meaning to the way we lead our lives in the surrounding world:

Just as Jewishness does not know limitations inside the Jewish individual, so does it not limit that individual himself when he faces the outside world. On the contrary, it makes for his humanity. Strange as it may sound to the obtuse ears of the nationalist, being a Jew is no limiting barrier that cuts the Jew off from someone who is limited by being something else.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, only when we are fully immersed in our Jewish selves can we interact positively with the non-Jewish world around us. We can manifest our true humanness only when we are thoroughly convinced of our own uniqueness. Accordingly, our

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Nahum Glatzer, FRANZ ROSENZWEIG: HIS LIFE AND THOUGHT (New York: Schocken Books, 1953), 215.

tradition realized that every human being needs to take the opportunity of Talmud Torah, which is the great leveler of the Jewish people:

כל איש מישראל חייב בתלמוד-תורה. בין עני בין עשיר בין שלם בגופו בין בעל יסורין בין בחור בין שהיה זקן גדול שתשש כחו. אפילו היה עני המתפרנס מן הצדקה ומחזר על הפתחים ואפלו בעל אשה ובנים חייב לקבע לו זמן לתלמוד-תורה ביום ובלילה. שנאמר, והגית בו יומם ולילה.

Every Jew is required to study Torah, whether poor or rich, healthy or suffering, young or old. Even a beggar going from door to door for sustenance, or someone with a family to support, must establish time to study Torah during the day and night, for it is written, "You shall recite it day and night" (Joshua 1:8).

(Mishnei Torah, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 1:8)

Moreover, even the Sages had to balance studying Torah with making a living; study and work go hand and hand:

גדולי חכמי ישראל היו מהן חוטבי עצים ומהן שואבי מים ומהם סומים ואף-על-פי-כן היו עוסקים בתלמוד תורה ביום ובלילה. והם מכלל מעתיקי השמועה איש מפי איש מפי משה רבנו.

Some of the great sages of Israel were wood-cutters and water-carriers, while other were blind. Nevertheless they



were engaged in Talmud Torah day and night, and are included among those who have transmitted the tradition in the direct line from Moses.

(*Mishnei Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah 1:9*)

Think of some professional people with whom you are acquainted: doctors, lawyers, businesspeople, secretaries, teachers. If you ask those who are both capable in their professional field and knowledgeable Jewishly why Jewish involvement is important to them, you may get very interesting answers. An attorney may say that the study Jewish law is tremendously important for understanding the legal profession and for self-understanding. A doctor may tell you that though he gives much of himself to others and makes a good living, there is much more to life than one's career. A USY advisor pursuing rigorous, intellectual studies on a college or graduate level may give a similar answer. They all want to be well-rounded, fulfilled, and enriched people, and that concentrating only on one aspect of life is not enough. All facets of life must be orchestrated together to create a sense of wholeness.

Indeed, knowledge of Torah may provide a feeling of wholeness at times we might never anticipate. The person who is has absorbed classical

Jewish texts, has a gift of expression in a moment of need which otherwise might not be there. For instance, when our children were born, my wife and I were able to shout out the blessing *sheh-heheyanu* in the delivery room because it was on our lips. On other occasions, such as visiting Israel or experiencing a deep human emotion, I have had verses from the Torah or the Siddur to draw upon to enrich the particular moment, ennoble it, and make it more special. At times of great pain or affliction, too, words of Torah can provide solace and peace to help us over a very rough emotional road. We're not all scholars or poets, so sometimes when we need to say something we don't have the appropriate words readily available. But being steeped in the tradition of Talmud Torah may help us through some poignant moments in our lives:

יש בו באדם דברי תורה ויסורין כאין עליו. לבו  
 מתיישב עליו. אין בו באדם דברי תורה ויסורין  
 כאין עליו. לבו מתמרמר עליו. כאי זה צד יעשה.  
 יצדיק עליו את הדין. היה רעב יאמר כך וכך  
 כתוב בתורה ברעב. היה צמא יאמר כך וכך  
 כתוב בתורה בצמא. היה עומד ערום יאמר כך  
 וכך כתוב בתורה בערום. . . . וכן דוד אמר  
 אלמלא דברי תורה מרצין אותו בשעה שייסורין  
 באין עליו. כבר עקרתי עצמי מן העולם. שנאמר  
 לולא תורתך שעשועי וגו' (תהלים קי"ט צ"ב).

If affliction overtakes a person who has words of Torah within him, he is resigned: if he has no words of Torah,

he is embittered. What does the former do? He acknowledges that God's decree is righteous. If he hungers, he says, "Such and such a thing is said about hunger in the Torah." If he is thirsty, he says, "Such and such a thing is said about thirst in the Torah." If he has no clothing, he says, "Such and such a thing is said about nakedness in the Torah." So with David; had not words of Torah consoled him when affliction befell him, he would have uprooted himself from the world, as it says, "Unless the Torah had been my delight, I should have perished in my affliction" (Ps. 129:92).

**Tanna d'vei Eliyahu, Ch. 25 [27]**

In yet another way, our tradition teaches that we will be held accountable for the wholeness of our lives, both our deeds and our study of Torah. One is incomplete without the other. It also doesn't particularly matter if our original motives for studying are idealistic or practical, since the very act of study may transform us. Thus, even if the original motivation of our study is not "study for its own sake," we must begin the process anyway:

תחלת דינו של אדם איו נדון אלא על התלמוד  
 ואחר כך על שאר מעשיו. לפיכך אמרו חכמים  
 לעולם יעסק אדם בתורה בין לשמה בין שלא  
 לשמה שמתוך שלא לשמה בא לשמה.

A person is first judged on whether he studied (Torah) and only afterwards on his other deeds. Therefore the sages said, "One should always study Torah whether or not he studies for the sake of learning--for from study not for its own sake, one comes to study for its own sake."

(Mishnei Torah, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 3:5)

Though we will have more to say about time management to achieve personal goals we set for our own study of Talmud, the pressure of daily living is such that it is easy to put aside one aspect of our life while another aspect totally overwhelms us. It's easy to decide that we have time only for schoolwork and talking on the phone with friends. On the other hand, a scholar can get so mired in the pursuit of his discipline that he has no time for people or other causes. Maimonides has expressed one way to set priorities for juggling communal demands with nourishing the spirit:

אין לך מצוה בכל המצות כלן שהיא שקולה  
כנגד תלמוד־תורה. אלא תלמוד־תורה כנגד כל  
המצות כלן שהתלמוד מביא לידי מעשה. לפיכך  
התלמוד קודם למעשה בכל מקום.

היה לפניו עשית מצוה ותלמוד־תורה אם אפשר  
למצוה להעשות על־ידי אחרים לא יפסיק  
תלמודו. ואם לאו יעשה המצוה ויחזור לתלמודו.

There is no mitzvah among all the

mitzvot equivalent to Talmud Torah, but Talmud Torah is equivalent to all the mitzvot since study leads to action. Therefore, study should always precede action. If one has the opportunity to perform another mitzvah or Talmud Torah--if the other mitzvah can be done by someone else, he should not stop his studying. If it cannot be done by someone else, he should do it and then continue studying.

(*Mishnei Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah 3:3-4*)

Abraham Joshua Heschel once spoke of the need for human beings to take leaps of action and leaps of faith. A leap of faith is the ability to believe something simply because you are willing to accept it as being true. A leap of action entails doing a deed even when you're not quite sure of its meaning or implications. For example, we can talk about the beauty of Shabbat, but it cannot really be appreciated until it has been experienced; it is that leap of action which adds an essential level of understanding. Likewise, you can keep reading the pages of this book about Talmud Torah and never ever really understand its meaning until you jump in with both feet, eyes, hands, and ears and partake. That leap of action may then lead to an understanding the words of this volume have

some truth to them. Ultimately, wholeness is something which comes from inside: a feeling of self-worth, completion, belonging, and knowing who we are and what we want out of life.

It is something inside the individual that makes him a Jew, something infinitesimally small yet immeasurably large, his most impenetrable secret, yet evident in every gesture and every word--especially in the most spontaneous of them. The Jewishness I mean is no "literature." . . . It is only lived--and perhaps not even that. One *is* it.<sup>13</sup>

Talmud Torah can help a great deal, but we must apply it to all facets of our existence in order to feel the wholeness to which we aspire.

## QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Set up a career workshop in which you invite men and women who have been professionally successful and involved Jewishly to discuss their careers and Jewish involvement. Have them explain

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<sup>13</sup>Glatzer, FRANZ ROSENZWEIG, 216.

that training was necessary to become involved with their particular profession, and is added to their lives by the dimension of Jewish involvement.

2. As a second stage to the career workshop, try to arrange for chapter members to spend some time with these professionals, both "on the job" and in their homes or in their Jewish communal life, so participants can see the synthesis that these individuals have generated to make their own lives more complete.

## CHAPTER THREE BEGINNING TALMUD TORAH



### Role Models

Perhaps the single most important factor in Jewish education is an accessible role model, a person to whom we look as an example of the kind of person we wish to be. No wonder that programs such as USY on Wheels, Israel Pilgrimage, regional encampments, and Camp Ramah have always sought out staff people who are both excellent in their specific area of instruction and committed to Jewish values and practice. The notion that we desire to be like significant people whom we meet



is at the heart of what helps us grow emotionally, socially, interpersonally, and religiously.

Our tradition recognized the importance of a positive role model in effecting people's lives. Part of what a role model does involves setting standards and creating an image that other people want to achieve. Many people don't recognize the fact that they are role models because they do it so naturally and so easily; others strive deliberately in an educational setting to model behaviors which others will emulate and practice. As you grow into positions of responsibility, whether in USY or the Jewish community at large, you begin to realize that your every gesture serves as a model for other members of the community. Teaching Torah requires role models of outstanding quality, not only to teach the text properly, but to instill in others the desire to learn. The role model often has to do even more than he or she wants others to do, as shown in a story about Elijah ben Solomon, the Vilna Gaon (18th century). It is said that he used to spend 18-20 hours studying Torah everyday. When his students were asked why he spent so much time on Talmud Torah, they gave the following response:

"If the Gaon studies eighteen hours a day, the average Polish or Lithuanian Rabbi will study ten hours. If the Polish Rabbi studies ten hours the German Rabbi, in an environment less conducive

to such diligent application, will study for six hours, and the English Rabbi for two hours. And if the English Rabbi spends two hours a day in Torah study there is a likelihood that his congregants will, at least, keep the Sabbath. But if the Gaon lowers the standard and spends no more than ten hours in Torah study, the Polish Rabbi will be content with only six hours, the German Rabbi with two, and the English Rabbi with only half an hour. And if that happens what will become of the Sabbath of English Jews?"<sup>1</sup>

Jewish tradition has always had numerous and important role models, including at the present time.

Serving as a role model was also considered a difficult position; the Rabbis, perhaps exaggerating, tried to emphasize the lifestyle and dedication of a person really devoted to studying Torah. At the same time, a role model, though honored, respected, and beloved, was cautioned never to become conceited or think the responsibility made him or her better than any other person:

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<sup>1</sup> Louis Jacobs, BOOK OF JEWISH VALUES (Chappaqua, N.Y.: Rosset Books, [1960], 1983), 24.

כך היא דרכה של תורה: פת במלח תאכל, ומים במשורה תשתה, ועל הארץ תישון, וחיי צער תחיה, ובתורה אתה עמל. אם אתה עושה כן, אשריך וטוב לך; אשריך בעולם הזה, וטוב לך לעולם הבא.

אל תבקש גרלה לעצמך, ואל תחמד כבוד. יותר מלמודך עשה, ואל תתאוה לשלחנם של מלכים, ששלחנך גדול משלחנם, וכדרך גדול מכתרם; ונאמן הוא בעל מלאכתך, שישלם-לך שכר פעלתך.

This is the life style for Torah students: Eat a salty crust of bread, ration your drinking water, sleep on the ground, live a life of privations, exhaust yourself in Torah study. If you live in this manner, "You will be happy and all will go well with you" (Psalm 128:2). "You will be happy" in this world; "all will go well with you" in the world-to-come.

Do not seek high position; do not covet honor. Let your deeds exceed your learning. Do not crave the table of kings--your table is greater than theirs and your crown greater than their crown. Your Employer can be relied upon to compensate you for your labors.

(Pirkei Avot 6:4-5)

Indeed, the scholars of the community were to be respected and honored and were even exempted from certain practical demands. However, they

were also required to be patient, humble, and sensitive, with understanding for the people they might influence. The following sources highlight some of these issues:

דרכם של תלמידי חכמים: ענו ושפל רוח, זרין וממלח, עלוב, ואהוב לכל, ושפל רוח לאנשי ביתו, ירא חטא, ודורש את האדם לפי מעשיו, ואומר: כל מה שיש לי בעולם הזה אין לי חפץ בו לפי שאין העולם הזה שלי, יושב ומתעטף בכסותו לפני רגלי חכמים, ואין איש רואה בו דבר רע, שואל כענין, ומשיב כהלכה. This is the way of scholars: they are to be modest and humble, eager and bright, submissive, beloved by everyone, gentle to their family, sin-fearing, and judging every person by his deeds. The scholar says, "I have no desire for the things I have in this world"; he sits at the feet of the wise. Let no one find a evil trait in the scholar; he should ask appropriately and answer correctly.

(*Derech Eretz Zuta* 1:1)

תלמידי-חכמים אינם יוצאין בעצמן לעשות עם כל הקהל בבנין וחפירה של מדינה וכיוצא בהן כדי שלא יתבוז בפני עמי-הארץ . . .

Scholars are not called upon to participate with the rest of the community in building and digging for the state, or similar tasks, so they don't lose the respect of the common people. . . .

(*Mishnei Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah* 6:10)

אין ראוי לחכם שיטריח את העם ויכוין עצמו להם כדי שיעמדו מפניו. אלא ילך בדרך קצרה ומתכון שלא יראו אותו כדי שלא יטריחן לעמד. והחכמים היו מקיפין והולכין בדרך החיצונה שאין מכיריהן מצויין שם כדי שלא יטריחום.

It is not proper for a scholar to put people to the trouble of standing up in his presence by deliberately passing before them [since people were supposed to rise in the presence of a scholar]. Instead, he should use a shorter route, so they won't notice him, so that none will have to rise before him. The sages used to take circuitous outer paths, where those who knew them wouldn't be found, in order not to trouble them.

(Mishnei Torah, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 6:3)

Accessible role models are individuals with different personalities and different styles. There are those with whom we feel comfortable, and there are those who have such sophistication, power, or knowledge that we feel overwhelmed and intimidated by them. Ideally a role model should be a human being who is able to communicate what he knows to others in a sensitive and caring matter, enabling us to warm ourselves in this person's light. Though we will discuss the nature of Jewish scholars and scholarship at greater length in Chapter

4, at this point we note that for Jewish tradition the teacher, the scholar, was the role model par excellence. Though teachers can sometimes get on our nerves and can make demands of us which push us to grow and change--and that can often cause resentment--our tradition places such stock in the importance of teachers and scholars that it records the following hyperbole:

עון גדול הוא לבזות את החכמים או לשנאתן.  
לא חרבה ירושלים עד שבזו בה תלמידי-חכמים.  
שנאמר, ויהיו מלעבים במלאכי האלהים ובוזים  
דבריו ומתעתעים בנביאיו. כלומר בוזים מלמדי  
דבריו. וכן זה שאמרה תורה, ואם בחקתי  
תמאסו' — מלמדי חקותי תמאסו...

It is a serious sin to belittle or hate scholars. Jerusalem wasn't destroyed until its scholars were treated with contempt, as it is written, "They mocked God's messengers, despised His words, and taunted His prophets" (II Chronicles 36:16); that is, they despised those who taught His words. In the same way, when the Torah says, "If you respect My laws" (Leviticus 26:15), it means, "If you respect the teachers of My laws."

(*Mishnei Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah 6:11*)

No role models are ever freed from the obligation to continue improving their own skills and

level of understanding. No more than we would want to visit a doctor who hadn't read or kept up with the latest medical journals, would we want those serving as role models to stop studying; therefore, the following imperative:

עד אימתי חייב ללמוד עד יום מותו שנאמר  
 ופן יסורו מלבבך כל ימי חייתך וכל זמן שלא  
 יעסוק בתורה הוא שוכח.

For how long is one obligated to study?  
 Until the day of death, as it is said, "So  
 that they do not fade from your mind as  
 long as you live" (Deuteronomy 4:9).  
 When a person doesn't study, he forgets.

(*Shulhan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 246:3*)

Finally, one of the most exciting things about the concept of role models in Judaism is that anyone can be one. The position is not gained by heredity or conferred because of the status of your birth or privilege or wealth; rather, it is something that all of us can aspire to, and achieve. One of the greatest joys for a teacher is to learn about the influence he or she may have had on someone in a class years earlier. Working in USY, Camp Ramah, and similar environments can fill staff members with a feeling of accomplishment when they see that they *do* influence those in their charge. In positions of Jewish organizational leadership, as well, your work can change people's lives--involv-

ing them with other Jews, creating life-long friendships, and bringing them into our tradition. The obligation of a role model to consider himself or herself at one with a community while also accepting responsibilities for others is the quintessential trait for someone to really effect the lives of others:

מה אין מצויין ת"ח לצאת ת"ח מבניהן ? אמר רב יוסף שלא יאמרו תורה ירושה היא להם. רב ששת [שישא] בריה דרב אידי אומר כדי שלא יתגדרו על הצבור. מר זוטרא אומר מפני שהן מתגבויין על הצבור.

Why do we not find that scholars have children who are also [automatically] scholars? Rav Yosef says, "So that no one will say the Torah is a [guaranteed] inheritance for them." Rav Sheshet (Shisha), the son of Rav Idi, says, "So that they don't consider themselves superior to the rest of the community."

(*Nedarim* 81a)

We hope that in our times, educated Jews, whatever their professions, will also be role models for the community.



## QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Make a list of names and short biographies of a few people in your community you feel to be role models, especially for young people in our movement today. Look at the backgrounds of some of these people; you will probably realize how similar they may be to to your own background.

2. Recently, some faculty members of the Jewish Theological Seminary were asked to complete brief information sheets about their educational backgrounds and involvement in USY. Many of the younger generation of scholars attended public schools and afternoon Hebrew schools; many came from homes that were originally non-observant. Some have reached their current levels of Jewish knowledge and commitment because of the role models to whom they were exposed when they were younger, and some of them now serve as role models for the next generation of teachers. The chain of tradition continues and is strengthened because of individuals with backgrounds that have been be very much like yours.'

## What Stops Me

If there's so much to be gained from Talmud Torah--personal riches, heritage, academic prowess, and intellectual awareness--why do we find it so difficult and why don't we do more of it? There are probably as many answers as people reading these words. Our life space and time are limited, and our knowledge of Jewish tradition has been largely shaped by our home environments and early Jewish educations. Most people don't realize that a child who has gone to Hebrew school for five years, from age eight to Bar or Bat Mitzvah, has studied Judaica for fewer hours than a first grade child attends public school in one year. That doesn't leave a great deal of time to master the many skills necessary for serious Jewish study. On the average, students spend at least 990 hours per year in public school learning secular skills in math, social studies, science, English, music, and other subjects. Obviously, therefore, Jewish education simply has not had the time to offer adequate preparation for the skills needed for a student to feel competent.

All of us need to feel competent in what we do. We like to play tennis with people whose skill is equal to our own, or maybe a little bit better, but we don't like to be shown up on the court by a player with much greater skill. Too often in our Jewish studies we feel incompetent. While we are

successful in so many secular areas, in Jewish studies we feel uncomfortable or inadequate; therefore we may turn away from them altogether. If you are at the stage of preparing to go off to college, your time may be more taken up with schoolwork and extracurricular activities which will help you move on to the next steps in your education. Ironically, and unfortunately, at the time of life when your intellect and mind may be their most acquisitive (and inquisitive) Jewish subjects may be pushed aside because of the pressing demands of college acceptance. Especially since our society gives few, if any, rewards for a person who achieves in Torah study, it's hard to say, "Here, I've found something special even if very few other people have discovered it."

Hebrew language, too, is often seen as an insurmountable problem, since the lack of Hebrew knowledge is often a barrier to a feeling of competence in Talmud Torah. This weakness is largely the result of the limited time most students spend in Hebrew school. It takes approximately 120 repetitions of a word in a foreign language to really make it yours; combine that with the fact that a vocabulary needed to study in a foreign language consists of three thousand or four thousand words. Solving the Hebrew issue is not easy, yet there are many ways to approach the solution.

In addition to taking Hebrew courses in the

local high school, college, or synagogue, there can be tremendous value in spending time in Israel. There are many opportunities including a summer *Ulpan*, or a year-long program such as Nativ or that of the Hebrew University. There are also several techniques to help you develop your Hebrew language level on your own:

- On those occasions when services become a little too tedious or long, you might look at the translation, if your Siddur has one, to help you analyze some Hebrew words that have familiar roots. In this way, I was gradually able to find the English counterpart for each Hebrew word and began to teach myself the meaning of the Hebrew passages. It should be stated that while the Siddur contains materials for study, it was not developed as a Hebrew textbook. Nonetheless, this method not only helped me learn Hebrew, but also increased my understanding of the *tefillot* as I picked one Psalm or passage to study each Shabbat morning.
- Take the new USY songster or Ramah *shiron* and try to break down the words to your favorite song so you can understand what it means. Either use a translation or, better yet, do the work yourself by using a Hebrew dic-

tionary. As you begin to translate more songs in this manner, your Hebrew competence will increase. Songs are generally short poems, so this will also help your ability to appreciate poetry and poetic style.

- Become familiar with two very special and little-known books, *Luah Hap'olim Hashalem* and *Luah Hash-eimot Hashalem*. The first lists the roots of most Hebrew verbs in alphabetical order; it also provides notations about the way each verb appears in the seven conjugations. The second book presents other information for Hebrew nouns; both will enable you to expand your Hebrew vocabulary and comprehension.
- Use a "linear" translation of the Siddur or Rashi's commentary to the Torah to help you improve your Hebrew level as you learn the content of the volume.
- Subscribe--or ask your synagogue or local library to do so--to an Israeli newspaper such as *Lamathil* or *Ha'omer* in simplified Hebrew. Start with one article per week and decipher it, using dictionary or with the help of a friend or teacher.

The difficulties prohibiting us from studying Torah are not new. Over the ages Jews in many different places had trouble intergrating Torah study into their lives, especially when the pressures of daily living and mere physical survival were so difficult. Despite the pressures, however, the drive for Talmud Torah was stronger than the obtacles.

### QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. List all of the reasons you're not involved with Talmud Torah (or not involved more). Analyze each reason carefully to see if you are being true to yourself or are just making an excuse which could be overcome if you had the motivation and willpower.

2. Complete the following sentences:

The thing I liked least about Hebrew school was \_\_\_\_\_.

The problem with the Bible is \_\_\_\_\_.

The last Jewish book I read was \_\_\_\_\_.

I think study sessions at USY Kinnusim are \_\_\_\_\_.

If I could decide what to study in the world of Talmud Torah, it would be \_\_\_\_\_.

The person who influenced me Jewishly most in my life was (or is) \_\_\_\_\_.

The best time of the week for me to begin studying Torah would be \_\_\_\_\_.

I felt I was a Jewish role model when \_\_\_\_\_.

The last time I felt intensely Jewish was \_\_\_\_\_.

I am most proud to be a Jew when \_\_\_\_\_.

I am least proud to be a Jew when \_\_\_\_\_.

The most important thing I ever learned in Hebrew school was \_\_\_\_\_.

3. As an aid to helping you look at how you spend your time, complete the following:<sup>2</sup>

**WHERE DOES YOUR TIME GO?**

**Time Wasters**

Self-Imposed	System-Imposed
___ 1. Not enough planning	___ 1. Overlong visit
___ 2. Socializing	___ 2. Negative attitude
___ 3. Preoccupation	___ 3. Meetings
___ 4. Ineffective delegation	___ 4. Delays
___ 5. Trying too much	___ 5. Interruptions
___ 6. Too involved in details	___ 6. Poor communication

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Charles R. Hobbs, YOUR TIME AND YOUR LIFE (Chicago: The Charles R. Hobbs Corporation, 1983).

- |                               |                                |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ___ 7. Reverse delegation     | ___ 7. Waiting for decision    |
| ___ 8. Unable to say no       | ___ 8. Mechanical failure      |
| ___ 9. Arguing                | ___ 9. Others' mistakes        |
| ___ 10. Lack self-discipline  | ___ 10. Secretary ineffective  |
| ___ 11. Wrong priorities      | ___ 11. Problem not clear      |
| ___ 12. Procrastination       | ___ 12. Lack policies          |
| ___ 13. Interruptions         | ___ 13. Lack authority         |
| ___ 14. My own mistakes       | ___ 14. Understaffed           |
| ___ 15. Failure to listen     | ___ 15. Overstaffed            |
| ___ 16. Overcontrol           | ___ 16. Different value system |
| ___ 17. Fear of offending     | ___ 17. Lack of feedback       |
| ___ 18. Unrealistic estimates | ___ 18. Role not clear         |
| ___ 19. Can't end visits      | ___ 19. Low priority memos     |
| ___ 20. Failure to anticipate | ___ 20. Shifting priorities    |
| ___ 21. Goals not clear       | ___ 21. Lack clerical staff    |
| ___ 22. Slow reader           | ___ 22. Lack competent help    |
| ___ 23. Emotional upset       | ___ 23. Changing priorities    |
| ___ 24. Other:                | 24. Other:                     |

List 3 ways you currently waste time:

- \_\_\_ 1. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_

Select the most troublesome problem out of the three. Set a goal to reduce or eliminate the problem and carry it out.

A

What is the worst unnecessary interruption you have during the day.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

B

Write what you might do in order to resolve the interruption.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_



4. Keep a time log of all of your activities over the course of one week. Make a listing to show what activity you are engaged in every half hour or so; just put an arrow through the hours you are sleeping. In keeping this log it is important to take it everywhere you go (though on Shabbat you'll just have to try to remember what you did and then log it on Saturday evening). It's important to make regular entries, preferably every fifteen minutes but no more than every half hour. Be as detailed as possible so that you can really get a picture of how you are spending your time.

At the end of the week, collate or cluster together similar kinds of activities such as attending classes, sleeping, eating, exercising, doing homework, socializing with friends, talking on the telephone, watching television, doing a special project, interruptions from outside sources, or job related activities. Next, add up the time you spent on each type of activity, and then calculate the percentage of time you devoted to each item from the total time available in the course of a week. Look over the relationship of those percentages.

Do you feel that too much time is being spent on certain areas of your life? Obviously, there are certain areas about which you have no choice (such as the time you must be in school). However, in areas you *do* control (such as watching TV, socializing, talking on the telephone, or working out),

you may be able to reorient some of your priorities to give you a half-hour or an hour more a week to branch out to do something new. That "found" time could be used to initiate a project of Talmud Torah and make it a part of your daily routine. Look over your list to see what were the most frequent interruptions; how much of your day is uncommitted or free; what part of your day seemed to be the most productive for you; how could you consolidate or eliminate certain routine items in the course of your week; what things do you seem to enjoy most and what items seem to cause you the most grief and could you rearrange when they occur so as to provide more of a balance in your scheduling.

5. Try a game of associations. React to the following terms, and make quick word associations with them: *messiah, salvation, Our Father who art in Heaven, hallelujah, adoration, and the Time of the Redeemer is Nigh*. Your associations may have had a Christological tone to them, because English is a Christian language and it reverberates with Christian images and concepts. However, all the words from the list are taken from the Siddur; they have entirely different connotations and associations for the knowledgeable Jew reading them in Hebrew.

### Taking the First Steps

First, remember that Torah is there for the taking. It is public property, potentially your legacy, and you have every right and reason to pursue it. Secondly, do not let yourself become overwhelmed by the amount of material Talmud Torah entails; by moving in small steps you will come closer to your goal each day. When trying to lose weight, we do it one calorie at a time; when working up for an athletic competition, we do it gradually; the same is true of studying music or any other endeavor, including Talmud Torah. Talmud Torah can seem so imposing that its power can "burn" you; on the other hand if you staying away from it altogether, you will "freeze" you out of the Jewish people:

... מה אש נתנה מן השמים כך דברי תורה  
 נתנו מן השמים שנאמר אתם ראיתם כי מן  
 השמים דברתי עמכם מה אש חיים לעולם כך  
 דברי תורה חיים לעולם מה אש קרוב לה אדם  
 נכוח רחוק ממנה צונן כל דברי תורה כל זמן  
 שאדם עמל בהם חיים הם לו פרש מהם ממיתים  
 אותו מה אש משתמשים בה בעולם הזה ולעולם  
 הבא כך דברי תורה משתמשים בהם בעולם הזה  
 ולעולם הבא מה אש כל המשתמש בה עושה  
 בגופו רושם כך דברי תורה ...

"A fiery law went from His right hand for them" (Deut. 33:2). Words of Torah are compared to fire: just as fire was given from heaven, so words of Torah were given from heaven as it says, "You

see that I speak with you from heaven." Also, just as fire is alive forever, so words of Torah are alive forever. Just as with fire a person who draws too close is burned but one who is far away is frozen, so too with words of Torah. If one toils in them, they give life; if one remains separate from them they kill. Just as fire is used in both this world and the next, and so too with the Torah. Fire leaves its mark the person who uses it; so do words of Torah.

(*Sifrei Devarim, V'zot Hab.*, [Finkelstein, 399-400])

The final point is that life is too short to delay starting. Begin now, and the rest of the task will follow, step by step. For instance, every time I thought of the work necessary to prepare this book, the challenge seemed overwhelming. However, simply by starting, one section at a time, the project became less intimidating, and even enjoyable!

## QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. We shall offer suggestions for how to can gain control of your time and use it more beneficially. If you completed the time log suggested previously, the next step is to begin keeping an organized calendar diary. This isn't just for businesspeople; the busy schedule you have ought to be reflected in a weekly or monthly calendar. You will then be able to schedule events, gain some control over your time, and pursue those goals and interests which are important to you. First you must determine your own priorities. Try to begin planning each day, or a few days in advance, using the following code:

- **A** = *vital*: events with a high "pay-off"--those which will give you tremendous personal satisfaction or events which simply must be done;
- **B** = *important*: things which you must attend to but are a little less important than the **A** events;
- **C** = *limited value*: things that you need to do, but which can be left undone without terrible consequences;
- **D** = *waste of time*: something which doesn't need to be done, and which you would be better off not doing;
- **\*** = *urgent*: an event calling for your immediate attention; everything else must be put aside.

Every action or event should be considered on two scales: is it urgent (or not); is it worthwhile to you (or not)? This can be shown as follows:<sup>3</sup>

Event \_\_\_\_\_

	WORTHWHILE	NOT WORTHWHILE
URGENT		
NOT URGENT		

You will begin to see from this exercise that we often spend our time doing the urgent, non-worthwhile task rather than that which is worthwhile. The urgent event always seems to have a way of "pre-empting" the projects which are in line with our long-ranged goals. Therefore, it is all the more important to use as much of the remaining time as possible for activities that are worthwhile, even though they may not be urgent.

2. After using this framework to analyze the nature of your daily activities, make a list of "Things To Be Done Today" and rate each item using the system above (A, B, C, D, or \*). Then, within each

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<sup>3</sup>Based on Charles R. Hobbs, YOUR TIME AND YOUR LIFE.

group set a priority order (A-1, A-2, A-3; B-1, B-2, and so on). Every part of your life should go on this daily planning list: schoolwork, recreational and social activities, tefillah, meals, relaxation, etc. The more you can plan in advance, the more you can begin to do your top priority items. This system is based on the assumption that, very often, items near the end of a long list of things to do are never reached. Therefore, in order to do those things that you feel most important and most consistent with your ultimate goals, you have to be certain they are "near the top of the list."

There are a few other points which must be made for this system to be most useful. The only way you will know if a particular action is in line with your overall goals is to be certain you have given thought to those goals. Sometimes articulating the goals, or even writing them down, can help you formulate them clearly. In addition, it is essential that you constantly check your actions against your goals. If non-worthwhile items begin to get in the way of the worthwhile ones, try to restructure the way you spend your time, using the methods outlined above. There are also a few other techniques to help you (applied to the specific example of reading the whole Torah):

1. Set aside a specific time to work on the task you have given the highest priority. Select the best time of day for you to accomplish your task,

depending on whether you work best in the morning (even before school) or evening. Close your door or go to a place where you won't be interrupted.

2. As mentioned above, break the task into small units, each of which can be accomplished, even if the whole job looks too big. (Select an amount to be read or studied each day. Choose the order in which you want to read the books, and make a chart with a time allotment for each. Then further subdivide the task for the first book, making a schedule of when you will cover each chapter.)

3. If the task allows, do the toughest part of the job first. (If you are studying a passage in Hebrew, you may have to spend some time with a dictionary, writing difficult vocabulary

4. Turn a difficult task into a game. (After each chapter or set of chapters give yourself a "reward".)

5. Commit yourself to a deadline and use other people to help reinforce what you are doing. Let them know what your goals are and how you are accomplishing them you can get the well-deserved "strokes" and praise.

6. Finally, remember that accomplishing your goals may mean changing your behavior, and that can be the single hardest thing we do. (You may have to cut out telephone calls right after school--if that's the time you've chosen--so you can read the chapter you have assigned yourself.)



7. Set ambitious, but achievable, goals. (Don't plan to read all of Jeremiah in one night, nor will you need two weeks to read Obadiah!)

### **Methods of Inquiry**

Every field of endeavor, intellectual, physical, or emotional, has tools by which people in that particular discipline do their work. So, for example, a carpenter has a saw and plane to manipulate the "stuff" of his trade--wood. A sailor has charts and measuring instruments such as a compass to guide him in passage from one port to another. In the same way, people who involve themselves in the world of intellect, such as scholars, also have tools by which they acquire knowledge, investigate and synthesize it, and often reach conclusions based on it. These tools are methods of inquiry. They are the questions, techniques, and processes used by people who study a particular discipline to understand that subject and the processes which guide it. There are different kinds of inquiry tools which can be roughly divided into areas associated with the poetic, the scientific, the historical, the sociological, the psychological/emotional, the aesthetic and the philosophical. These areas are generally ones which have been applied in our secular educations and by which we continue to hone the intellectual skills used to understand the world.

The purpose of this section is to give you a feel for some of the questions and issues which different fields of inquiry raise and to see how they apply to the study of Torah and to secular study. These intellectual tools of inquiry or academic skills will help you in both your secular and Jewish "worlds." They may, in fact, help you combine the two into the "whole person," we described at the end of Chapter 2. Let us turn, now, to the methods of inquiry.

**A. Poetic Inquiry.** Volumes have been written on the relationship of poetry to the study of Torah. Basically, poetry is a form of language in which ambiguity conveys mood and meaning. The language generates interpretations, emotions, and understandings which often differ from person to person, enabling the reader to relate his or her own experience to the poem. Much of what we call Talmud Torah (with the exception, perhaps, of certain legal material) falls into this area. A poet is like a person who throws a rock into a pond causing ripples to radiate out from where the stone landed. A poet throws words (so to speak) into our intellectual space, and they radiate meaning. When you throw two words together the ripples intersect, causing a new pattern of ripples or a new pattern of meanings. Poetry is, thus, the art of creating ideas and emotions through the careful manipulation of sounds and words. No word is there unless it was intended to be there, and each word and its

place in the poem must be investigated to understand a greater whole which the poem tries to convey.

The secret of understanding poetry is in realizing that we don't look for *what* a poem means, but rather *how* a poem means.<sup>4</sup> Much of Jewish literature is written in poetic language. In fact Abraham Joshua Heschel has explained, by an analogy, just how important poetry is to Judaism:

analysis : science :: poetry : religion

We saw earlier that both science and religion seek certain truths but ask different questions. Now we can see that they use different methods to express their quests. Science is presented in analytical terms, while poetry is the language of religion. Even within the area of poetry, several different approaches are in use. For instance, formalistic criticism, one popular method, is based on the assumption that the form and content of literature (not just poetry) are seen as the same. The form reflects the content and the content reflects the form. To illustrate this approach we shall make a few comments about Genesis 22, the story of

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<sup>4</sup> This is explained by John Ciardi in *HOW DOES A POEM MEAN?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959), an examination of the way poetry conveys meaning.

*Akedat Yitchak* (the "binding of Isaac") and about the opening line of Herman Melville's novel *Moby Dick*.

Despite the profound emotional and psychological implications of Genesis 22, there are very few details; we are left to infer for ourselves what Abraham and Isaac were thinking. The simplicity of style and form reduces everything to basic elements; it evokes a sense of loneliness, father and son going off alone. We also note that verbs, connoting action, are the chief part of speech used throughout the text. Although the story is a test of Abraham's faith, his faith is shown not by what he feels or even by what he believes--the form hides those from us--but by his actions. By analyzing just the form of the narrative we see that its focus is on action. By formalistic analysis, therefore, we derive tremendous meaning from this particular literary work. As Moshe Greenberg has said, "The validity and relevance of extrinsic information can be tested by its ability to illuminate the inner coherence of the book's elements; whatever helps to explain why a given item is as it is or where it is in the book is a contribution to understanding."<sup>5</sup>

It's my contention that by applying formalistic

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<sup>5</sup> Moshe Greenberg, UNDERSTANDING EXODUS (New York: Behrman House, Inc., for The Melton Research Center of The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1969).

criticism to the opening sentence of *Moby Dick*, possibly the greatest American novel, we can derive the subject and meaning of the rest of the book. Sound impossible? In fact, I would make a similar claim about analyzing the opening sentences, or first few paragraphs, of any great work of literature. *Moby Dick* begins with a sentence of three words: "Call me Yishmael." The phrase is an imperative. This points to a theme of the story, the overriding drive--the imperative--on the part of Captain Ahab to seek out and destroy the whale which injured him. Next, the name Yishmael, which means "God will hear," reminds us of the first son of Abraham, the son of Hagar who was rejected and sent out to the desert to die. The use of this name implies a wanderer, a person who feels rejected, a person crying out to God for help. The middle word, "me," immediately tells us that the subject of this book is going to be personal. It is a first person narrative of someone expressing his inner feelings, needs, and motivations. Thus, from the opening few words of the book, we learn that the "me" is indeed a person who is wandering, crying out to God for help, and looking for the meaning of his existence and of life in general. The novel often quotes the Bible, and even that is hinted at in the first sentence.

For us as Jews, the poetic or literary method of inquiry needs to be taken a step beyond the pure intellectual level when considering Jewish texts.

It should also be help us derive personal meaning from our tradition.

**B. Scientific Inquiry.** We have already pointed out, in discussing the issue of science and religion, that the two realms have separate concerns and different modes of expression. Nonetheless, scientific inquiry can be useful, in fact it can be essential, to a full understanding of certain features of Jewish law. For instance, in order to determine whether certain food products are *kasher* ("proper," i.e., ritually acceptable), we must often submit them to chemical analysis. Similarly, in many areas of halachah, especially as new questions of law are raised each day, scientific inquiry is a necessary tool.

**C. Historical Inquiry.** Unfortunately, all too often, an individual's knowledge of history comes from what are called secondary sources, such as a school textbook. The student is required to take the word of the author that the information presented is true. How can you be sure? Where did the author get the information in writing that text? A good historian, therefore, seeks to understand the events of the past through the study of sources that were extant at the time and place being considered. It is through the interpretation of those sources--the primary sources--in relationship to the events of the day that historians draw conclusions about what may have occurred in the past.

A history textbook is often a distillation of primary source material interpreted by a particular author, and given to you with that author's point of view. This writing of history is called historiography. Whether the authors write of their own history or of the history of others, there is a certain bias or certain view as to what they'd like the events to mean or symbolize. In addition, they read the sources and write about them through their own cultural framework. Thus, there really is then no such thing as objective history and objective recording of events. They are colored by the glasses which each of us wears and the experience each of us brings to viewing the event.

Good historians seek to understand the viewpoint which was employed by a particular author at a particular time, and from that try to develop a more balanced approach to the historical period in question. Even when scholars study historical sources, they bring to those sources their own points of view. Therefore, it is especially valuable to confront the primary sources directly whenever possible. The following introduction to a leading high school history text gives a good indication of why the study of various levels of source material is so important:

The use of [primary] source material in the teaching of history is recommended in the professional literature and considered good educational practice.

Sources provide a direct encounter with the past, challenge the student's judgment and imagination, arouse interest for additional reading, supplement textbooks as well as lectures, and evoke wide-ranging discussion.

Encounter with the sources is likely to make the study of history more authentic. The reading of sources adds depth to the learning process and enables the students, in some small degree, to experience the past.<sup>6</sup>

The Bible, too, is written from a point of view which shows the origins and development of the Jewish people. Though it was not meant as an abstract book of history, it presents certain values and guidance about how to live in a largely chronological framework. While many of the historical elements in the Bible have been confirmed by scholars, it is presented with a bias: it is historiography from a Jewish (or Israelite and Judean) point of view. Interestingly enough, chances are that in your Jewish education you have greater exposure to authentic, original sources (through your study of Bible and rabbinic literature in the Siddur) than you have had in your secular education. To

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<sup>6</sup> Eliezer L. Ehrman, READINGS IN MODERN JEWISH HISTORY (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1977), 22.



some extent your secular education may have given you second or third party points of view as to what happened in a given time and place. Therefore, the study of source material, namely, the interaction of you, the reader, with traditional Jewish materials gives you direct access to the original sources of our people, enabling you to make your own independent judgments as to what the nature of Jewish life and civilization were and should be.

**D. Sociological Inquiry.** This method, along with social psychology, provides yet another set of tools with which to understand the world around us in terms of the general culture and of our Jewish heritage. Sociology is concerned with human groups, of varying sizes and complexities, and how the groups form, function, rule their members and accept new ones, and dissolve. It also examines the relationships among groups. Social psychology is concerned with the behavior and attitudes of individuals who participate within in social structures such as groups. Social psychology tries to explain the behavior of individuals as it is influenced by the social environment and the way the behavior of individuals effects social structures.

Since family structure, societal organization, and norms of behavior are dealt with in Jewish law and practice, and since the behavior of individuals within the group is governed by a system of laws and traditions which are designed to create a

smoother and sensitive civilization, the tools of inquiry of sociology and social psychology can easily be applied to a wide range of topics concerning Talmud Torah. For example, the well-known book *Life is with People* depicts European Jewish shtetl life. It is a work largely based on the use of sociology and social psychology to understand the European Jewish civilization in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Likewise, applying sociological tools of inquiry to the laws of agriculture and property as they appear in the Torah can begin to provide a sense of what society was like in biblical times and what its issues and difficulties were. Sociology and social psychology also help us to understand the place of the Jew in the surrounding world, since Jewish communities never functioned in a vacuum. Our tradition was effected by the world around us and we, in turn, had an important impact on the surrounding civilizations.

An offshoot of sociology, anthropology, which is the study of human development, interactions, and groups also helps to revive and interpret cultures which are no longer living or which were inscrutable to us to begin with. As Margaret Mead wrote,<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Margaret Mead, "Introduction" to Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog, *LIFE IS WITH PEOPLE: THE CULTURE OF THE SHTETL* (New York: Schocken Books, 1952), 19.

One of the special characteristics of Jewish culture is that it is the culture of a people who have lived as communities within a larger society, who themselves did not constitute a nation, and who therefore had always to include in any picture of themselves the picture which their neighbors, who belonged within the same state but had a different culture, had of them. In every society any group which is highly differentiated culturally from other groups has the task of dealing with an image of themselves which includes all the ways in which they separate themselves from the others, both self-approving and self-deprecatory, but also the ways in which the others separate themselves from them.

These disciplines, then, can help us to understand how groups interrelate and form images of each other, how prejudices are formed, and how to deal with some of the resulting tensions and expectations that come from groups' (as well as individuals') understandings of each other. The application of sociology, social psychology, and anthropology to Jewish life through the ages has helped uncover the meanings behind the events and helps us understand our own identity as Jews.

**E. Psychological/Emotional Inquiry.** Most of us would say that psychology is involved with the

study of the mind. However, since a mind cannot be seen or felt we can only observe behaviors and attribute them to the mind. Psychology and the study of the emotions seek to understand the interrelationship of the physical and the mental often through observation of animal and human behavior. Making inferences from those observations, we seek to understand how a healthy organism acts as a way of learning how to help an unhealthy organism cope with, and overcome, illness. There are many fields of psychology, from behavioristic psychology (which studies how animals respond to stimuli and rewards) to psychoanalysis and psychiatry (which try to understand the intricacies of the human mind). One could say that modern psychology is really involved in the pursuit of helping people live their lives more meaningfully and more enjoyably. The same is true, to a large extent, of Jewish tradition.

An example of how the tools of psychological inquiry can easily be applied to Jewish law and practice is found with regard to death and dying. Many modern psychologists and psychiatrists, notably Elisabeth Kubler Ross, have begun to study the process of dying in terminally ill patients. They have come up with the notion that a dying patient must go through various stages of grief in order to attain some closure and some sense of contentment when death draws near. These stages have also been discerned in the process of bereavement,

when a person suffers the death of a close relative or friend. First there is often denial: "This can't be happening; it can't be true; someone's made a mistake." Secondly, there is often anger involved: "How could the person who died have done this to me; how could he or she have caused me all these problems, leaving me all alone, removing such love from my life." There may also be anger against oneself or against the hospital or doctor. The third stage is guilt: "What might I have done differently to save his or her life?; if I had only gotten the doctor sooner; if we had only tried another hospital." People sometimes also feel guilty that their relationship with the deceased wasn't better: they argued the last time they saw each other, or didn't show enough love in their life, or didn't verbalize that love enough during their years together. The next stage is generally loneliness and isolation, the feeling of emptiness and being left alone to cope with life, no longer having a partner or the loved one who died to help you along the road. Finally, if the grief progresses in a healthy manner, there is acceptance; life must go on. At this point you have to accept the death as real and enrich your life through the memory of the deceased. There is widespread agreement among those who deal with emotional health that these stages are important and that a person must work through them in the grieving process. Arresting the process at any given stage may lead to emotional problems.

So, for example, refusal to admit death can lead to the painful situation of a parent who has lost a child leaving all the toys and clothing in the child's room and pretending that the child is still alive. This is a devastating emotional state and leads to a paralysis of acting and growing by the living relative.

Centuries ago Jewish tradition understood these stages of grieving and established behaviors--through halachah--to help the bereaved move through each step of the process. So in Jewish law, from the time someone is informed of the death of a close loved one until the funeral, he or she is an *onen* and is released from any positive religious commandments. The tradition realized that a person needs time to cope with a sense of loss and denial and cannot be asked to do certain things that would divert attention from dealing with very powerful emotions. It was also recognized that in this early stage of grief, no words of comfort would be appropriate, since they would not be useful or sufficient. The need to face the death, without denial, may be seen in the process of burial, which is generally not delayed, and by seeing and hearing the coffin be covered with earth. This helps to convince the mourner that the death is real and final. The need for anger is expressed by the mitzvah of *keriyah*, tearing of the garment. (Although some mourners attach a torn black ribbon to their clothes, many actually tear an article of

clothing to show that something has been torn from their life and as a sign of hurt and anger of what has befallen them.) The emotions of guilt and loneliness are dealt with through the seven day period (*shivah*), in which friends and relatives lend support to the mourner, letting him know that he is not alone and was not responsible for the person's death. This period also helps a person realize that normal life must be resumed--there is no such thing as a *shivah* longer than seven days--even if slowly at first. In the decreasing levels of mourning such as *sheloshim* (a period of thirty days during which the mourner observes certain restrictions) and then finally a year period of saying *kaddish* for a parent, the mourner is gradually returned to regular life while remembering their loved one. An understanding of the tools of psychological inquiry can not only enrich and enlighten our understanding of Jewish practice, but can also help us evaluate when our own lack of understanding makes us want to change a particular law when change would be helpful.

**G. Philosophic Inquiry.** There were many in Jewish tradition who were adamantly opposed to the use of philosophy as a tool of inquiry. People were warned against using philosophy because it might lead them astray. (It may be added that some of the other tools of inquiry were also rejected, for a variety of reasons.) It could pervert ideas which the tradition found holy and lead people to

accept ideas which were very foreign to Judaism. A talmudic Sage of the second century, Elisha Ben Avuya (also called *ahayr* "the other") was so involved in his search for truth and the meaning of life that he left Judaism to take on the trappings of Greek culture and philosophy. Centuries later, when Maimonides wrote his now-famous *Moreh N'vuchim* (Guide of the Perplexed), other philosophical treatises, and certain legal works, some of his writings were rejected and even burned, because people were so infuriated that he combined processes of Greek philosophy within Jewish tradition.

The word "philosophy" comes from the Greek word *philosophia*, which literally means "the love of wisdom." Dictionary definitions generally explain that philosophy is the science which aims at an explanation of all the phenomena of the universe by resolving the phenomena into causes and reasons, powers and laws. Through an analysis of words, the logic of ideas, and the sources of ideas and occurrences in the world, philosophers seek to understand the meaning of the universe, the meaning of life, and the reasons behind the way things are. Therefore, philosophy entails the pursuit of knowledge and truth and a questioning of the very existence of knowledge and meaning itself. It is obvious, on the one hand, that such a pursuit is extremely applicable to Talmud Torah for it, too, is concerned with the meaning of life and the ultimate



source of authority. On the other hand, however, you may immediately see how philosophic inquiry could be in conflict with Jewish tradition: it could lead a person to suspect or reject Jewish conclusions about the nature of God, the authority of God, and the sources of Jewish law.

The philosopher traditionally sought to distinguish truth from falsehood through a process of logical reasoning and analysis based on whatever principles he thought true and valid. As but one example, the following excerpt explains the approach of Rene Descartes, one of the foremost philosophers of the western world:

The *first* [principle] was never to accept anything for true which did not clearly know to be such; . . . so clearly and distinctly as to exclude all ground of doubt. The *second*, to divide each of the difficulties under examination into as many parts as possible, and as might be necessary for its adequate solution. The *third*, to conduct my thoughts in such order that, by commencing with objects the simplest and easiest to know, I might ascend little by little, and, as it were, step by step, to the knowledge of the more complex; . . . And the *last*, in every case to make enumerations so complete, and reviews so general, that I might be assured nothing was omitted. . . . [This approach] led me to imagine that all

things, to the knowledge of which man is competent, are mutually connected in the same way, and that there is nothing so far removed from us as to be beyond our reach, or so hidden that we cannot discover it, provided only we abstain from accepting the false for the true, and always preserve in our thoughts the order necessary for the deduction of one truth from another.<sup>8</sup>

There are obviously many things in this philosophical methodology which are applicable to, and which can be used by, people who think critically to this day. Those of us who have been schooled in a western tradition of critical inquiry, asking questions and seeking to understand who we are and where we have come from, are influenced by Descartes' basic ideas to some extent. The problem for the traditional Jew, however, is that there are some things that may be accepted without clearly demonstrable proof, such as one's understanding of the nature of God or the acceptance of Jewish law (even when the law and the reason for it are not entirely understandable). For many, the sense of mitzvah, of obligation, exists strongly regardless of whether a philosophic underpinning

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<sup>8</sup> Descartes DISCOURSE ON METHOD (1637), cited in Raymond P. Stearns, PAGEANT OF EUROPE (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1961), 359.)

which makes sense to us can be found. Individuals like Maimonides sought to combine the world of philosophic inquiry with the traditional notion of mitzvah to try to bring reason and understanding to all that we do. Numerous works, such as *Sefer HaHinnuch*, have been written throughout Jewish history in order to give a logical reason for each of the many mitzvot. Perhaps works of this type derive from a basic human need to find reason and meaning behind our actions and not to accept anything simply on blind faith.

The tools of philosophic inquiry can be used to understand the import, logic, and universal value underlying much of Jewish law and practice. In his study of modern Jewish philosophers, Nathan Rotenstreich, Professor of Philosophy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, speaks of this combination as a transfer of ideas:

Thus, for instance, the transfer of the philosophical idea of first cause to the concept of God as understood in the book of Genesis represents the use of a philosophical concept in the articulation of a biblical notion. . . . In the Middle Ages, philosophy took advantage of the Aristotelian concept of the first cause or of the neo-Platonic concept of the One. In modern times, the philosophy of Judaism took advantage of the ethical meaning of the idea of God as implied in Kant, or the idea of Spirit as put for-

ward in post-Kantian systems.<sup>9</sup>

Yet despite the benefit which can be found by applying philosophical thought to Jewish tradition, the caveat given by the Rabbis should not be ignored. The same philosophical ideas rooted in alien cultures, such as Greek and other non-Jewish civilizations, can lead us astray; balancing or integrating the two is a problem with which we continue to grapple.

## QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. To understand the problems of "objective history" in contrast with historiography, try the following experiment. Ask two of your friends to help you: on a given evening, each of you watch the evening news broadcast on one of the three major networks. (Make sure you decide who will watch each network.) List the stories as they appear on the broadcast noting the following points:

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<sup>9</sup> Nathan Rotenstreich, *JEWISH PHILOSOPHY IN MODERN TIMES FROM MENDELSSOHN TO ROSENZWEIG* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968), 1-2.

- which story is put first, and what is the order of the other stories?
- how much time was given to each story?
- what were some of the salient points made by the reporters in each story?

You will have just witnessed or heard the events of the earth as they occurred in the world. Compare your lists. You will probably find differences in the order and way the stories were reported, in the amount of time given to certain stories, and in what was emphasized in each story. You might find completely different interpretations of events which were reported by reporters at the same time and place--in other words, three different versions of reality. Try to determine which is correct. You may conclude that each is correct in its own way, given the viewpoints and the biases of the reporters and those brought to it by the viewer. Imagine how much more difficult it is to determine a "correct" version of a reality that took place long ago.

2. Try to obtain some original source material about a period in American history, such as the Civil War. See how the author reached the conclusions presented in the text and on what the "facts" in the textbook were based. You should be able to judge for yourself how accurate an account is being ren-

dered in the secondary textbook. You may wish to consult your teacher to provide you with references for the primary material.

3. In order to understand the tension between Jewish tradition and philosophical inquiry, you should read *As A Driven Leaf* by Milton Steinberg. This is the story of Elisha Ben Avuya and his search for truth. You will be interested in seeing what his solution is.

4. Here is a classical proof of the existence of God by the philosopher Aristotle. It has been called the **ontological argument** because it is *proof by definition*. Read the proof carefully and see if you understand the logic behind it.

Further, those things are said to be self-evident which are known as soon as the terms are known, which the Philosopher [Aristotle] says is true of the first principles of demonstration. Thus, when the nature of a whole and of a part is known, it is at once recognized that every whole is greater than its part. But as soon as the signification of the name *God* is understood, it is at once seen that God exists. For by this name is signified that thing than which nothing greater can be conceived. But that which exists actually and mentally is greater than that which exists only mentally. Therefore, since as soon as the name *God* is understood it exists men-

tally, it also follows that it exists actually. Therefore the proposition *God exists* is self-evident.<sup>10</sup>

Now try to consider how reciting a *berachah* (a blessing) might be, in a way, a similar "proof" by the Jew for the existence of God. You may find it helpful to look at another USY source book by Steven Brown, *L'ayla L'ayla, Higher and Higher: Making Jewish Prayer Part of Us* (New York: United Synagogue Youth, 1979), Chapter 4, especially pages 87 and 92.

To summarize, then, tools used in literary, scientific historical, sociological, anthropological, psychological, and philosophical inquiries are all applicable, in one way or another, to the study of Torah. The more you can improve your skills and use them in your secular studies, the more you will be able to apply them to your Jewish studies. Similarly, the more you develop your skills in your Jewish education, the greater will be the benefit to your secular studies. The use of these tools will make you all the better a student, and the better will be your grasp on the heritage of knowledge which awaits you.

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<sup>10</sup> From John Hick, ed., CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY READINGS IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1964), 37.

### Acquiring the tools

It may take a lifetime of patience and careful work to master the skills of inquiry that open up the beauty of Talmud Torah as well as secular learning to you. However, you are well on your way, having been given an introduction in your education so far. Never underestimate how much your Jewish education to this point may have already helped you develop of the skills of interpreting literature and language. Most students do not have the amount of exposure to classical texts and analysis as Jewish children have, regardless of whether the Jewish education was exciting or boring. This background has added to your overall academic expertise--whether you realize it or not! To help you continue and refine those skills, we will provide some strategies or techniques which you can use in your all aspects of study. While they are worthwhile at any stage of life, they may be especially important throughout the next years, if you continue in an intensive academic environment

**Basic Inquiry Questions.** Some basic study questions and approaches follow. Though they have particular relevance to the study of poetry or prayer, they can be used to ferret out the meaning of any book, article, or other literary work; most



can be applied profitably to non-literary study, as well. I am grateful to my teacher and friend, Dr. Saul Wachs, for preparing the original questions on which this formulation is based.<sup>11</sup>

1. Summarize what the material seems to say; i.e., what does it say to you?

2. Can the material being read be divided into units of thought or style? The units may be stylistic (including, person, form of address, mood, literary devices, structure) or conceptual (by the content or ideas).

3. If you don't know the time and place of authorship, can they be inferred from style or content?

4. By and for whom was the particular passage written and by whom was it first read? What type of experience might have stimulated the writing of the passage? Could we have a similar experience today?

5. What related experiences (both positive and negative) do we have that the author did not have? What experiences might the author have had that we do not have?

6. What questions is the passage attempting to answer?

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<sup>11</sup> Saul P. Wachs, "An Application of Inquiry-Teaching to the Seedur," (unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1970).

7. In what context was this passage written--as part of a larger work, to stand on its own, as a part of a sequence?

8. Where is the particular passage located in the overall work in which it is found? Why is it there and not elsewhere?

9. What ideas are in this particular unit of study? What is the most important? What is the next important, and so on?

10. Can you tell how the writer feels about the ideas which are being expressed? How do you feel about the ideas that are expressed?

11. What has happened over time to the ideas expressed in the passage? Have they evolved? Are they still the same? Have they lost all relevance or meaning?

12. What role does this passage play today in the general community and in the Jewish community?

13. What role do the ideas in this passage if any play in your own life?

14. How do you feel about the passage itself? How might it affect you if you took it seriously?

15. What would you have to do to make the ideas expressed in the passage a part of your life? If you wished not to make them a part of your life, why not?

**Additional tips.** If you are studying a poem or a short story here are some additional guidelines:<sup>12</sup>

1. Read the passage more than once; two or three readings sometimes are necessary to let you get your bearings and understand what it is all about.

2. Keep a dictionary near you and use it. An author of great literature selects a particular word for a particular reason. You must understand a word's connotations (the nuances and associated meanings) as well as its denotations (the restricted "definition").

3. If you are studying a poem, read it aloud in order to hear the sounds of the words. In addition, since much of Jewish tradition was handed down orally this may help recapture some of the original feeling for the text.

**Problem solving.** Often academic work in the sciences, and sometimes in the humanities, as well, requires you to solve a problem. There are four major steps in problem solving; if you work through each step, your task will become easier. The following example is from a high school al-

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<sup>12</sup>Based on Laurence Perrine, *SOUND AND SENSE* (New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1956), 17-19.

gebra textbook, but the steps involved apply to the solution of any problem.<sup>13</sup>

### Four Steps in Problem Solving

*Problem:* The combined population of Watertown, River City, and Coldstream is 89,400. How many people live in Watertown if the population of River City is 7,400 more than that of Coldstream, and the number of people in Watertown is twice the number in River City?

**Read**--*Identify* what is to be found.

--*Identify* what is given.

You are asked to find the population of Watertown. The combined population of Watertown and two other cities is given. The population of Watertown is expressed in terms of the population of Coldstream.

**Plan**--*Analyze* the information.

--*Decide* on the operations.

--*Represent* the data.

--*Write* a mathematical sentence.

**Solve**--*Perform* the necessary operations.

--*Solve* the sentence.

**Interpret**--*Check* the solution.

--*Decide* if the answer is reasonable.

**Value concepts.** *The Rabbinic Mind*, an im-

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<sup>13</sup>

From Eugene Nichols, et. al., HOLT ALGEBRA 2 WITH TRIGONOMETRY (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1982).

portant volume which explains much about classical Jewish literature, gives us a very helpful handle on understanding many of the complex concepts, practices, traditions and ideas that we come across in Talmud Torah. The author of the book, Dr. Max Kadushin, talked about the Rabbis as having a rather unique way of looking at the world. He described rabbinic thought as being made up of "value concepts" which generally came from the Bible and were then refined and developed in rabbinic literature. The value concepts were expressed in the form of nouns such as *tzedekah*, *gemilut ḥasadim*, or *berachah*. None of these concepts is rigidly defined; they get their definitions from the various circumstances in which they are applied. Since the value concepts are all interwoven and interrelated--and not organized in any coherent whole--their definitions (or meanings) are modified depending on the specific instance and other value concepts which are applicable at that time. They refer to something very specific and concrete while, at the same time, they are an explanation of a larger idea or understanding of the world.

Value concepts can be used to apply to a specific case or as a general principle of a particular world view that is Jewish. So for example, the mitzvah of *bikkur holim*, "visiting the sick," refers to the actual visit to a sick person in a hospital; when you make such a visit you are considered to have performed the the mitzvah of

*bikkur ḥolim*. At the same time *bikkur ḥolim* involves much more than the visit. It also involves worrying about that person, providing for his or her needs, making sure that a hospital is available if needed, sending a card or letter or basket of cheer, worrying about the needs of the sick in general, forming organizations to visit people who might not have others to visit them, and so on. *Bikkur ḥolim* also "interacts" with other value concepts and is part of other general concepts (such as *gemilut ḥasadim* and *tzedekah*), as well.

Rabbinic value concepts, therefore, form an organic whole which involves practice and ideas, reasoning, knowledge, and carrying out our beliefs and values. Kadushin believed that there were four basic concepts which integrated all of the value concepts: *Middat ha-Din* (God's justice), *Middat Raḥamim* (God's love of mercy), *Torah*, and *Yisrael*. Since these terms, and many other value concepts, appear again and again throughout all of Jewish law and literature, a list of some of the concepts is included in **Appendix C**, where a brief English "definition" is given for each of the terms. However, they are impossible to translate because (depending on the specific context) they mean so very much as they interact with one or more other value concepts.

**Miscellaneous approaches** We would now like to provide a few additional suggestions for

ways of approaching textual material and improving your study habits in general. Though the first set of guidelines derives from the Jewish tradition and the second is based on an English textbook, both sets of suggestions are complementary and both should prove useful in any field of study.

We turn first to some rabbinic maxims on study methods and techniques. Perhaps you could apply some of the tools of inquiry enumerated previously to understand some of the thinking which led the Rabbis to their particular points of view regarding the actual act of Talmud Torah:

ברית כרותה שכל הלומד בבית הכנסת לא  
במהרה הוא משכח וכל היגע בתלמודו בצנעה  
מחכים שנה' ואת צנועים חכמה וכל המשמיע  
קולו בשעת תלמודו מתקיים בידו אכל הקורא  
בלחש במהרה הוא שוכח.

An agreement (promise) has been made that whoever studies in the House of Assembly (i.e., synagogue or Beit Midrash) will not easily forget what he has learned. Whoever labors over his studying in private will become wise, as it is said: "Wisdom is with the modest" (Proverbs 11:2). Whoever raises his voice while studying will have his learning endure, but one who reads silently will soon forget.

(Shulhan Aruch, *Yoreh De'ah* 246:22)

עד אימתי חייב ללמוד עד יום מותו שנאמר  
 ופן יסורו מלבבך כל ימי חיך וכל זמן שלא  
 יעסוק בתורה הוא שוכח.

For how long is one obligated to study?  
 Until the day of death, as it is said, "So  
 that they do not fade from your mind as  
 long as you live" (Deuteronomy 4:9).  
 When a person doesn't study, he forgets.

(Shulhan Aruch, *Yoreh De'ah* 246:3)

כל המשים על לבו לעסוק בתורה ולא לעסוק  
 מלאכה להתפרנס מן הצדקה הרי זה מחלל  
 השם ומבוזה התורה שאסור ליהנות מדברי  
 תורה וכל תורה שאין עמה מלאכה גוררת עון  
 וסופו ללסטם הבריאות.

Anyone who makes up his mind to study  
 Torah and not work, but live on charity,  
 profanes God's name and disgraces the  
 Torah, for it is forbidden to benefit  
 from the words of the Torah. All Torah  
 study which is not combined with work  
 leads to sin. The end of such a person  
 will be that he will rob others.

(Shulhan Aruch, *Yoreh De'ah* 246:21, note)



גדולה תורה יותר מן הכנה ומן המלכות, שהמלכות נקנית בשלשים מעלות, והכנה בעשרים וארבע, והתורה נקנית בארבעים ושמונה דברים. ואלו הן: בתלמוד, בשמיעת האזן, בעריכת שפתים, בבינת הלב, בשכלות הלב, באימה, ביראה, בענוה, בשמחה, בשמוש חכמים, ברבוק חברים, בפלפול התלמידים, בישוב, במקרא, במשנה, במעוט סחורה, במעוט שנה, במעוט שיחה, במעוט תענוג, במעוט שחוק, במעוט דרך ארץ, בארך אפים, בלב טוב באמונת חכמים, ובקבלת היסורין. המכיר את־מקומו, והשמח בחלקו, והעושה סיג לדבריו, ואינו מחזיק טובה לעצמו, אהוב, אהב את־המקום, אהב את־הבריות, אהב את־הצדקות, אהב את־המישרים, אהב את־התוכחות, מתרחק מן הכבוד, ולא מגיס לבו בתלמודו, ואינו שמח בהוראה, נושא בעל עם חברו, ומכריעו לכף־זכות, ומעמידו על האמת, ומעמידו על השלום, ומתישב בתלמודו, שואל ומשיב, שומע ומוסיף, הלומד על מנת ללמד, והלומר על מנת לעשות, המחכים את־רבו, והמכון את־שמועתו, והאומר דבר בשם אומר. הא למדת, שהל־האומר דבר בשם אומר, מביא גאלה לעולם שנאמר: ותאמר אסתר למלך בשם מרדכי.

Torah is greater than Prieshood and Royalty. Royalty is acquired through thirty virtues, Priesthood through twenty-four, Torah, however, is acquired through forty-eight virtues. By study; by attentiveness; by orderly speech; by an understanding heart; by a perceptive heart;

by awe; by fear; by humility; by joy; by ministering to the sages; by cleaving to colleagues; by acute discussion with pupils; by calmness in study; by study of Scripture and Mishnah; by a minimum of business; by a minimum of sleep; by a minimum of small talk; by a minimum of wordly pleasure; by a minimum of frivolity; by a minimum of wordly pursuits; by patience; by a generous heart; by trust in the sages; by acceptance of suffering. By knowing one's place; by contentment with one's lot; by guarding one's speech; by taking no personal credit; by being beloved; by loving God; by loving all creatures; by loving charitable deeds; by loving rectitude; by loving reproof; by shunning honor; by not boasting of one's learning; by not delighting in rendering decisions; by sharing the burden with one's fellow; by influencing him to virtue; by setting him on the path of truth; by setting him on the path of peace; by concentrating one's studies; by asking and answering questions; by absorbing knowledge and contributing to it; by studying in order to teach and to perform mitzvot; by sharpening the wisdom of his teacher; by being precise in transmitting what he has learned; by quoting his source. From this we learn that a person who quotes

his source brings deliverance to the world, as it is written, "And Esther spoke to the king, in the name of Mordecai" (Esther 2:22)

(Pirkei Avot 6:6)

Now, here are some reading techniques and study aids which you can apply to strengthen your academic prowess in general:<sup>14</sup>

PREVIEWING is taking a brief, but planned, look at the material before you begin to read. The following procedure can be followed when previewing:

1. Read the title, author, date, and any other information important to your purpose.
2. Read the headnote (the paragraph between the title and the body of the reading) and the first two or three paragraphs.
3. Read all subheadings, chapter titles, and boldfaced and italicized words.
4. Read the last paragraph.
5. Study the author's style, especially his manner of structuring sentences and paragraphs.
6. Look for topic sentences in the paragraphs and take note of any pattern followed by the author. Quite often the topic sentence will be first in the paragraph, although some writers choose a different position to add variety to their writing.

DETERMINING A PURPOSE before you begin to read is a necessary step in the reading process. With a specific pur-

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<sup>14</sup> Based on Patrick Sebranek and Verne Meyer, *Basic English Revisited* (Burlington, WI: Basic English Revisited, 1977) 74-75.

pose in mind, you can take full advantage of several other pre-reading techniques:

You should **ASK QUESTIONS** which you hope to find the answers to in your selection. Continue to raise these questions throughout your reading. It is also a good idea to write down your questions as you think of them. It becomes a natural thing, then, to fill in the answers as you find them.

Your should **LEARN TO ANTICIPATE** what is coming up in each of the various sections of the article. This will help you to concentrate and to maintain an interest in what you are reading.

**ADJUSTING YOUR RATE** to suit your purpose and the difficulty of the material is another of the common sense techniques which often goes unused. There are three basic reading rates which you can use:

Skimming is the fastest reading rate and is actually a form of previewing. You can use it to get a quick overview of the material you are reading or to find the answers to specific questions.

Pacing is a technique you can use to increase your reading and skimming speed. By moving a card or your hand quickly down a page, you can consume many pages of print in the time it takes to read a single page.

Studying is the slowest, most deliberate rate. It involves several steps: a. **SURVEY**: look over the entire reading assignment, noting such things as the title, headnot, chapter titles and sub-headings, illustrations, and bold-faced words. b. **QUESTION**: ask questions as you survey in the hopes of further establishing a positive foundation for the actual reading. c. **READ**: read the article carefully from start to finish looking for main ideas, major details, and additional answers to the questions you have raised. d. **RECITE**: recall or remember what you have read by answering (aloud or to yourself) all the questions you sought answers to while you were reading. This should be done at the end of each major section and again when you have finished the entire reading assignment. Applying the **WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY, and HOW** questions could help

this final reciting. e. **REVIEW:** look over all your notes in preparation for a test, discussion, demonstration, or whatever else may be required of you for this assignment. Many people find that it is much easier and more productive to review with another person than alone.

As a final study tip, we'd like to have you think about the skills necessary to comprehend any material which you are trying to learn. The list of comprehension skills which follows is related to the inquiry questions presented toward the beginning of this section.

**Isolating details,** separate an individual part from among other parts.

**Recalling specific facts,** bring back from memory a precise event or circumstance.

**Retaining a concept,** keep in mind and recall a generalization or idea formed by mentally combining characteristics and details.

**Organizing facts,** form stated, interdependent, or coordinated events or circumstances into a whole.

**Understanding the main idea,** perceive the writer's primary intention as interpreted in the light of important details.

**Drawing a conclusion,** arrive at the one decision justified by the stated evidence.

**Making a judgment,** arrive at a sound decision (not necessarily the only one) based on the stated evidence.

**Making an inference,** arrive at a deduction based on assumed premises.

**Recognizing tone,** appreciate qualities of style that reveal an author's attitude or point of view.

**Understanding characters,** appreciate the aggregate of features and traits that form an individual nature of some person.

**Appreciation of literary forms,** distinguish among the various types of writing and figures of speech.

**Knowledge of word meanings,** comprehend the vocabulary used, by using a dictionary or defining words from their contexts.

It would be worthwhile for you to create a question, based on each of these skills, that you would ask yourself as you read through a particular work.

**The Hevruta Method.** As you may have already been able to see from what you have read so far, the study of Torah was really not a lonely activity, to be engaged in by individuals oblivious to one another. As a matter of fact, traditionally most study was conducted in partnerships or in small groups. In this way people teach one another and learn from one another, reinforcing each other religiously as well as intellectually. Unfortunately, most educational systems today do not place much of a value on students helping each other. Too often such cooperation is, at best, suspect, or, at worst, viewed as cheating. However, there are models of student-to-student learning and cooperation even in our own times which are quite

important for academic success. One such model is the way law students often form "study groups," getting together to study cases and challenge one another before being challenged by the professor in class.

In modern times, schools have developed a system of peer mediated instruction in which materials are prepared for one student to teach another student. Sometimes a strong student is paired with a weak student or sometimes students of equal ability work together. Small groups of peers teaching one another have always had an important role in Talmud Torah. Such *chevrotot*, or study circles go all the way back to talmudic times; then, much later in the sixteenth century, mystics in Tzefat often studied in small groups. This is the classic expression of the partner system of learning:

יהושע בן פרחיה ונתי הארבלי קבלו מהם.  
יהושע בן פרחיה אומר: עשה לך רב, וקנה לך  
חבר, והוי דן את כל האדם לכף זכות.

Joshua ben Perahyah and Nittai, of Arbel, received the tradition from them. Joshua ben Perahyah taught: Select a master-teacher for yourself; acquire a colleague for study; when you assess people, tip the balance in their favor.

(Pirkei Avot 1:6)

Perhaps you could find friend who would be willing to undertake a study project together with you. Spouses studying together can add a tremendous amount to the marriage relationship as well. The nature of a fully intimate relationship with a friend is clearly outlined in the following rabbinic exhortation:

שאיין חבר נקנה אלא בקשי קשין מכאן אמרו  
 יקנה אדם חבר לעצמו שיהא קורא עמו ושונה  
 עמו אוכל עמו ושותה עמו וגולה לו סתריו וכן  
 הוא אומר טובים השנים מן האחד.

A friend can be gained only with great difficulty. Therefore they say, "Let a person get a friend, one who will read with him, study with him, eat and drink with him, and share his secrets, for two are better than one" (Eccles. 4:9).

(Sifre Deut., *Nitzavim* [Finkelstein, 129])

**Prayer as a means of study.** Throughout the development of Jewish tradition, study and prayer were considered opposite sides of the same coin. Both prayer and study were viewed as ways of getting close to God, and the act of study was considered a devotional one. As explained above, the Siddur is replete with many passages from the Bible and rabbinic literature, and the prayers, them-



selves, are worthy of study. In addition, on Shabbat, Festivals, and several times during the week, we read from the Torah as part of the ritual service. There can be no doubt that study and prayer are partners. Even during the time of the Second Temple, when sacrifices were still the chief form of worship, synagogues began to flourish and daily Torah study became an integral part of the tradition. Study really came into its own as a form of worship with the destruction of the Temple:

כבר תקנתי להם סדר קרבנות בזמן שקוראין  
בהן לפני מעלה אני עליהם כאילו הקריבום  
לפני ואני מוחל להם על כל עונותיהם.

I already established the order of sacrifices for them. When they read about them before Me [after the destruction of the Temple], I will consider it as though they had actually offered them and I will forgive their sins."

*(Ta'anit 27b)*

Despite some tensions in eighteenth century Hasidism caused by the congruence of study of prayer, the combining of study and prayer expanded and found its ultimate base in the organization of the Siddur. In every service there are passages which may be offered as prayer and which also provide additional opportunities for study. Again it

is our recommendation that as you find yourself involved in a prayer experience you stop from time to time; contemplate the particular passage both as a "piece of the prayer liturgy" and as a source of study.

**Selecting a college/Judaic program.** We have referred constantly to the coming years in your education. As you make your own choices, particularly if you will be going to college within the next few years, you will have much to say about your own involvement in Talmud Torah. There you will be subject to a range of choices, lifestyles, experiences, and opportunities probably unknown to you up until now. As you make your choices about where to apply, we encourage you to look for a college where there are possibilities for you to continue studying Torah, be they in the formal university setting, through a local Hillel, or in a "private" chevruta. The point from the following Hasidic tale can easily be applied to choosing a college:

On a map of the world, in addition to lines marking the borders, there are dots marking cities. The larger the dot, the larger the population of the city. You can tell from the map just how important a city is. On "God's map," however, a large dot marks the site of a great center of Talmud Torah. Thus, the small towns of Radin, Mir, Slobodka, and

Volozhin appear with large marks.<sup>15</sup>

We'd also like to suggest that unless there is absolutely no other option, correspondence courses are generally not a satisfactory alternative to local classes in Jewish studies, although they may be a fine supplement to formal classes.

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<sup>15</sup>Based on Mendel Weinbach, GIVE US LIFE (New York: Feldheim, 1969), 198-199.

## QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Set a "chevruta" program with one or two friends. Select any material of Judaica and establish a rotation so you both prepare in advance. Make a contract with one another. List in it the hours you will spend together, the amount of time you will prepare separately, and what you will do to test each other's knowledge at the end of a specified period of time, such as six weeks. Include in the contract a way of celebrating the successful conclusion of the project. Sign the document and give each other a copy.

2. Make a list of all the passages in the Siddur which are citations from earlier literature, or "potentially" Talmud Torah. Working from the list might, in fact, be a good starting point for your own Jewish studies, with a partner or on your own.

### Issues of Holiness

The final material of this section is devoted to a rather practical matter--the way we treat the physical books or scrolls which embody the words of Torah.

You may know that if a synagogue is burning, the Torah scrolls are to be saved, if at all possible. On a less dramatic scale, however, when a sacred book drops on the floor, a Jew will pick it up and kiss it to show his or her love of the words it contains. When the Torah is paraded through the synagogue, people either kiss it or bow in its direction; they don't turn their backs to it, again out of recognition of its special nature. Below are a few additional statements about the proper treatment of sacred texts:

אין זורקין כתבי הקדש ואפילו הלכות ואגרות  
(ואסור להפוך אותו על פניהם וכשמצאו כך  
צריך להפכו.

Sacred books should not be thrown, even if they are books of law and *aggada*. Note: It is forbidden to put them upside down. If they are found that way, one must turn them right side up.

(Shulhan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 282:5)

מותר להניח ספר תורה על ס"ת ומניחים  
 חומשים ע"ג נביאים וכתובים אבל אין מניחים  
 נביאים וכתובים על גבי חומשים ולא חומשים  
 על גבי ס"ת.

It is permitted to place a *sefer torah* on another *sefer torah*, or *humashim* on (scrolls of) Prophets or the Writings. However, one must not place Prophets or Writings (scrolls) on *humashim*, nor *humashim* on a *sefer torah*.

(**Shulhan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 282:19**)

The reverence Jews have always held for the written word--especially sacred texts--and the vessel which contained them, such as the Torah scroll or books of prayer and study, was also expressed in the way these objects were treated when they could no longer be used. In an age when there were no printing presses or copy machines, precious few manuscripts from which people could study were available. They were, therefore, used so heavily that they were worn out in the process. However, according to Jewish law and practice, ritual objects which contained the name of God could not be thrown away or destroyed. The tradition was to treat these objects with great reverence. A place called a *Genizah* (from Persian, "ganoz," which means "treasury" or "hidden place") was created to house these ritual

objects. Much as we treat a corpse for burial with great reverence and respect, so too do we treat ritual objects such as a Torah scroll, prayerbook, tallit, tefilin, and books of study. In some communities books which were banned were also placed in the genizah and thus became known as *Sefarim genuzim*, or books that were to be hidden away.

ספר תורה שבלה או נפסל נותנין אותו בכלי  
חרס וקוברין אותו אצל ת"ח וזו היא גניזתו.

A *sefer torah* which has been worn out or has become unfit for use, is put in an earthenware vessel and buried next to a scholar. This is its *genizah*.

(Shulhan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 282:10)

A *genizah*, therefore, was a place of concealment. Sometimes this was a hidden cave; other times it was space between the stories of a building or a separate cupboard or small room with a small opening into which could be placed the remnants of books and manuscripts which contained the name of God. Therefore, they were called *sheimot* (literally, "names"). Special ceremonies often occurred when quantities of such used materials were conveyed to the *genizah*. The vessels of the printed word were conveyed to the *genizah* amidst joy and celebration over the love the Jewish people

have had with the books. Often things placed in the genizah were destroyed over the years from mildew and erosion, but in certain climates they were preserved.

Such was the case with a great genizah in old Cairo which was discovered by Professor Solomon Schechter. Schechter's discovery opened to modern Jewish scholarship thousands of pages of ancient manuscripts and original works which had been lost or not known to modern scholars. Ancient Hebrew poems from Palestine, Babylonia and Spain were discovered, as were texts relating to the Bible, documents on ancient Jewish communities such as the Karaites, and handwritten letters and documents from famous Jewish personalities were all discovered in this genizah. Scholars have spent many years and are still spending time reading these documents, researching them and learning more about the literary and social history of our people. In modern times, there are community *genizot*, and many synagogues have periodic burial services. You might want to check with your own Rabbi and synagogue to see what their procedures are for handling used religious objects.

A wonderful project might be to gather together from the congregation used prayer books, tallitot, and tefilin. Then organize such a ceremony sometime around the High Holidays or around Simchat Torah as a way of honoring the study of



Torah and performing a wonderful community service.

כל כתבי הקדש מצילין אותן מפני הדליקה בין שקורין בהן ובין שאין קורין בהן אע"פ שכתובים בכל לשון טעונים גניזה ומפני מה אין קורין בהם מפני ביטול בית המדרש.

All sacred writings are to be saved from a fire [on Shabbat] whether they are books read [in public] or not. Even if they are written in any language, they must be "hidden" [in a genizah].

(*Shabbat* 16:1)

ת"ר תשמישי מצוה נורקין תשמישי קדושה נגנזין ואלו הן תשמישי מצוה סוכה לולב שופר ציצית ואלו הן תשמישי קדושה דלוסקמי ספרים תפילין ומזוזות ותיק של ס"ת ונרתיק של תפילין ורצועותיהן . . .

Our Rabbis taught: "Accessories of religious observances [when unfit] are to be thrown away; accessories of holiness are to be stored [in a genizah]. The following are accessories of religious observances: a *sukkah*, a *lulav*, a *shofar*, *tzitzit*. The following are accessories of holiness: large sacks for keeping *Sifrei Torah* in, *tefillin* and *mezuzot*, a mantle for a *sefer torah* and a *tefillin* bag and *tefillin* straps."

(*Megillah* 26b)

A similar custom showing the joy and respect we feel in studying Torah is a *siyyum*, or concluding ceremony upon finishing the writing of a Torah scroll or upon concluding the study of a tractate, or volume, of the Talmud. When at last the Torah scroll is almost finished the *sofer* (scribe), may leave the first line and last lines of the scroll with letters in outline form alone, so that members of the congregation can fill in each letter. Traditionally it was a mitzvah for each Jew to write a Sefer Torah. This mitzvah was fulfilled somewhat symbolically by helping to fill in a letter, thereby making the scroll proper for use.

Another tradition consisted of a celebration when a group of students or individuals finished the study of a tractate of the Talmud. A special formula is recited for the privilege of studying Torah; it asks that we be able to continue studying in the future. A *se'udat mitzvah* was held and the students finishing the tractate often taught the last part of it and discussed the contents and purpose of the volume. Many groups sought to arrange their study cycles to finish the tractate and have the *siyyum* on the day before Pesach when the first born males are supposed to fast. The joy and the mitzvah of the *siyyum* override the mitzvah to fast and so people participating in this *siyyum* be-

come free from of fasting on Erev Pesach. This ceremony is called "*siyum Bechorot*."

It is also appropriate to have a *siyyum hasefer* when finishing a book of the Torah or a book such as Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) or any other substantial piece of a Torah study in which we are involved. All of us need to mark our achievements in life and to sit back and take pleasure in what we have accomplished. The *siyyum hasefer* with appropriate singing, storytelling, recounting of materials studied, even acting out some of the stories or values which have been studied are all appropriate ways to celebrate the conclusion of a unit of Torah study.

Yet another custom showing our feelings of reverence and joy for the act of study is the *Kaddish d'Rabanan* or the Rabbinical Kaddish. Whenever a minyan of people study any sacred text, one of them recites a form of the kaddish which recalls the Rabbis, their disciples, and all those who engage in the study of Torah:

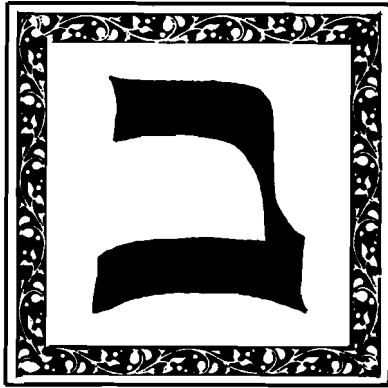
על ישראל ועל רבנן ועל תלמידיהון, ועל כל-  
 תלמידי תלמידיהון, ועל כל-מאן דעסקין  
 באוריתא, די באתרא הרין ודי בכל-אתר ואתר,  
 יהא להון ולכון שלמא רבא, חנא וחסרא ורחמין,  
 וחיין אריכין ומוזנא רויחא, ופורקנא מן קדם  
 אבוהון די בשמיא, ואמרו אמן.

Heavenly Father, grant lasting peace to  
 our people and their leaders, to our tea-

chers and their disciples, to all who engage in the study of Torah, in this land and in all other lands. Let there be grace and kindness, compassion and love for them and for us all. Grant us fullness of life, and sustenance. Save us from all danger and distress. And let us say: Amen.



## CHAPTER FOUR CREATIVITY AND TALMUD TORAH



### Contemporary Hermeneutics

When I was a student in school--we should remain "students" even after our formal schooling is completed--the excitement of Talmud Torah led me to want to combine my secular studies in education with the vast amount of Jewish source material to which I had been exposed. It was also of great concern to me to be certain that the tradition of interpreting texts (hermeneutics), which was always changing, developing, and enriching Jewish life, would continue in modern times. I also felt very

strongly that Jews today, young and old, ought to see themselves not only as claiming their legacy, but as being able to contribute to it.

Too often Hebrew schools treated students as receptacles, pouring information into them without allowing them to respond creatively to the wisdom of our Sages and to make their own contributions to the development of Talmud Torah. It was important to me that young people be able to express their own responses to the wisdom and beauty of our tradition through music and art, drama and literature, filmmaking and photography, slide-sound presentations and sculpture, or any other creative form. Accordingly, I chose to write my doctoral dissertation about the use of modern educational media and materials in creatively developing the Talmud Torah tradition:

Our rapidly expanding knowledge of the ancient world and even more recent events in Jewish history have enlarged our awareness of the range of culture and creativity possessed by our ancestors. . . . However, in the course of time, the unique medium of the printed word took on a sanctity of its own. What had been passed on orally, and remained fluid, open to change, revision, and question, became rigid, binding, authoritative. It became the only "legitimate" medium of Jewish expression. . . .

Though much of the media and materials of expression available today are unknown to traditional hermeneutical methods, many non-print modes of expression have always been a part of the tradition. The detailed account of Betsalel's art and craftsmanship in the construction of the Tabernacle is elegant testimony to the most ancient Jewish devotion to expression of deep religious feeling in tangible, visual forms (Ex. 35-38). The book of Psalms reiterates the worship of God through music and song (Ps. 92, 96, 97, 150). Throughout Jewish history religious craftsmen have created objets d'art which embody their faith. Utilization of modern media alternatives to the verbal tradition are a consistent, though possibly innovative, extension of the hermeneutical tradition so essential to Jewish life...For Jewish culture to flourish it must continue to adapt alternative modes of expression to its particular world-view, changing the nature of those media and being changed by them.<sup>1</sup>

This, then, is your invitation to contribute to the legacy for yourself and for the future heirs.

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<sup>1</sup> Steven M. Brown, "Media, Materials, and Instruction in Jewish Religious Education" (unpublished Ed.D. dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1974), 36-40.



### Personal creativity

If you are a music student you are undoubtedly aware of the hundreds of composers over the ages who have set biblical texts to music. Jewish composers, such as Salamone De' Rossi and Leonard Bernstein, and Christian composers, such as Bach and Handel, have given the world great gifts. They have done so--in response to a text--by offering their understanding of the meaning and tone of a particular Psalm or other passage in the Bible through their orchestration and instrumentation. Throughout history, artists have sought to capture biblical stories and Jewish values by expressing their own beliefs in a visual format. Marc Chagall, the object of much contemporary study and fascination, is but one example of an artist who has expressed a deep sense of value and identity and a conflict of identity. One way for you to develop your own ideas for creative responses to Talmud Torah through artistic expressive means such as art, ritual objects, calligraphy, architecture, or sculpture, is to view the work of others. One stimulating overview of Jewish art throughout history is entitled *Jewish Art and Civilization* (Fribourg, Switzerland: Chartwell Books, Inc., 1972), edited by Geoffrey Wigoder. That beautiful volume and numerous other books of Jewish art should be available in your synagogue library or, if you are lucky enough to have one, a local Jewish bookstore.

It should be clear from your reading so far that, throughout the ages, the Jewish people poured the bulk of its intellectual and creative energy into the expansion of texts. By means of interpretation and re-interpretation, the process of *midrash* or creative literature, the meanings a text held in its original contexts (*peshat*) were translated into additional, sometimes hidden, meanings. However, there was a time when the Rabbis felt that merely putting the interpretations and laws into writing would lead to a stultification of the tradition.

והא אמר רבי אבא בריה דרבי חייא בר אבא  
א"ר יוחנן כותבי הלכות כשורף התורה והלמד  
מהן אינו נוטל שכר דרש ר' יהודה בר נחמני  
מתורגמניה דר"ל כתוב אחד אומר כתוב לך  
את הדברים האלה וכתוב אחד אומר כי על פי  
הדברים האלה לומר לך דברים שעל פה אי  
אתה רשאי לאומרן בכתבוש בכתבאי אתה  
רשאי לאומרן על פה . . . דהא רבי יוחנן  
ור"ל מעייני בסיפרא דאגדתא בשבתא ודרשי  
הכי עת לעשות לה' הפרו תורתך אמרי מוטב  
תיעקר תורה ואל תשתכח תורה מישראל.

Didn't Rabbi Abba the son of Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba state in Rabbi Yohanan's name, "Those who write down the *halachot* (laws) are like those who burn the Torah, and someone who learns from the writings receives no reward." Rabbi Yehudah bar Nahman, the *meturgeman* (public interpreter or spokesman) of Resh Lakish gave this explanation: One (part of the)

verse (in Exodus 34:27) says, "Write down these words," and another part of it says, "In accordance with these words." This is to tell you that what was received orally should not be written, and what was received written should not be recited orally (by heart)...Rabbi Yohanan and Resh Lakish used to read books of *aggadah* on Shabbat (so they would be remembered), and explained (what they did) as follows: "At a time of working for the Lord, they have broken the law" (Ps. 119:126). They said, "It is preferable to uproot the Torah [to violate one part of the law, in this case studying the words that were 'illegally' written] than to have it forgotten from Israel."

(*Temurah* 14b)

Indeed it could even be argued that after the invention of the printing press, by printing the Siddur the tradition of creating and reciting new prayers nearly came to a standstill. That which is printed seems to take on a sanctity of its own, and so, despite the benefits of having more copies of the Siddur, creativity was minimized. It is to be hoped that you will see yourself as a creative extension of the generations of Jews who have come before you in realizing that the Torah is yours for the taking--to add to it, to modify it by enlarging its meaning and relevance to others, and to respond creatively to it in any way you can. It is interesting

that the tradition emphasized that the Torah was available to everyone; it was not the exclusive province of any single individual or even of any one tribe:

מפני מה לא ניתנה תורה בארץ ישראל שלא ליתן פתחון פה לאומות העולם לומר לפי שנתנה תורה בארצו לפיכך לא קבלנו עלינו. דבר אחר שלא להטיל מחלוקת בין השבטים שלא יהא זה אומר בארצי נתנה תורה וזה אומר בארצי נתנה תורה לפיכך ניתנה במדבר דימוס פרהסיא במקום הפקר.

Why was the Torah not given in the Land of Israel? So that the (other) nations of the world wouldn't be able to say, "Since it was given there, we haven't accepted it" [i.e. it was available to anyone who would accept it].

*Mechilta, Bahodesh, Yitro, II, 236)*

למה נתנה במדבר? שאלו נתנה להם בארץ היה השבט שנתנה בתחומו אומר: אני קודם בה. לכך נתנה במדבר, שיהיו הכל שוים בה.

Why was it given in the desert? If it had been given to them in the Land of Israel, the tribe in whose territory it had been given would claim, "I take precedence in it." Therefore, it was given in the desert so that all would have equal claim to it.

*(Bemidbar Rabbah, Hukat 19:26)*

The desert, then, served as a cauldron in which ideas could percolate, develop, and be put forward. One interesting facet of these rabbinic statements--and many others which are similar--of why the Torah was given in the desert is hinted at in the following source:

א"ר יוחנן לא כרת הקב"ה ברית עם ישראל  
אלא בשביל דברים שבעל פה שנאמר כי על  
פי הדברים האלה כרתי אתך ברית ואת  
ישראל.

Rabbi Yoḥanan said, "The Holy One, blessed be He, established the covenant with Israel only because of the "Oral Tradition," as it is said, 'For in accordance with [literally, "by the *mouth* of these words have I made a covenant with you and with Israel'" (Ex. 34:27).

(*Gittin* 60b)

In other words, only the Torah (*Torah shehbiḳ'tav*, the "Written Torah") was the property of anyone who would take it. The exegetical tradition surrounding it (*Torah sheh-b'al peh*, the "Oral Torah") was the exclusive domain of Israel. In many ways, therefore, Jewish tradition recognizes that it is in the realm of "interpretation"--response to the text--that you have the opportunity to make your unique contribution to the ever-growing legacy.

## QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

The remainder of this section offers areas of creative endeavor that you might wish to undertake and some questions to consider. These suggestions, even though there are many, are only examples from a list that has no end. You can pursue any of these ideas individually, with a partner in a *hevruta* (a small group), with other members of a USY chapter, or in a classroom setting. Some of the projects may require additional guidance from your rabbi or a local educator.

1. Apply some of the techniques of literary analysis to passages from the Bible or Siddur. This has been done, for example, by Aryeh Strauss, a leading Israeli literary critic, who used formalistic criticism (explained in Chapter 2) to analyze Psalm 114. This Psalm from *Hallel, B'tsayt Yisrael*, is about the Exodus from Egypt. Through an analysis of the meaning of the nature of the words and the process of compression of language (i.e., reducing the number of words in a sentence to a bare minimum to convey meaning), Strauss showed how the form of the poem reflects its content that God is

the source of all blessings in the history of our people. See if you can analyze the language structure of this religious poem on your own.

2. Start your own study of readings in psychology regarding death and dying and apply the understandings of modern psychology to Jewish traditions of death and mourning. See where the traditions seem to fit in with modern psychological viewpoints and where they don't. Come up with suggestions for what a truly authentic Jewish funeral ought to look like as far as you are concerned and show how it is conducive to proper mental health in terms of today's knowledge and standards. For much of the Jewish material, you may find another USY source book useful: Isaac Klein, *A Time To Be Born, A Time To Die* (United Synagogue Youth, 1976).

3. Begin to study the book of *Shemot* (Exodus) and, at the same time, to investigate ancient Egyptian civilization and culture. Try to see what in the Egyptian cultural milieu could have influenced Moshe and what, therefore, may have been rejected by the Exodus. See which aspects of Egyptian civilization, such as the pharaohs' status as gods or the divine symbolism of the great serpeant, were mocked and ridiculed by various aspects of the Exodus story.

4. Compare and contrast modern scientific and medical methodologies regarding heart trans-

plants, test tube babies, abortion, and the use of psychogenic drugs with traditional Jewish sources regarding issues such as human life and the origin of life. The whole field of biomedical ethics, though complex, has much to be compared with traditional Jewish sources on the same topics.

5. Study ecological issues in the modern world and seek out Jewish sources about our responsibility to the natural world and the land. You might want to go to an environmental center to investigate a particular local problem. Then confront the problem in scientific terms while at the same time underpinning the direction you feel society should take based on Jewish sources which stress the earth as a gift from God.

6. Prepare a summary of local, state, or national laws regarding owners' responsibilities for damage caused to others. Compare it with talmudic law on the same topic. You may wish to prepare a similar comparison for laws of business or partnership.

7. Study some of the biblical laws and rabbinic commentaries dealing with general concerns for land and its use in urban or suburban environments or with the cities which were to be given to the Levites. These topics might be of special interest and value if you become interested in the field of city planning.

8. Investigate how Jewish holidays (such as



*Sukkot*) are inter-related with basic human reactions to the forces of nature and to human dependency on water as a natural resource.

9. Undertake the creation of new rituals or ritual objects for a holiday which seems not to have been fully developed in Jewish tradition. Examples might include *Tu Bish'vat*, *Yom Ha'Atzma'ut* or *Yom Yerushalayim*.

10. Pick any rabbinic passage in this volume and turn it into a poem, short story, play, picture, sound-slide presentation, song, or prayer. You may prefer to close your eyes, see what image the passage evokes in your mind's eye, and respond through painting, sculpture or photography.

11. Do an oral history of friends, relatives, or community leaders regarding questions of Jewish identity or their own evolution in terms of Talmud Torah.

12. Study the *birchot hanehenin* (blessings recited on various occasions) and develop a sound-slide show or video tape depicting the bounty of God's world and our responsibility to take care of the gifts which we have received and to share them with others.

13. After studying examples of medieval and later illumination techniques, illustrate your own Haggadah or Siddur.

14. Investigate local charitable foundations in

your community, both Jewish and non-Jewish, and relate their goals and procedures to traditional sources of *tzedakah* and *gemilut hasadim*.

15. Take any biblical story or rabbinic passage and write your own commentary. Print the story in the middle of the page and write your notes around the outside to recreate the traditional pattern for presenting commentaries side by side with text. As a group activity, designate in advance a particular Torah portion to study. Have various members prepare their own commentaries to parts of the *parashah* and then write their comments around the side of the page along with selected passages from Rashi or other traditional commentators. The group can then study this collection of materials together.

16. If you are a musician, study some of the classical examples of *nusah* such as that found in the volume by Cantor Spiro. Once you understand the musical phraseology involved, set to music any of the *t'fillot* which are most appealing to you, trying to use the basic *nusah* to guide your own melody orchestration.

17. Gather various passages from the liturgy, Bible (Psalms, in particular) or rabbinic sources related to the renewal of life and the ongoing recreation of the world. Photograph images of this topic, perhaps contrasting spring and winter pictures and then prepare an exhibit combining text with photography.

18. Create new *seder* ritual objects out of clay, medal, or cork to be used for your home. The objects might include a *seder* plate, *kiddush* cups, *kos Eliyahu*, three pocketed matza cover, salt water container, *afikoman* holder, candle holders, and a special holder for the *matzah* of hope which reminds us of our obligation to our brothers and sisters in the Soviet Union.

19. Pick a biblical or rabbinic figure of interest to you and try to recreate that individual's psychological make-up. Perhaps you might want to reconstruct incidents in that person's life and either write a profile or issue a psychological evaluation of that particular person. (You should remember that you are evaluating a personality *as if* it represents someone you could interview.)

20. Develop an archeological dig regarding a certain period of Jewish civilization such as the early settlement of Cannan or the Golden Age in Spain. Create a *te/* (a mound) in which objects are hidden and then have others in the group begin to excavate your *te/* to see what they uncover and what conclusions they can draw.

21. Take a look at some of the films which have been produced on the Bible recently; (these are often available through Jewish media centers). Compare your understanding of the text with the director's and actor's interpretations of the biblical story as it appears on the screen. You might then

compare the views of a traditional commentator, as well.

22. Create a video tape in which people are put into situations of confrontation (or situation ethics). When showing the tape to a group, stop it at various points in the dialogue to ask how the situation should be handled. Prepare a list of Jewish sources regarding the particular confrontation and distribute the list for discussion after reviewing the tape. Once the tape has been produced, it can be used as the basis for discussion and instruction on many different occasions.

23. With a group, determine how to allocate a certain amount of money to a specific, limited number of causes or agencies. Require participants to use traditional sources to justify the allocation of funds they suggest.

24. Write some new songs based on rabbinic or biblical verses. By combining the talents of your friends who are poets with those who are musicians, you may create a whole new repertoire of contemporary Jewish music.

25. Do your own painting (or photographic) survey for the Jewish calendar, creating a picture for each holiday and important occasion on the calendar. Replace the picture which is displayed as the calendar changes.

26. Create a calendar diary book in which art, poetry, selections of rabbinic phrases, and descrip-

tions of the weekly Torah portions are included. The booklet could then be printed and distributed to all members of the region or chapter, to be used as a planning book to help individuals in the time management program which was described earlier in this source book.

27. If you are able to visit Israel, make a point of getting to art museums and exploring architectural displays. Soak up modern Israeli artistic interpretation of Jewish source material which so pervades the land of Israel.

28. Pick a rabbinic text--perhaps one you might have stumbled upon in this volume--and take it with you if you are traveling. (This is an especially good project if you participate in USY on Wheels.) As you meet new people, ask them to read the text and give you their reaction or interpretation. Tape record the reactions and edit them when you return home. You might have a valuable compendium of a cross section of America reacting to a traditional rabbinic statement which is important to you.

29. Interview lawyers, people in business, or government officials regarding the nature of contractual agreements in our society. Then investigate biblical and talmudic writing on the nature of contracts and agreements to see how Jewish tradition and the modern secular world interact, where they agree and disagree.

30. Recreate a debate of the Rabbis surrounding a biblical law which they are seeking to adapt to the needs of their times (or our own times). Various types of evidence supporting different viewpoints could be brought in the form of case studies, pictures, and recorded interviews.

31. To recreate the process of creative response to a source, show a short "trigger" film without the sound. Then ask members of the audience to create the dialogue or fill in a narrative. See how different people may look at the same visual clue and come away with totally different interpretations of what they are seeing.

32. Compare the treatment of a biblical story by a Jewish artist with the same treatment by a non-Jewish artist and see if you can tell whether there are any visual values which are the same or which differ.

These, then, are just some ways in which you can respond creatively to Jewish tradition as well as integrate your Jewish and secular studies. Who knows, but perhaps one of you reading these words will someday write a new and important commentary on the Torah, make major contributions in biblical scholarship, or reinterpret texts or traditions which have been considered lost for generations. Someone else may create a striking new

Jewish novel based on traditional values and sources. Another reader of this volume might write a great work of philosophy for the modern Jew, enabling us to feel more comfortable as Conservative Jews with an evolving, religious tradition of which we are a part. The world of Talmud Torah--studying what has been written already and adding to it--is totally open to you. There are no limits to what men or women may give as contributions; all are welcomed and all are needed. Only you can decide when and what you want to offer.

### **Careers and Talmud Torah**

The approach of this source book has been to show you ways to integrate the world of Talmud Torah with the daily secular pursuits in which you will be engaged during the coming years. It is our hope that you can now see the benefits of this approach, so you will be able to find your own ways of applying your general knowledge of the world to your understanding of things Jewish and, also, of viewing the world around you with glasses colored by Jewish sources and values. We hope you will use the methods explained in this volume now and that you will continue to apply them to whatever fields of endeavor you pursue in the future.

As a person ready to make decisions that will

affect how you will earn a living and the way you lead the rest of your life, it is worth being aware of just how large a role Jewish scholars, steeped in Jewish tradition, played in the development of scholarship in general. Jews who were knowledgeable in the ways of Talmud Torah functioned throughout history in almost every field of endeavor: medicine, law, science, business, art, architecture, literature, and education. They understood that life was a whole, and that one could not separate a personal value system from one's career choice. There was no aspect of life from which we might not learn and grow, as seen in the following Hasidic story:<sup>2</sup>

The Rabbi of Sadgora once said to his disciples, "We can learn something from everything: we may learn not only from things God has created, but also from the creations of humans."

One of his students asked, "What can one learn from a train?"

"That because of one second a person can miss everything," he answered.

"But what can we learn from the telegraph?"

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<sup>2</sup>Based a saying of Rabbi Abraham Jacob of Sagora, cited in Francine Klagsbrun, *Voices of Wisdom* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 251.



"That every word is counted and charged."

"And what about from the telephone?"

"That what we say here," the rabbi responded, "is heard there."

Reverence for the individual contributions of scholars and the uniqueness of each individual's ability to change the world was already recognized in the Talmud:

חכם קודם למלך ישראל חכם שמת אין לנו  
כיוצא בו מלך ישראל שמת כל ישראל ראויים  
למלכות.

A scholar takes precedence over a king of Israel. This is so since if a scholar dies no one can replace him, but if a king dies all Israel is eligible for kingship.

*(Horayot 13a)*

Since Judaism concerned itself with all of life, some rabbinic scholars looked at many occupations and endeavors and attempted to work out precise codes of behavior which should govern their pursuit. It is our hope that as you pursue your chosen career you will consult Jewish sources which relate to the professional activities in which you are engaged. They may help guide you in the value decisions that you will have to make, regardless of your occupation, and may give you some insight

into the development of the profession and skills in which you are engaged. Though you might spend the next few years involved in learning the skills of your profession or trade, you will soon realize that there is much more to life than a life based on those skills alone. Thus, for example, a doctor knowledgeable of Jewish sources can be comforted and helped in many life and death decisions and ethical problems which arise. It is widely agreed that our western system of jurisprudence is based on biblical and talmudic law to a great measure, and that much of the legal structures and systems we use today have their origins in the rabbinic dialectic which surrounded the Torah. Throughout history some Jews were engaged in the fields of math and science for the reasons given previously, namely, that Torah was concerned with all of life. Where science and math could serve the needs of humanity and help scholars better understand the implications of Torah, they were to be pursued. Where life might be improved or life saved, there was no question that knowledge and learning of particular fields of expertise were viewed as quintessential to Jewish life and civilization.

Jewish tradition accepted the premise that whatever one's occupation, it was appropriate--in fact, it was necessary--to be involved in Talmud Torah. Conversely, it was essential to have an occupation even beyond Talmud Torah. Two classical formulations of these views make a fitting conclusion to this section of the chapter:

Rabban Gamliel, son of Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi, said, "The study of Torah combined with an occupation *derech eretz*, (literally, 'the way of the land,') is proper, since the effort required by both makes sin be forgotten. Study alone without an occupation leads to idleness and causes sin."

(Pirkei Avot 2:2)

כא רבי אלעזר בן-עזריה אומר:  
 אם אין תורה אין דרך ארץ,  
 אם אין דרך ארץ אין תורה.  
 אם אין חכמה אין יראה,  
 אם אין יראה אין חכמה.  
 אם אין בינה אין דעת,  
 אם אין דעת אין בינה,  
 אם אין קמח אין תורה,  
 אם אין תורה אין קמח.

Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah said,

"Without Torah, there is no occupation;

without an occupation, there is no Torah.

Without wisdom, there is no awe;

without awe, there is no wisdom.

Without understanding, there is no  
knowledge;

without knowledge, there is no  
understanding.

Without sustenance, there is no  
Torah;

without Torah, there is no sus-  
tenance.

**(Pirkei Avot 3:21)**

### **Scholar and Student**

Throughout this volume we have impressed upon you the richness and beauty of the heritage of Talmud Torah and you have seen the numerous sources and teachers who have come down to us over the generations. Obviously a study of Talmud Torah would not be complete unless we looked for a moment at the relationship between teachers and students. Aaron Kirschenbaum has beautifully summarized the attitude toward teachers and scholars in our tradition:

The centrality of Torah and learning in

Jewish traditional life leads inevitably to attitudes of the deepest reverence and the highest esteem for the teacher of Torah, as evident in the rabbinic term for teacher--*rav*, "master"--whence arose the term *rabbi*, "my master," which developed into the title for the revered religious leaders of Israel. In fashioning the moral character of the student as well as in guiding him in the fulfillment of his destiny as a human being, the teacher in Judaism is viewed as the analogue to the parent. "Whoever teaches the son of his fellow-man is viewed as having begotten him."

The status of the teacher in Israel as one's spiritual father is no mere literary fancy. It is taken literally. Thus, all that is included in the Fifth Commandment, "Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother" is equally applicable to one's teacher.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout your school career you have probably had many different kinds of teachers, some of whom you have loved and some of whom you have found it very difficult to learn from. Yet,

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<sup>3</sup> Aaron Kirschenbaum, "Students and Teachers: A Rabbinic Model," *Conservative Judaism* (vol. 26, no. 3 (Spring, 1972), 23.

if someone were to ask you, "Who have been the most influential people in your life," you would probably answer that it has been your parents, your friends, and a few special teachers. Certainly as you go on in your academic pursuits there will be one, two, or possibly three teachers who will profoundly affect your whole life—your intellectual growth, the things that you find important, and perhaps even your career choice. The understanding that a teacher is like a parent (and can so shape or influence you that their power seems to be overwhelming) underlies part of the rabbinic attitude towards the way students should treat teachers. As you read the following sources, consider why the tradition was so exacting about the way pupils ought to behave toward teachers.

Was the position of esteem given to the teacher simply a matter of authoritarianism or was an underlying relationship of reverence needed in order for one generation to transmit to the next the accumulated wisdom of history? After looking at the following few sources, ask yourself what you feel is a proper relationship between student and teacher in the modern world. Do all or some of the traditional sources still seem appropriate to you? Do some need to be modified or changed given the nature of current society?

לא יהיה התלמיד בוש מחבירו שלמדו מפעם ראשונה או שנייה והוא לא למד אלא אחר כמה פעמים שאם נתבייש מדבר זה נמצא נכנס ויוצא לבית המדרש והוא אינו למד כלום לפיכך אמרו חכמים הראשונים אין הבישן למד ולא הקפדן מלמד. במה דברים אמורים בזמן שלא הבינו התלמידים הדבר מפני עמקו או מפני דעתן שהיא קצרה אבל אם ניכר לרב שהן מתרשלין בדברי תורה ומתרפין עליהן ולפיכך לא הבינו חייב לרגוז עליהן ולהכלימן בדברים כדי לחדדן ובעניין זה אמרו חכמים זרוק מרה בתלמידים. לפי כך אין ראוי לרב לנהוג קלות ראש בפני התלמידים ולא לשחוק בפניהם ולא לאכול ולשתות עמהם כדי שתהא אימתו עליהן וילמדו ממנו במהרה.

A student should not feel ashamed before his fellow students who grasp the lesson after hearing it once or twice, while he needs to hear it several times before he knows it. For if this makes him feel ashamed, he will go through the academy without learning anything. Accordingly, the sages said, "A bashful person cannot learn, nor can a passionate person teach" (*Pirkei Avot* 2:6). These observations apply only when the students' lack of understanding is due to the difficulty of the subject or to their intellectual inability. However, if the teacher clearly sees that the cause of their failure to understand is that they are negligent and lazy in their study of Torah

it is his duty to scold them and shame them with words of reproach, stimulating them to be keen. In this regard, the sages said "Arouse awe in the pupils." Thus it is improper for a teacher to indulge in frivolity before his pupils, or to joke in their presence, or eat and drink with them--so that they will be afraid of him. Thus they will learn from him quickly.

(Mishnei Torah, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 4:5)

כשם שאדם מצווה בכבוד אביו וביראתו כך הוא חייב בכבוד רבו ויראתו ורבו יתר מאביו שאביו הביאו לחיי העולם הזה ורבו שלמדו חכמה מביאו לחיי העולם הבא. ראה אבירת אביו ואבירת רבו שלרבו קודמת לשלאביו אביו ורבו נשואים במשא מניח את שלרבו ואחר כך שלאביו אביו ורבו שבויים בשבייה פודה את רבו ואחר כך פודה את אביו ואם היה אביו תלמיד חכמים פודה את אביו תחלה וכן אם היה אביו חכם אף על פי שאינו שקול כנגד רבו משיב אבדתו ואחר כך משיב אבדת רבו ואין לך כבוד גדול מכבוד הרב ולא מורא יתר ממורא הרב אמרו חכמים מורא רבך כמורא שמים. לפיכך אמרו כל החולק על רבו כחולק על השכינה שני בהצותם על ה' וכל העושה מריבה עם רבו כעושה עם השכינה שני אשר רבו בני ישראל את ה' וכל המתרעם על רבו כמתרעם על השכינה שנא' לא עלינו תלונותיכם כי על ה' וכל המהרהר אחר רבו כמהרהר אחר השכינה שנא' וידבר העם באלהים ובמשה.



Just as a person is commanded to honor and revere his father, so he is obligated to honor and revere his teacher, to an even greater extent, since his father gave him life in this world, while his teacher who instructs him in wisdom, secures for him life in the world to come. If he sees an article that his father had lost and another article that his teacher had lost, the teacher's property should be recovered first, and then his father's. If his father and his teacher are loaded with burdens, he should first relieve his teacher and then his father. But, if his father is a scholar, even though not of the same stature as his teacher, he should recover his father's lost property first and then his teacher's. There is no honor higher than that which is due to the teacher; no reverence more profound than that which should be paid him. The sages said, "Reverence for your teacher shall be like the fear of Heaven" (*Pirkei Avot* 4:15). They also said, "Whoever distrusts the authority of his teacher--it is as if he disputes with the *Shechinah*; as it is said, "When they strove against the Lord" (Num. 26:9). Whoever starts a quarrel with his teacher, it is as if he started a quarrel with the *Shechinah*; as it is said, "Where the children of Israel strove with the Lord, and He was

sanctified in them" (Num. 20:13). Similarly, whoever resents his teacher--it is as if he resents the Lord, as it is said, "Your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord" (Ex. 16:8). Whoever harbors doubts about his teacher--it is as if he harbors doubts about the *Shechinah*, as it is said, "And the people spoke against God and against Moses" (Num. 21:3).

(*Mishnei Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah* 5:1)

תלמיד לא ירחץ עם רבו ואם רבו צריך לו  
מותר.

A student shouldn't bathe with his teacher; if the teacher needs his help, it is permitted.

(*Pesahim* 51a)

Just so you don't think the obligation to be respectful is one-sided, scholars and teachers also were admonished to treat their students respectfully and to behave in ways which would bring students closer to Torah. Even though students and teachers were not viewed as equals, these sources reflect a certain reciprocity between them:

כשם שהתלמידים חייבין בכבוד הרב כך הרב צריך לכבד את תלמידיו ולקרבן כך אמרו חכמים יהי כבוד תלמידך חביב עליך כשלחברך וצריך ארם להזהר בתלמידיו ולאובן שהם הבנים המהנין בעולם הזה ולעולם הבא.

Just as pupils are bound to honor their teacher, so a teacher must honor his pupils and draw them near. The sages said "Let the honor of your students be as dear to you as your own" (*Pirkei Avot* 4:15). One should take an interest in his pupils and love them, for they are his spiritual children who will bring him happiness in this world and in the world to come.

(*Mishnei Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah* 5:12)

אין מלמדין תורה לתלמיד שאינו הגון אלא מחזירין אותו למוטב ומנהיגין אותו בדרך ישרה ובודקין אותו ואח"כ מכניסין אותו לבית המדרש ומלמדין אותו. הרב שאינו הולך בדרך טובה אע"פ שחכם גדול הוא וכל העם צריכים לו אין למדין ממנו עד שיחזור למוטב.

One must not teach Torah to an unworthy pupil but must first restore him to the right path and lead him in upright ways and test him. One may then bring him to the House of Study and teach him.

One should not study at the feet of a teacher who does not walk in the right way, even if he is a great sage whose wisdom is needed by all the people, until he returns to the good way.

(**Shulhan Aruch**, *Yoreh De'ah* 246:7-8)

(1.3 inch)

Disciples increase the teacher's wisdom and broaden his mind. The sages said, "I learned much wisdom from my teachers, more from my colleagues; from my pupils, most of all." Even as a small piece of wood kindles a large log, so even a pupil of limited abilities sharpens the mind of his teacher, so that by his questions, he elicits glorious wisdom.

(**Mishnei Torah**, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 5:13)

As you can see from the sources there are many obligations which fall both upon students and teachers. So important is the relationship between teacher and students in Jewish tradition that the Rabbis described it by these very special terms:

אמר ריש לקיש כל המלמד את בן חבירו  
 תורה מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו עשאו שנאמר  
 ואת הנפש אשר עשו בחרן ר' (אליעזר) אומר  
 כאילו עשאו לדברי תורה שנאמר ושמרתם  
 את דברי הברית הזאת ועשיתם אותם.

Resh Lakish said: He who teaches Torah

to his neighbor's son is regarded by the text as though he had created him, as it is written, "*and the souls which they had made in Haran.*" R. Eleazar said: As though he himself had created the words of the Torah, as it is written, *Keep therefore the words of this covenant, and make them.*

(*Sanhedrin* 99b)

The role of the teacher-scholar was so important that the entire community, not only the families of students, provided for their welfare and their needs. What made them so important? It was not they, so much, not their personalities, nor even their intelligence. It was the Torah they embodied.

## QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. List your greatest strengths as a student and your greatest weaknesses both academically and on an interpersonal level with your teachers and fellow students.
2. What qualities do you think make up the

ideal teacher? If you serve as a teacher what aspects of your own teaching do you think need to be improved?

3. Initiate a conversation with your teacher in an attempt simply to get to know each other better as human beings. List the two or three best teachers you have ever had and why you feel so strongly about them.

4. There is a value concept called *geneivat da'at*, "stealing of knowledge." How do you feel about cheating and what do you feel is your responsibility if you see a member of your class cheating? On another level, how careful are you, in writing a term paper, to ascribe quotations to their source?

5. Pretend you were your own teacher. Evaluate yourself as if you were the teacher, your academic self as well as your social self.

6. Make a study lifeline. On a straight line list your birthdate and then days or dates in your life in which you can remember important activities associated with your growth and learning. Extend the line into the future and list events you would like to happen. In a parallel column, list the "great Jewish books" you have read, and plan to read.

7. Compare the Jewish books that are in your home with some of the recommendations and resourcess volume. Are you pleased with your own Judaica library collection? Make a list of

priority books you want to acquire to have better access personally to Jewish source material. Perhaps you can ask people to give you these as gifts for special occasions rather than some less important items.

8. How do you feel about grading procedures in the classrooms? Can you come up with an alternative to measure achievement and success? Do you think teachers should be graded? If so, how and by whom?

9. Do you think teachers can cause emotional problems in students? Do you think students ever affect the emotions and self-images of teachers?

10. The following is a list of 20 character traits which could be helpful to any student.<sup>4</sup> Rate how important each trait is for you, on a scale of 1-10. Once you have made your evaluations, compare them to yourself (in reality) and see what changes you might want to make in your functioning as a student.

*List of Character Traits*

- |            |                 |
|------------|-----------------|
| 1. Honest  | 11. Responsible |
| 2. Playful | 12. Caring      |

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<sup>4</sup>Based on Leland W. Howe and Mary Martha Howe, PERSONALIZING EDUCATION (New York: Hart Publishing Co., Inc., 1975), 239-240.

- |                   |                    |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| 3. Self-confident | 13. Self-directing |
| 4. Orderly        | 14. Independent    |
| 5. Aggressive     | 15. Rational       |
| 6. Courageous     | 16. Curious        |
| 7. Cooperative    | 17. Spontaneous    |
| 8. Competitive    | 18. Friendly       |
| 9. Creative       | 19. Flexible       |
| 10. Loyal         | 20. Open-minded    |

12. Apply some of the time management projects described above. On one side of a piece of paper, list some of the overall goals that you have in Talmud Torah. Select one or two top priorities and break them down into small manageable steps. Then make a chart showing the date, first steps taken toward meeting the goal, the "target date" for completing that stage of the task, and a column indicating that the step has been completed.

### **Women and Study--Then and Now**

Throughout this volume we have assumed that involvement with Talmud Torah is open to all Jews. It is a legacy given to every member of the Jewish community for the taking. Unfortunately, Jewish tradition did not always view the legacy as being equally accessible to all members of the Jewish people. In particular, women were largely excluded from involvement in Talmud Torah, in part because they were not obligated to perform positive mitzvot



that were associated with time. That lack of obligation then released them from the duty to engage in the study of Torah. Traditional sources were very clear on women's involvement or lack of it in serious Torah study. The talmudic views go so far as to prohibit teaching one's daughter Torah.

Clearly, these assumptions regarding women can no longer hold for us today. The Conservative Movement, itself, has made an unequivocal statement of the equality of women with men in the area of Talmud Torah. The decision of the Jewish Theological Seminary to ordain women, and the graduation of the first woman rabbi, Amy Eilberg, in June of 1985, were historic steps forward in the realization that women can--and must-- make full contributions to the tradition of Talmud Torah. It is challenging to be writing at a time when the legacy is now open for all members of the Jewish community. It is exciting to be writing this volume when my own daughter, who is now three years old, can look forward to joining the ranks of the great Jewish scholars of the world. It will be up to her own talents and energy, but she now has the same choice as does my son to claim her legacy. Both they who can now participate in Talmud Torah and the community at large have gained renewed strength.

### Pursuit of Jewish Scholarship

We have studied sources reflecting many areas of human life and endeavor, most fitting into professional areas such as law, literature, medicine, or science. However, the profession of Jewish scholarship itself must not be ignored. As the last section in this source book we wish to hold out the possibility for you of a career in Jewish scholarship. If only a few of the many people who will read this book consider a career in Jewish scholarship, then it will have created new worlds. One scholar's creation opens up new ideas and vistas of intellectual vigor and drama that can profoundly influence generations to come. As author of this source book, I consider myself simply to have been a clerk who has pulled together many sources for you to study and upon which you can build your own ideas. However, someone of my readers may well develop a new understanding of Jewish law or civilization or prepare a new and different type of commentary.

Here, now, we challenge you: become part of the growing legacy of Talmud Torah. You may wind up as one of the scholars who shape the next generation of Jewish intellectual thought, who bequeath the gift to generations to come. In the end, as Rabbi Tarfon said (*Pirkei Avot* 2:21),

You are not obliged to finish the task,  
neither are you free to neglect it. If you

have studied much Torah, your reward will be abundant.

How does one begin to prepare for a life of Jewish scholarship or of Talmud Torah on any level? Consider the following advice:<sup>5</sup>

You must always consider three things: you have only one day to live, you have only the page or chapter now before you to study, and you are the only person on whom depends the survival of Torah.

To return to the beginning and to our title, Rabbi Hillel said, "*Marbeh Torah, Marbeh Hayyim*--"the more study, the more life" (*Pirkei Avot* 2:8). It is our fondest hope that you, too, will understand that the study of Torah leads to a richer and meaningful life for you individually, for the Jewish people, and for humanity. May your life be filled with study and may your study be filled with life.

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<sup>5</sup>Based on Mendel Weinbach, *GIVE US LIFE* (New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1969), 236.

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# APPENDIX A. CLASSICAL JEWISH LITERATURE

## BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

### TORAH (= Pentateuch)

Genesis  
Exodus  
Leviticus  
Numbers  
Deuteronomy

### NEVI'IM (= PROPHETS)

#### Early Prophets

Joshua  
Judges  
I, II Samuel  
I, II Kings

#### Latter Prophets

Isaiah  
Jeremiah  
Ezekiel  
12 "MINOR PROPHETS"  
Hosea  
Joel  
Amos  
Obadiah  
Jonah  
Micah  
Nahum  
Habbakuk  
Zephaniah  
Haggai  
Zechariah

Malachi

**KETUVIM** (=Writings)

Psalms

Proverbs

Job

**Five Megillot**

Song of Songs

Ruth

Lamentations

Ecclesiastes

Esther

Daniel

Ezra

Nehemiah

Chronicles I, II

TRACTATES OF THE MISHNAH<sup>1</sup>**Zera'im** (Seeds: Laws of Agriculture)

BERACHOT (Blessings)  
 PE'AH (Edge of the Field)  
 DEMAI (Doubtful Crops)  
 KILA'YIM (Diverse Kinds)  
 SHEVI'IT (The Seventh Year)  
 TERUMOT (Heave-Offerings)  
 MA'ASEROT (Tithes)  
 MA'ASER SHENI (Second Tithe)  
 HALLAH (Dough Offering)  
 ORLAH (Fruit of the Trees)  
 BIKKURIM (First Fruits)

**MO'ED** (Festivals)

SHABBAT (Sabbath)  
 ERUVIN (Sabbath Travel Regulations)  
 PESAHIM (Passover)  
 SHEKALIM (Temple Taxes)  
 YOMA (The Day of Atonement)  
 SUKKAH (Booth)  
 BETZAH (An Egg)  
 ROSH HASHANAH (New Year Observance)  
 TA'ANIT (Fast Days)  
 MEGILLAH (The Scroll of Esther)  
 MO'ED KATAN (Mid-Festival Days)  
 HAGIGAH (Festival Sacrifice)

**Nashim** (Women)

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<sup>1</sup> From Eugene Lipman, trans., THE MISHNAH: ORAL TEACHINGS OF JUDAISM (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.)

YEVAMOT (Sisters-in-law)  
KETUVOT (Marriage Contracts)  
NEDARIM (Vows)  
NAZIR (The Nazirite-vow)  
SOTAH (The Suspected Adulteress)  
GITTIN (Divorces)  
KIDDUSHIN (Marriage)

**Nezikin (Civil and Criminal Law)**

BAVA KAMA (The First Gate)  
BAVA METZ'IA (The Middle Gate)  
BAVA BATRA (The Last Gate)  
SANHEDRIN (The High Court)  
MAKKOT (Punishment by Flogging)  
SHEVU'OT (Oaths)  
EDUYOT (Testimonies)  
AVODAH ZARAH (Idolatry)  
HORAYOT (Erroneous Decisions)

**Kodashim (Sacred Things)**

ZEVAHIM (Animal Sacrifices)  
MENAHOT (Flour Offerings)  
HULLIN (Unconsecrated Animals)  
BECHOROT (First-Born)  
ARACHIN (Evaluations)  
TEMURAH (Exchanges of Sacrificial Cattle)  
KERITOT (Divine Punishment)  
ME'ILAH (Inadvertent Sacrilege)  
TAMID (Daily Sacrifice)  
MIDDOT (Measurements)  
KINNIM (Bird Offerings)

**Tohorot (Ritual Purity)**

KELIM (Vessels)  
OHOLOT (Tents)

NEGA'IM (Leprosy)

PARAH (The Red Cow)

TOHOROT (Cleanliness)

MIKVA'OT (Ritual Baths)

NIDDAH (The Menstruating Woman)

MACSHIRIN (Prerequisites for Non-Kashrut)

ZAVIM (Bodily Discharges in Illness)

TEVUL YOM (Post-Immersion Uncleanliness)

YADAIM (Uncleanliness of Hands)

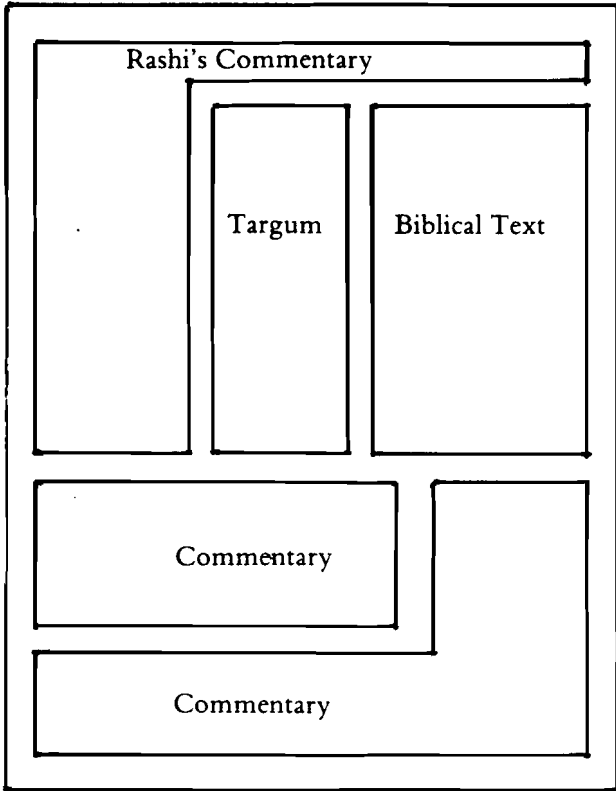
UKTZIN (Stalks and Ritual Uncleanliness)





# APPENDIX B. SAMPLE PAGES

## PAGE OF BIBLE





PAGE OF TALMUD

Biblical sources (notes compiled 16th century by Joshua Boaz).

Critical notes, Joel Sirkes, 1561-1640.

Additional commentaries of other traditions.

The column by the edge of the page — whether left or right hand side — contains commentaries of Tosafot (literally: additions), French and German scholars, 12th-13th centuries. Generally comments on selected topics or apparent inconsistencies with other passages.

[Faded Hebrew text from a Talmud page, including main text and marginalia.]



## APPENDIX C. GLOSSARY OF VALUE CONCEPTS

The following partial glossary of terms is based on Max Kadushin, *The Rabbinic Mind* (New York: Bloch Publishing Co., 1972):

<i>Averah</i>	transgression
<i>Avodah</i>	worship and Torah study
<i>Avodah Zarah</i>	idolatry
<i>Avot</i>	patriarchs
<i>Akedat Yitzhak</i>	binding of Isaac
<i>Am Ha'aretz</i>	ignorant person
<i>Bechor</i>	first born
<i>Berachah(/-ot)</i>	blessing(s)
<i>Beresheet</i>	creation
<i>Beit Haknesset</i>	synagogue
<i>Beit HaMidrash</i>	study place
<i>Beit Hillel</i>	law according to...
<i>Beit Shammai</i>	law according to...
<i>Derash</i>	interpretation
<i>Derech erez</i>	correct behavior
<i>Elohim</i>	God
<i>Emunah</i>	belief, faith
<i>Gemilut hasadim</i>	deeds of loving-kindness
<i>Ger</i>	convert/stranger
<i>Gere ummot haolam</i>	semi-proselytes
<i>Gilluy Shechinah</i>	revelation
<i>Goyim</i>	non-Jews
<i>(H)aggadah</i>	figurative interpretation
<i>hacham(im)</i>	wisemen, scholars
<i>Halachah</i>	law
<i>Hasid</i>	pious person

<i>Hillul Ha-Shem</i>	profanation of God's name
<i>Kavanah</i>	acting with purpose
<i>Kedushah</i>	holiness
<i>Kiddush Ha-Shem</i>	sanctification of God's name
<i>Kedushat Ha-Yom</i>	holiness of the day
<i>Ma'aseh Beresheet</i>	creation section in Genesis
<i>Makom</i>	name for God
<i>Malchut Shamayim</i>	kingdom of God
<i>Mattan Torah</i>	revelation of the Law
<i>Middah</i>	characteristic of God or nature
<i>Middat Ha-Din</i>	God as righteous judge
<i>Middat Rahamim</i>	God's qualities of mercy
<i>Mitzvah ( -ot)</i>	religious obligation(s)
<i>Nes</i>	miracle
<i>Nochri</i>	non-Jew
<i>Olam</i>	universe
<i>Olam Ha-Ba</i>	world to come
<i>Peshat</i>	contextual interpretation
<i>Rasha</i>	evil one
<i>Ruah Ha-Kadosh</i>	Holy Spirit
<i>Shechinah</i>	God's presence
<i>Sidre Olam</i>	order of the universe
<i>Talmid Hacham</i>	learned one
<i>Tashmishei Kedushah</i>	items used with Sefer Torah
<i>Tashmishe Mitzvah</i>	items associated with mitzvot
<i>Tehiyat Ha-Metim</i>	resurrection of the dead
<i>Teshuvah</i>	repentance
<i>Tzaddik</i>	righteous one
<i>Tzedakah</i>	acts of righteousness, charity
<i>Yirat Shamayim</i>	awe of heaven

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Steven M. Brown, a native of Philadelphia, is currently Headmaster of the Solomon Schechter Day School of Greater Philadelphia. He has been a visiting lecturer at Gratz College of Philadelphia and serves on the boards of several Jewish communal organizations.

Dr. Brown received his B.A. in Comparative Literature and B.H.L. in Hebrew Literature from the Combined Program of the Jewish Theological Seminary and Columbia University. He completed his M.A. in Educational Technology and Instructional Systems, and his Ed.D. in Curriculum Development and Teaching at Teachers College of Columbia University, where he wrote a dissertation entitled, "Media Materials and Instruction in Jewish Religious Education." In addition to his academic credentials, the author served as a staff member in several Camps Ramah, and previously served as principal of Central Hebrew High School of Long Island and as Educational Director of Congregation Adath Jeshurun, Elkins Park, Pa.

Dr. Brown is the author of many articles on Jewish education, editor of a manual for Camp Ramah counselors, and author of another USY sourcebook, *L'ayla L'ayla: Higher and Higher-- Making Jewish Prayer Part of Us*. Dr. Brown has led many workshops in Jewish education throughout the country and is a member of the Jewish Educators Assembly and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. He is married to the former Michele Leimberg and is the father of Dory Adam and Aliza Ronit Brown.