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A ROOM WITH A VIEW, BUT A ROOM OF OUR OWN

The unblemished saints do not complain about evil, but increase righteousness; do not complain about heresy, but increase faith; do not complain about ignorance, but increase wisdom. (R. Abraham I. Kook)¹

I think that trying to restrain an entire contemporary age is like a passenger in a carriage holding on to the seat in front of him in order to stop the carriage: he determines himself in continuity with the age, and yet he wishes to hold it in check. No, the only thing to do is to get out of the carriage, and so hold oneself in check. (Søren Kierkegaard)²

It is today possible that an Orthodox Jew who wishes to devote his professional life to the study of *Torah she-biKtav* (the Written Torah) will seek to develop an orientation to the world of academic Bible scholarship. The Orthodox intellectual world is divided among those who welcome this situation and those who deplore it. The stakes in the struggle are greater than the small number of men and women involved in academic activities would lead one to believe.

This is, first of all, because the study of Bible occupies a more delicate position in the Orthodox curriculum than the study of Talmud. When it comes to Talmud the Yeshivot are already in possession of a *derekh ha-limud*, a set of well-established approaches to analyze and organize systematically our learning. The academic Talmud scholar cannot hope to supplant the regnant approaches; realistically he can only aspire to augment the accepted canons with his own particular knowledge and methodology.³ Bible, however, has not received the same attention in our schools. Any new trend is therefore likely to have far-reaching effects on the study of Bible by non-specialists.

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Torah she-biKtav and *Torah she-b'al Peh* (Oral Torah) also differ with respect to the characteristic interaction between piety and intellect. The fervor with which the traditional student of Talmud applies himself to the text is relatively independent of the content of the passage being studied: an outsider, observing *benei Torah* in action, cannot determine whether the topic under discussion carries immediate practical or existential implications or not. But with respect to other branches of Torah, perhaps due to their secondary status, one expects the connection between the subject matter and the religious experience of the student to be more direct and explicit. Consequently, a shift in the mode of Biblical study that detaches the reader from the exigency of the text, that cools the ardor of confrontation, undermines the very *raison d'être* of learning.

Because so much is at stake, the dispute is often carried on in terms that are more heated than enlightened, more defensive than constructive, clouded by arbitrary assumptions, marred by bad logic and inhabited by straw men. The position I take in this introductory essay does not conform to that of either side in the debate. Long-standing opponents of my position will no doubt find points to quarrel with. By stating my general position at the outset, however, I hope to forestall the more blatant misunderstandings, so that those who disagree with my approach will at least know what it is that they object to.

1) Knowledge is a good thing. Specifically, reliable information about the historical, geographic and linguistic background of the Bible can enhance our understanding of *Tanakh*. Authoritative control of such information requires a good deal of specialized training; even the preparation necessary to form an intelligent judgment about the work of experts in these fields presupposes an investment of time beyond that expected of most literate Jews. Nonetheless it is good that certain individuals master these disciplines and interpret them for the benefit of non-experts. The potential value of such knowledge seems so evident as to need no argument: the example of preeminent Rishonim and Aharonim who availed themselves of Semitic philology, books on ancient religious practice, and historical-geographic data, speaks for itself.

2) Most academic scholarship in Bible is conducted as if the fundamental tenets of Orthodox Judaism were false. At best, one affects methodological neutrality about the truth of these propositions. Sharp, irreconcilable conflict over fundamental presuppositions with wide-ranging implications—the authorship of the Torah, the reliability of the biblical canon, the authenticity and authority of the Oral Law—must, of necessity, preclude the development of consensus between Orthodox Jews and the academic establishment. Methodological agnosticism renders the Orthodox Jew an intellectual Marrano: compelled to feign neutrality in discussing matters on which he or

she holds firm, unshakable convictions. To acquiesce outwardly, out of hunger for professional toleration, in a scholarly consensus the presuppositions and conclusions of which one judges false and pernicious, is an offense against intellectual honesty and a betrayal of human dignity.⁴

3) Jewish biblical study cannot be separated from the framework of Torah study and Jewish theological reflection as a whole. Even when the Orthodox student finds himself in agreement with secularist, Christian or non-Orthodox writers about some particular issue, the context of interpretation differs considerably. Situating our own analysis within the continuum of Jewish biblical exegesis is more than a nostalgic exercise in historical piety: it defines an essential dimension of our study.⁵ Style of presentation and choice of terms are not merely conventional, but trail clouds of theological significance.⁶ This barrier to collaboration between Orthodox Jews and the academic establishment seems less absolute than the flat-out conflict mentioned in the previous paragraph: the Orthodox Jew is not asked to deny or suppress her beliefs, but merely to isolate one aspect of academic activity from the larger context of religious-intellectual existence and to desist from "parochial" vocabulary. Yet the threat is just as great, albeit more subtle: we lose contact with connections that we are constrained from expressing; when we are deterred from forming our insights in our own authentic words, their roots tend to wither away.

The principles I have spelled out invite further elaboration. I call my own *derekh ha-limmud* a *literary-theological approach*. Both terms carry a double meaning. By *theological*, we assert the conviction that Bible is to be encountered as the word of God, rather than primarily as the object of academic investigation; we also refer to the authoritative presence of the interpretive tradition. The adjective *literary* comes to stress that understanding the word of God is not only a matter of apprehending propositions, but also of hearing them in their literary and historical context; secondarily, we are reminded that the language we use to articulate our insight is also an integral aspect of our study.

In this essay we will first comment on the necessity to make our Bible study a true *derekh ha-limmud*, integrated within an overall program of *Mahashevet Yisrael*, Torah study and theological reflection, faithful to the Rav's conception of the *homo religiosus* who "calmly but persistently seeks his own path to full cognition of the world."⁷ Next we will address the contentions of those who seek intellectual salvation in the greater integration of Orthodox Bible study within the academic world. Finally, I suggest that some tasks facing contemporary Orthodox Bible study, despite my general insistence on autonomy, can most honestly and most effectively be done, at present, within the walls of the secular university.

II

THE SPECTER OF APOLOGETIC

How we are to study *Tanakh* is equivalent to the task of finding a way of learning (*derekh ha-limmud*). To have a *derekh* of learning means that we have created a unified, integrated way of studying and teaching. When we are preoccupied with the novelty or strangeness of a certain methodology, when the novelty or strangeness interfere with the primary vocation of elucidating *devar ha-Shem* (the word of God) and hearing its message for our lives, we have not yet successfully incorporated that methodology as an integral part of our *derekh*. In particular, we cannot pursue the goals of Torah study when the truth of fundamental principles is rejected or doubted. If this is the case, then we surely cannot cultivate a *derekh* of Bible study in the hostile shadow of the academic establishment, an environment in which the bulk of our energy must be expended on defense rather than construction.

At this point an example may be useful. It is not a crucial or an especially exciting one, but it will serve our purpose precisely by illustrating the atmosphere in which we do our everyday work. In the speech that includes the opening of *Parashat Nitsavim* (Deut. 29), Moses consistently addresses Israel in the second person plural. He shifts to the second person singular in only one passage (vv. 11-12) which speaks of initiating the individual into the covenant to be instituted that day. Why the switch?⁸ The Rabbis, commenting on v. 28, define a transition between two periods, marked by an expanded notion of responsibility on the part of Jews for the sins of their fellows; this idea is derived from the fact that several letters in the text are dotted, implying, according to midrashic principles, that the acceptance of responsibility is somehow "suspended" during the intermediate stage.⁹ Whether this comment can be adopted as a satisfactory explication of v.28 (at the level of *peshat*), is, of course, highly debatable.¹⁰ It occurred to me, however, that the idea underlying the midrashic interpretation of v.28 might supply a key to the variation of persons in vv. 11-12. I thought that the second person singular might refer to the undertaking of expanded responsibility connected to the covenant.

Having offered this modest suggestion in public,¹¹ I had nobody to blame when I got a scholarly rap on the knuckles. Naturally my critic was mildly annoyed by the infiltration of Rabbinic tradition into a discussion of Biblical text. This was not, however, my most serious offense: my proposal lacked merit because it did not explain the second person singular/plural changes throughout Deuteronomy. Thus I could not challenge the scholarly opinion that these alternations in Deuteronomy betray the presence of different authors.¹²

Now this criticism could be countered simply by noting that the scholar who thirty years ago had erected his theory of authorship on the singu-

lar/plural criterion, had not applied it to the entire book either: in fact, he had explicitly omitted the section that I had examined! But let us say, for the sake of argument, that Minette had extended his hypothesis to *Nitsavim*; and let us also imagine that his theory is plausible (so long as one has no initial objection to the multiplication of authors on the basis of stylistic variation). How does this affect me? If it is incumbent upon us to refute the contending position, then we must either produce the comprehensive refutation or fall silent. If, however, our task is to forward our own interpretation, in accordance with the fundamental beliefs to which we are firmly committed, then I am free to advance my reading, either as a local explication of *Nitsavim*, without any aim to explain other sections of the book, or as a provisional thesis, one that may, or may not, be successfully broadened to cover the other sections.¹³

To adopt the implicit outlook of my critic means that every thesis, every reading, every insight, to the degree that it deviates from the received position, must be pitted against the entire edifice of academic Biblical scholarship. An idea that has not triumphed against the entrenched theories must be withdrawn from circulation. Autonomous Bible study by Orthodox Jews is thus frozen until the established views are decisively melted down. The alternative is to go our way, “calmly but persistently” seeking our own path to knowledge. Whether those outside our religious-intellectual community are curious, impressed or dismayed by work firmly rooted in the fundamental beliefs to which we are firmly committed, whether they sit at our feet or relegate us to the outer darkness or pick up something from us even while keeping a safe distance—all this is, and should remain, their business.

Please don't get me wrong. I am not oblivious to the fact that many individuals who were taught Orthodox beliefs, and many more who were not, have learnt something about conventional academic objections to those basic tenets, and consequently harbor doubts, or reject outright, the fundamental doctrines of Orthodox Judaism. In my youth I tried very hard, though fruitlessly, to become such an individual myself, and my subsequent career as student and educator has brought me in contact with others similarly motivated. Clearly such individuals need to be supplied with some adequate warrant for Orthodox Judaism (which may, or may not, focus on the problems directly posed by Biblical scholarship) before they devote themselves wholeheartedly to the *derekh ha-limmud* we propose. Surely it is desirable that there be advocates of Orthodox Judaism who can incline the disaffected in the direction of belief. But the justification of Orthodox doctrines pertinent to the study of Bible, though it sometimes draws attention to important questions previously neglected, is not necessarily a contribution to that study. A *derekh ha-limmud* must build, it must provide positive content and insight; a purely apologetic stance, however sophisticated and persuasive, is not the same thing.

Let me add that the constructive endeavor, independent of apologetic

motives, is, in the final analysis, the most satisfactory defensive posture as well. After all, the considerations that lead an individual to offer, or withhold, his assent to Orthodox Jewish doctrine regarding the Bible, are both complex and mysterious. What Ramban said about Talmudic dialectic,¹⁴ is true of the reasoning that comes into play here: it does not aspire to mathematical precision, and therefore does not allow of knockdown arguments. In these circumstances, something will almost always beat nothing. If Orthodox writers limit themselves to parrying attacks, however competently, and exposing weak points in their opponents' theories, they will never seize the initiative; the ball, so to speak, will forever remain in the other team's possession. When R. Kook extols the unblemished saints who, instead of carping about heresy and ignorance, increase faith and wisdom, he is not only commending an irenic disposition, but affirming the radical primacy of construction over defensive tactics.¹⁵

THE INDIVISIBLE MANSION OF JEWISH THOUGHT

No discipline is an island. Every facet of Torah is intimately related to the others. If we think of Torah as a mansion, each discipline within Torah can be compared to one of the rooms. The Orthodox explorer in the realm of *Tanakh*, whether he or she is a "producer" of original work or an active "user" of insights and research worked out by others, cannot be a mere tourist in the adjoining estates. Each student of Torah has his own interests and orientation; every attempt to do justice to all aspects of a sugya will fall short; the hermeneutical horizon will ever recede. Nevertheless the development of a *derekh ha-limmud* in Bible, for the individual and for the community, is inextricably bound up with our ambition and achievement as students of Torah. The briefest overview must distinguish, with respect to Bible, three areas of activity.

1) *Torah she-b'al Peh* has always been the "meat and potatoes" of Torah study. We believe that the Oral Torah transmits authoritative traditions with respect to Halakha and, to a lesser extent, Aggadah; it thus constitutes an authoritative source for the study of Bible. To resume the image we introduced in the preceding paragraph, *Torah she-b'al Peh* is a central chamber in the house of Torah: it communicates with all the other rooms. If the study of *Torah she-biKtav* is not to become (or remain) marginal to our religious-intellectual enterprise, the comings and goings between the two neighboring and allied domains must reinforce their close cognitive and experiential proximity.

There are more specific reasons for intensifying the ties between Bible study and the traditional Talmud-oriented curriculum. In theory one may,

following the great medieval and modern commentators, distinguish between the two levels of *peshat* and *derash*, and by asserting the autonomy of the former, free it of its dependence on the *derash* level (identified with the Oral Torah). In practice, however, the connection between the two dimensions of study is so intimate that one cannot hope to contribute to *peshat* in the legal portions of the Torah without observing and reflecting on the close interaction between the two. It is not accidental that those Rishonim and Aharonim who most magnificently explored the *peshat* level of the legal sections were equally renowned as Talmudists: Rashi, Rashbam, Ramban, among the medievals; the Vilna Gaon, Netziv, *Meshekh Hokhma* and R. David Zvi Hoffmann, to name but a few of their modern heirs.¹⁶

Nor is it fortuitous that one of the most influential strategies in contemporary Orthodox Biblical analysis originates in the techniques of halakhic analysis. The idea closely associated with R. Mordechai Breuer¹⁷, that different sections of the Biblical text provide contrasting but complementary “aspects” of the divine message, corresponds to the *lomdish* analytic phrase “two *dinim*” popularized by R. Hayyim Brisker to discriminate the multiple meanings of superficially uniform concepts.

Finally, the halakhic corpus occupies a position of primacy in Jewish theology. If the basic concepts, institutions and imperatives taught in the Bible are to be viewed in the context of a complex, comprehensive Jewish synthesis, the Halakha has a great deal to say about the nature of that synthesis¹⁸. Therefore an approach to Biblical study that exploits the resources of Halakha is boundlessly richer than one that ignores these vital dimensions.

2) The relevance of traditional Jewish Biblical exegesis, especially those trends identified with the method of *peshat*, is widely recognized today. Thanks in part to the remarkable lifework of Dr. Nechama Leibowitz, the giants of Jewish exegesis are routinely cited by Israeli Bible scholars, with no rigid correlation to their own presuppositions, and research on classical *Parshanut* has become a respectable sub-specialty at the universities.

Current fashions in the study of literature have moderated the ingrained academic distaste for *derash* and for *peshat* approaches not easily distinguishable from *derash*. This broadening of perspective has helped legitimate a more generous selection from the traditional exegesis. When the quasi-traditionalist M.Z. Segal, half a century ago, included a small monograph on the history of exegesis in his *Mavo haMikra*, he saw that history in terms of the conservative Critical orientation that was his own, and ended his story, for all intents and purposes, with Abarbanel, after whom Jewish commentary retreats into the ghetto, leaving the banner of *peshat* in the hands of the Gentiles. The fairly recent articles on exegesis in the *Encyclopedia Mikrait*, assigned to several authors, pursue the subject into

the modern era, and do not repine from treating such characteristic "ghetto" figures as the Vilna Gaon, the Netziv et al.¹⁹

3) Most people, when allusion is made to Jewish thought, think of what is customarily called Jewish philosophy, and/or ethical literature (Musal) and/or mystical works (including Hasidism). Much of the medieval literature has enjoyed the same renewal of academic interest among Bible scholars that promoted the exegetical compositions discussed above: thus, to take a straightforward example, it's a good bet that whoever would devote attention to Ibn Ezra or Radak will likewise spend time on the Biblical exegesis of Maimonides' *Guide*. The literature of the modern period has not been so favored, whether because of *Wissenschaft des Judentum's* built-in antiquarian bias or because the scholars knew too much about Hasidic Jews, Musar preachers, and their attitude towards the scholars, making it impossible to take comfort in visions of imagined affinity.

From a contemporary vantage point, it is unfortunate that classic Hasidic and Musar literature are banished from the framework in which *Tanakh* is studied. Their indefatigable, almost palpable, striving to come to grips, through vigorous reflection on Biblical and Rabbinic texts, with the ultimate religious realities of suffering and sanctity and the yearning for spiritual and worldly redemption, though sometimes arbitrary from a textual point of view, can illuminate our perception of those texts no less dramatically (and I daresay more accurately) than the Rambam's efforts to elucidate Genesis 1 in the light of medieval physics and metaphysics. The essays by David Berger (in the forthcoming *Modern Scholarship . . .*) amply demonstrates the relevance of the questions raised by this literature and the importance of confronting the answers it furnishes.

There is a feeling abroad, and it is not an unwarranted one, that the indivisibility of Torah builds more bridges than barriers between Orthodox scholars and proponents of the regnant theories in Biblical scholarship. Sharing an interest in Rabbinic exegesis and a respectful regard for the legacy of the medieval *pashtanim* may happily conceal the bottomless conflicts that defy collegial rapprochement. At a practical level, involvement in *Parshanut* or Rabbinic interpretation can become an agreeable "city of refuge" enabling the Orthodox scholar to participate in the academic field without affronting the ancestral pieties.²⁰

The elaboration of common ground between the Orthodox and some segments of the scholarly establishment is, in my opinion, beneficial to both sides, and not only because of the pragmatic calculations noted above. Yet quite apart from the crucial, ineradicable, unabated conflict over essential beliefs, it is easy to overestimate the significance of this ostensible meeting of the minds. For the underlying motives and orientations of the two partners in intellectual dialogue remain different in kind. To the academic Bible

scholar, the history of Biblical study supplements the elaboration of the academic methodology: valued as a tool, even appreciated as an object of scholarship in its own right, in the larger context of Biblical learning it is dispensable. The Orthodox thinker, by contrast, even one who values the reading of the Biblical text in its ancient context, encounters the Rabbinic literature and “what the veteran disciple is destined to innovate” as an integral part of Biblical study.

One component in our commitment to the exegetical tradition is the awareness that, willy nilly, the passage of millennia and the accumulated burden of hermeneutics thwarts any ambition to isolate the primitive, uninterpreted meaning of the Biblical text. This awareness is not necessarily limited to Orthodox thinkers. But our response to the tradition’s constitutive contribution is also dogmatic and normative: we read the Bible in the light of the exegetical literature not only because such reading is unavoidable, but because we believe it to be the right way to read. It is this deeper commitment, this radical at-homeness in the indivisible mansion of Torah, that sets us apart from those we superficially resemble.²¹

I have emphasized that our *derekh ha-limmud* is firmly rooted in a commitment to the intrinsic relationship between the study of *Tanakh* and the spheres of Torah that border upon it. But this should not be taken to obliterate any distinction between the spheres. It is one thing to insist that the doors in a house be unlocked, that they ought to link the rooms rather than segregate them; it is another thing to overlook the existence of separate rooms altogether, in order to postulate an undifferentiated one-room mansion.

In principle, this should be perfectly plain to anyone exposed to our *Parshanut*, anyone (to take one of numberless examples) who has come across Rashi’s programmatic assertion (on Genesis 3:8) that his commentary on the Torah expounds peshat rather than *derash*. Frequently, however, it is easier for Orthodox readers and writers to know this principle than to practice it creatively. There is a natural tendency to blur the boundaries, so that other areas of Torah effectively substitute for and supplant the study of *Tanakh* itself.

In working towards our own *derekh ha-limmud*, there is little profit in lamenting the manifestations of this phenomenon in popular Orthodox culture. It is more enlightening to examine critically a justly admired example of contemporary Orthodox exegesis. The direct encounter with *Tanakh*, we shall discover, can take an interesting analysis based on later authorities, and endow it with even more significant implications.

R. Moshe Eisemann’s thorough, painstaking commentary on Chronicles, that most neglected of Biblical books, is one of the high points of Orthodox Bible study in America. The “Overview” advances the remarkable thesis that *Divrei ha-Yamim* is an eschatological book.²² Argument for this position runs as follows: According to the Gemara (*Megilla* 3a) Yonatan b.

Uzziel was forbidden by a heavenly voice from composing an authoritative translation of the Hagiographa (*Ketuvim*) because "the end of days" is hidden there. Rashi identifies the "end of days" with the visions in the book of Daniel. Maharal of Prague, however, infers that all the *Ketuvim* are included in the prohibition, and that therefore all *Ketuvim* contain eschatological material. Since Chronicles is part of *Ketuvim*, adopting Maharal's view (as opposed to Rashi's) entails that Chronicles contains eschatological material. This is a short step from the conclusion that the eschatological theme defines the unique character of Chronicles. Having secured this conclusion, the author appeals to it in explaining some salient features of the book. Where the portrait of King David in Samuel differs in emphasis from that of Chronicles, for example, it is because the former depicts David as a man, while Chronicles treats him as the messianic figure.

To be sure I am pleased to see Maharal's comments brought to bear on the issue at hand. But is the logic indeed compelling that would put so much weight on an inferred generalization from a comment by Maharal that is itself an inconclusive inference from a Talmudic statement? Would it not be more responsible to submit this line of reasoning as no more than one possible overture to the book? By the same token, one might propose alternative explanations of the variations between Chronicles and Samuel. It might be suggested (and I am merely sketching the possibility) that Chronicles devotes more attention to David the King (and, incidentally, to the Levitical genealogies and Temple cult) in order to reestablish, for the generation returning to Jerusalem, a sense of institutional continuity with the pre-Exile period.

The conventional academic critique of R. Eisemann would stop here: taking him to task for over-exploiting his Maharal-text, one could, with a sniff of scholarly superiority and a sigh of relieved dismay, dismiss his work from further consideration. But the curious individual who continues to think along with R. Eisemann's theory might eventually stumble across an obvious literary-historical question implicit in his approach. If Chronicles contains eschatological themes, why were these brought to the fore by an author living in the early Second Temple period, writing for an immediate audience of his contemporaries? Are we to judge the coincidence of historical situation and revelation as an accident without import for the theological message?

Let us add another problem to the last one, in the hope that the two difficulties will resolve each other. A famous conundrum, not addressed by ArtScroll: why doesn't Chronicles narrate the exodus from Egypt?²³ The question is too important to be shrugged off, and yet, to the best of my knowledge, it is not discussed by traditional commentators. It troubled me for many years.

Why should the story of our redemption from Egypt be omitted from a review of Biblical history? The answer, I submit, is found in a prophecy of

Jeremiah (16:14-15): the days will come, when people no longer swear by "God who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt," but by "God who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the other lands where He had driven them. . ." ²⁴ The redemption from the Babylonian captivity will become more memorable than that of the first redemption from Egypt. Ramban, among others, picked up on this passage: he justified thereby the substitution of Babylonian names of months for the ordinal numbers of the First Temple era. ²⁵ Jeremiah's prophecy thus articulates the consciousness of the returning exiles so strongly that it explains their adoption of a new vocabulary. Is it not reasonable that Chronicles would paint a picture of Jewish history expressing the same keen awareness of redemption?

I hold no particular brief for R. Eisemann's thesis about the eschatological content of Chronicles. But if one is inclined to endorse that position, then my proposed solution to the problem of the missing exodus offers it support. By bringing to bear the eschatological prediction from Jeremiah one can at least suggest why Chronicles, written in the aftermath of the return from the Babylonian exile, might place special emphasis on the messianic theme.

What general lessons can we derive from this case? One result is to be dissatisfied with a methodology that relies exclusively on the exegetical and homiletical literature, at the expense of direct, unmediated encounter with the Biblical text. But in the course of thinking through the example, paying attention not only to the results but also to the process by which we earn those results, we arrived at an insight that appears, at least superficially, to run in the opposite direction. For my own attempt to get to the bottom of the silent exodus problem was nurtured not only by the unadorned Biblical text; it was fueled by my study of Ramban and other Rishonim, and my thinking was brought to a head by my critical encounter with R. Eisemann's discussion.

Thus we draw a paradoxical moral: on the one hand, to beware of interpretation that substitutes for the primary source; on the other hand, to recognize the benefits that accrue from thinking along with our partners in the search for Torah understanding. You could put the fundamental question of this essay as follows: Who are the interlocutors with whom we can best develop our authentic *derekh ha-limmud*? Who are the *havrutot* in whose company we may best fulfill our goals? With the academic world we recognize the potential value of new historical and geographical information, something that many Orthodox writers tend to ignore or downplay. Like the academicians we are wary of approaches that blur the borderlines between different facets of Torah. With our Orthodox colleagues we share a firm belief in the fundamental teachings of Judaism, with all their comprehensive implications for the study of *Tanakh*. And it is with our Orthodox brethren that we can unfold our understanding of *Tanakh* as part of the

indivisible empire of Torah. In our quest for a unified, integrated way of studying and teaching, it seems to me that we will do best to cast our intellectual lot in this world with those colleagues with whom we hope to share our spiritual portion in the next. Despite divergence about method and procedure, substance and style, the place for thinking religious individuals is with each other, to learn and to teach, to question and to answer, to challenge and to refine.

THE CONFRONTATION OF CULTURES

Theological reflection and textual analysis do not happen in a cultural vacuum. To our study of Torah we bring ourselves, our presuppositions and prejudices, our experience of life, our hopes and fears. To be honest in our work, and honest with ourselves, we dare not shirk the duty of self-examination, the ruthless scrutiny of our cultural baggage, the careful inventory of its virtues and deficiencies, both moral and intellectual. The imperative of self-understanding and the collateral impulse to articulate and criticize our outlook, and that of our society, as precisely as possible ("to get the better of words") constitutes the major justification for liberal arts education, quite apart from any possible relevance to the study of Bible.²⁶ There is no alternative to serious, disciplined reflection on the language we make ours and the ideas embodied in that language. Failure to do so will impoverish and vitiate our intellectual-religious life. Yet nowhere is this more true than in the study of Bible. This is due to the enormous philosophical and psychological sensitivity of the texts and ideas, as well as the direct and indirect infiltration of concepts and habits of thinking of secularist and Christian origin.

We may get better purchase on this critical activity by exploring an instance from the literature. We shall examine a recent article on the binding of Isaac by Phyllis Trible, a highly respected feminist Bible scholar.²⁷ My choice is deliberate: unlike many feminist authors, Trible is unfailingly stimulating, relatively plausible and responsible in her use of sources; many of the observations here presented, while open to question, are not unlike the ideas that might occur to us too. Thus we shall be able to evaluate both her approach and our possible responses to it.

According to Trible, the story of the *Akeda* "purports to be . . . a narrative of nonattachment." "To attach one's self to another is to negate love through entrapment. In surrounding Isaac, Abraham binds himself and his son. To attach is to know the anxiety of separation. In clinging to Isaac, Abraham incurs the risk of losing him—and Isaac suspects it. To attach is to practice idolatry." The use of the term *na'ar* (young man) shows that Abraham "distanced himself from Isaac²⁸ while affirming their unity. . . . Fear of God severs the link between detachment and attachment to save both Abraham and Isaac."

Trible goes on to argue that if Abraham requires the test of the *Akeda* in order to transcend the “entrapment of attachment,” Sarah is even more in need of such purification. It was Sarah, after all, who insisted that Abraham expel Hagar and Ishmael because they threatened Isaac’s position and destiny.

[S]he, not Abraham, ought to have been tested . . . that she learn the meaning of obedience to God, that she find liberation from possessiveness, that she free Isaac from maternal ties, and that she emerge a solitary individual, non-attached, the model of faithfulness.

Because Sarah was not called upon to sacrifice her son, she was denied the opportunity for a final reconciliation with Hagar, which presumably would have come about once she had attained the heights of nonattachment.

These intriguing remarks proceed to an unfortunate and unacceptable conclusion. Tribble decides that something has gone wrong with the narrative, and that Sarah has been replaced by the “ill-fitted” Abraham. This supposed deficiency of the Biblical text is attributed to the “patriarchal” partiality of the author, fostering “a bias for father-son bonding” that overcomes “the logic of the argument.”

We meet this kind of analysis, and this kind of conclusion, not only in academic journals, but in common educated discourse.²⁹ Some of the observations formulated by Tribble are not alien to us: if reject them we must, then we must stand ready to criticize and refine our own conceptions and interpretations. And some of her insights may even be true, in which case they may still want unpacking, improvement and distillation before they can become part of our intellectual property.

A full assessment of Tribble’s article cannot be undertaken short of a comprehensive study of the *Akeda*. My purpose here is to show how we must proceed with our work if we intend to be equal to the task. My precis of Tribble’s article highlights three elements: (1) a thesis about the purport of Genesis 22; (2) an ethical-psychological judgment about the situation described in the chapter; (3) an answer to the question “why Abraham rather than Sarah?” Let me comment on them in turn:

1) Tribble takes it for granted that the section purports to be a “narrative of nonattachment.” Abraham is indeed required to transcend normal human reactions for the sake of his exclusive commitment to God. Are these normal human reactions identical with the feelings of a father for a son, a father who gained that son only in his old age, after many tribulations? The Rambam³⁰ thought so, and God’s speech at the beginning of the chapter, with its fourfold repetition “your son, your only one, whom you love, Isaac” lends his view support. But many readers have located part of the drama of the test elsewhere, not in the overcoming of Abraham’s attachment to

Isaac, but in the surmounting of Abraham's deep-seated allegiance to a Kantian conception of universal moral law (a central theme in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*), or in the demonstration of Abraham's unshakable certitude in the authenticity of his prophetic encounter (Rambam's second explanation) or even in the testing of Abraham's faith in life after death, since, according to this argument, Abraham would not have offered Isaac up had he not been assured that Isaac would return to life (Abarbanel following Saadia, both preceded by Paul's *Epistle to the Hebrews*). Despite my sympathy with this thesis of Tribble's, her single-minded concentration on the interpersonal dimension runs the risk of oversimplification.

2) Tribble states that her "interpretation plays with three concepts: attachment, detachment, and nonattachment. . . . In addition to scriptural foundations, this interpretation builds on Zen Buddhism and Metapsychiatry."³¹ Whatever might be said of the ideas in her paper, the terminology certainly does not derive from the Bible. I don't mean this as a reproach. As noted above, we cannot avoid bringing ourselves to the act of study, and the only way we can eschew our own vocabulary would be to parrot a vocabulary that is not ours, and that consequently cannot express whatever it is that we want to say. If Tribble finds that the categories of Zen Buddhism and Metapsychiatry illuminate the subject and permit her to say what she wishes to say, then she should, by all means, play with that terminology.

What about us, trying to bring our *derekh ha-limmud* to bear on the *Akeda*, or on any other *sugya* in *Tanakh*? Do we consider the categories of Zen Buddhism and Metapsychiatry adequate to our apprehension of the multifaceted *devar haShem*? If we do not, it is not Professor Tribble's fault. It is our responsibility to discover our own voice, and in the process to unfold our own unique insight.

Where shall we seek our own authentic voice? To begin with, in the careful, disciplined, alert, but emphatically not slavish, emulation of our predecessors and role models, keeping in mind what we have already seen regarding the interaction of different branches of Torah. Second, by plundering the ideas and language of culture, tirelessly trying them out, struggling against all odds "to get the better of words" for the task at hand. Last, but not least, by examining critically the ideas and language of culture, holding them at arm's length, making them recite their story like a lesson, till we put our finger on the point where things went wrong, and resolve, undeceived and enlightened, to go our own way and try to do better.

I know that many studious readers will balk at the suggestion that defective language, or the uncritical borrowing of categories from various fashionable academic modes of discourse, can undermine our efforts to study *Tanakh* as thinking religious individuals. They would regard style as a matter of taste rather than substance; in any event, as something that

comes naturally. Our brief discussion of Tribler should cure us of any such illusion. To receive our language passively, to purchase it cheaply, off the rack, as it were, is to assume challenging intellectual responsibilities, replete with religious import, blithely oblivious to the shoddiness of our equipment. In a secular society, one becomes a sitting duck for every species of educated (or semi-educated) jargon.

3) Finally, a word about the most controversial element of Tribler's essay, her logical leap from the reasonable suggestion that Sarah was more "attached" to Isaac to her theory that the author of the Torah distorted the "true" story as a result of pervasive male chauvinism. Not a few scholarly people will, like one of my colleagues at Yeshiva, dismiss the question "why Abraham and not Sarah?" as an invitation to unwarranted speculation. Those who dispute Tribler's reduction of the *Akeda* to its purely interpersonal aspect will be similarly skeptical of her conviction that everything about the story must be connected to resolution of the interpersonal issue.

But what if we are sufficiently impressed with Tribler's account of attachment and detachment to place it at the center of Abraham's test? And what if we are convinced by her tenable claim that, of Abraham and Sarah, the one most attached to Isaac, and therefore the one who would profit most from withstanding the test of the *Akeda*, is Sarah? Does this support the hypothesis that the text in our *Humash* screens an "original" narrative deformed by an author who sacrificed his sense of psychological reality to the dictates of patriarchal ideology?

A moment's reflection may lead us to the opposite conclusion. When an individual is tested, God calls upon him or her to exercise extraordinary virtue. The Rabbis teach that God subjects those individuals to the test who are best able to respond: all things being equal, it is unfair to make an extraordinary demand of an individual that he or she cannot meet.³² By Tribler's own analysis, Sarah is more attached to Isaac. Hence the fact that Sarah is not the active participant in the *Akeda* is more consistent with the psychological reality depicted in the earlier narratives about Sarah and Abraham, Sarah and Hagar, Sarah and Ishmael, than is the revised edition envisioned by Tribler. (Unless, of course, you insist that the previous clashes between Sarah and Hagar are the product of patriarchal bias. But in that case the evidence of Sarah's attachment to Isaac can also be revised away, nor is there reason to lament the fact that Sarah and Hagar are denied the opportunity for reconciliation . . .)

No doubt Tribler brings her own presuppositions and hopes to the study of the text. Throughout her published work she has sought to bring biblical women and female imagery closer to the center of the text, and this motivation, which has enabled her to notice much that has previously been ignored, can also lead one to see what is not there. Because she is more

preoccupied with theme than with character, she also finds it easy to treat Abraham and Sarah as figures in an allegory rather than as flesh and blood individuals whose destinies transcend the theory of gender conflict. Her approach, furthermore, betrays a too facile optimism: for Sarah to have taken Abraham's place at the *Akeda*, passed the test with flying colors, and triumphantly reconciled with Hagar would seem to require no more than a modicum of good will on the part of the author. Human reality is often more tragic: if, as Ramban held, Sarah's conduct towards Hagar was sinful,³³ it is not at all clear that the injury could be undone by nothing more than a meeting of reconciliation.

I make these criticisms, not to discredit the work of an intelligent and thought-provoking religious thinker, but to stress the need for vigilance in evaluating current ideas and formulations. The vigilance ought to be self-directed as well, for our thinking and writing may not be completely free of irrelevant or misleading preoccupations and motivations, even the very same vices observed a moment ago. And if so, it would be a pity if our *derekh ha-limmud* suffered from our reluctance to turn on ourselves the kind of critique it is incumbent upon us to apply to others.

A CONCLUDING COMMENT

Our discussion so far has alluded to essential beliefs, held firmly by Orthodox Jews, doctrines that play a central role in defining the content and the contours of our study of *Tanakh*. I have not felt the need to define those beliefs precisely, for the simple reason that our discussion has been concerned with the unbridgeable gaps between our beliefs and those of scholars who do not subscribe to our beliefs. These differences are visible to the naked eye, so to speak, and do not need fine-tuning: just think of the authorship of the Torah, the reliability of the biblical canon, the authenticity and authority of the Oral Law and so forth. But cultivating a *derekh ha-limmud* sooner or later entails getting down to details, and that includes investigating the nuances of spiritual orientation and theological formulation.

We must recognize that an honest, informed and sophisticated approach to *Tanakh* can be expected to arrive at, and subsequently to employ, results and procedures that will not always show a familiar and reassuring face to the man in the street, and that may even shock people who deem themselves reasonably learned. Determining the right path to follow will not always be self-evident. Part of our responsibility as students, teachers and custodians of a *derekh ha-limmud* is to serve as a living laboratory in all areas belonging to our vocation. The problems that confront us as we seek to work through these issues can only be tackled in a forum where the fundamental beliefs underlying our learning are shared, where the goals of learning are held in common, and where, consequently, there is hope for a degree of consensus on the relative weights of various factors.

The reader to whom this sounds overly abstract will find many exhibits in Barry Levy's survey in our aforementioned book, and a thorough treatment of a narrow but important area—the stability of the Masoretic text in the light of Rabbinic literature—in Yeshayahu Maori's study. The focus of these discussions is what I would call the objective problem, by which I mean the problem of determining the truth or falsehood of a particular proposition. The work of forging a *derekh ha-limmud* also has a subjective aspect: how we incorporate a proposition or procedure into our individual and communal intellectual-religious frames of reference is not a matter of indifference and not something to be left to nature, as it were. Let us look at an instance of each type of challenge.

Mishna Taanit 4:5 states that the walls of Jerusalem were breached on the seventeenth of Tammuz; Jeremiah 39:2 gives the date as the ninth. R. Tanhum b. Hanilai (Jer. Talmud *ad. loc.*) answers that the Biblical text reflects a confused calculation (*kilkul heshbonot*). The Talmud discovers a similar confusion in Ezekiel 26:1, where (for reasons worked out in the *sugya*) the first of the month really refers to the ninth. Apparently the shock of disaster caused the messengers to get the date wrong, and the Biblical text perpetuates the error.³⁴

This passage attracted the attention of R. Kook, at the turn of the century, when he addressed some of the putative conflicts between science and religion. Every intelligent person, he maintains, knows that whether one accepts the older or newer theories of astronomy or geology has no relation to the Torah. It is also well-known that prophecy adapts itself to human language and to the contemporary human situation, "what the ear can hear in the present." R. Kook then refers to the Yerushalmi cited above, "according to its simple meaning," before blaming contemporary heresy on the moral corruption of the Catholic church, as a result of which modern people are easily duped by newfangled suppositions.³⁵

Now most religious readers of the Bible assume that the narrative is reliable, that when Jeremiah's account refers to the ninth of the month, it means the ninth, not the seventeenth. As readers of literature, however, we know that authors sometimes employ an "unreliable narrator," who may utter statements which the reader ought not to accept. The Talmud appears to be saying that, in order to commemorate the atmosphere of devastation and confusion, the Author of the Bible permitted several unreliable statements to creep into the Biblical texts. R. Kook implies that this example can be generalized and might resolve other apparent problems.

It seems obvious that R. Kook doesn't advocate wholesale rejection of Biblical statements. To do so would render *Tanakh* useless as a source of history. Under what circumstances would he countenance "deconstruction" of the text? Only where Biblical texts contradict each other or Rabbinic statements? Whenever the text appears to contradict well-attested Near Eastern documents? When the exact historicity is immaterial, in the

judgment of the exegete, to the import of the text? When the exegete detects rhetorical elements in the Biblical text itself that point towards such interpretation?

Most academic Bible scholars are not bothered by these questions, and can hardly be expected to take our problem seriously. For them the Biblical narrative enjoys no presumption of reliability at all. Our struggle to get R. Kook right would earn us a silky "contempt for our fixations," sugar-coated in avuncular congratulations upon having at last taken one small step towards the progressive light.³⁶ Only at home, in our own theological clearinghouse, sensitive to all that we value, can these principles be embodied, seamlessly and unself-consciously, in our *derekh ha-limmud*.

My second example illustrates the challenge posed to healthy religious subjectivity by the introduction of an unsettling proposition. It is beyond the scope of our discussion to offer an exhaustive account of the debate over the provenance of the book of Isaiah. Most of those who date the second half of the book (Chaps. 40-66) to the later part of the sixth century BCE operate with false theological presuppositions, such as the denial of prophecy *ante eventum*. One might, however, embrace the late dating on other grounds, without believing that this position is inconsistent with fundamental Jewish tenets.

Among Orthodox scholars who favored the divided Isaiah was Dr. Jacob Barth, who taught this view at the Hildesheimer Rabbinical Seminary in Berlin in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³⁷ One may question Barth's literary arguments and one may dispute his assessment of the theological considerations involved. Our interest here, however, is to record the subjective reaction of one prominent layman.

As a young man Jacob Rosenheim, a leading lay representative of Frankfurt Orthodoxy, visited Berlin, where he formed the following impression of Barth's activity:

Professor Barth, in spite of his Southern German origin, and despite the fact that he was the son-in-law of R. Ezriel Hildesheimer and indubitably lived as a devout Jew, both in thought and in action, endangered the faithfulness of the Seminary's students to the principles of Judaism. He had a completely *rationalistic, unphilosophical* mind, totally oriented to philological investigation, and it was he who accepted the view of the Bible critics about the two Isaiahs . . . , without realizing that this would necessarily undermine his young students' faith in the truth of the tradition concerning the composition of Scriptures. Indeed, all students of the Seminary who chose to study Orientalism or Hebrew at the university, were *required* to know the basic works of Biblical criticism before taking their doctoral examinations, so that pure faith, nay elementary respect for divine revelation, was necessarily undermined.³⁸

Presumably Rosenheim did not accept the multiple authorship of Isaiah. No scholar himself, his animadversions may well play out the

Frankfurt-Berlin tensions that divided modern German Orthodoxy. Yet his complaint deserves to be read carefully within its own limits. He does not here castigate Barth as a heretic *malgré lui*. Instead he bemoans the *consequences* of Barth's teaching. He alleges that Barth was intellectually one-dimensional (lacking philosophical depth), and that he failed to understand the effect certain results and modes of investigation would have on his students. The logical implication of this is that had Barth displayed a more comprehensive ("philosophical") approach, had he more successfully engaged his own piety in the act of teaching, had he better understood his students' mentality, Rosenheim would not have minded quite as much the raising of potentially unsettling theories. In fact, though Rosenheim is clearly unhappy with any exposure to heretical theories, he goes on to praise R. David Zvi Hoffmann as a more satisfactory role model who injected a more tangible quality of fervor into his teaching.

Let me pose a problem to those who believe that the future of serious creative Orthodox *Tanakh* study passes through the academic establishment. I presume that you, like me, want *Tanakh* to occupy an important place in Jewish education. Perhaps I have not convinced you that only a comprehensive, philosophical *derekh ha-limmud* can serve as our ultimate goal. Perhaps you believe that my conception of study suffused by and integrated with theological reflection is one more specialty, no better and no worse than a single-minded devotion to philology. But if you get your way, if the university orientation becomes the paradigm and pattern for our study, then the quasi-critical and speculative subjects peripheral to the study of *devar Ha-Shem*—issues of authorship, dating, historical background and the like—will inexorably work their way to the top of our syllabi. And if that is the case, then the marginality of Bible in the curriculum will necessarily be reinforced, as student and layman come to experience *Tanakh*, not as the occasion for confrontation with God and with ourselves, but as a complex of preoccupations, a sideshow of "problems," a vermiform appendix in the body politic of Torah, useless in itself, worthy of attention only when it causes pain or becomes infected.

III

Many arguments have been offered to urge a greater willingness, on the part of Orthodox Bible students, to participate in the professional culture of academia. Let us comment on some of them:

1) *Non-participation is intellectually dishonest*: In particular it is held that failure to apply to Torah the same methods used in other academic disciplines, and in the exact manner advocated by the upholders of greater participation, constitutes an inconsistency. This argument is specifically deployed

against "highly regarded centrist *roshei yeshiva*" who advocate the study of Western literature, philosophy and the like. When they insist that Torah is different from other disciplines, they are accused of coming close to making a mockery of the entire enterprise.

Many of us, especially those whose judgment of the aforementioned *Gedolei Yisrael* and their intellectual integrity or lack thereof is based on first-hand experience, would lack the equanimity to further discuss the imputation. But the argument makes sense if it means that what counts as truth and what counts as evidence is determined by the gatekeepers of a discipline, and that intellectual honesty requires us to forsake all knowledge that is not certified a part of the discipline we are studying at the moment. From a common sense perspective, however, inquiry that systematically ignores everything else we know (including the knowledge given us through revelation), is not honest. On the contrary: it is the height of perversity!³⁹

We are fortunate to have a pertinent letter, dated August 11, 1953, by *maran ha-Rav Soloveitchik zt"l*, counseling against RCA participation in the planned JPS Bible translation.

After all, we live in an age which admires the expert and which expects him to tell how things are and how they ought to be done. The expert, on the other hand, does not tolerate any opposition; all we ought to do is listen to him and swallow his ideas. I am not ready to swallow the ideas of the modern expert and scholar on our Tanakh. . . .⁴⁰

2) *Non-participation is a sign of weakness*: It is held that refraining from participation in the academic enterprise projects to the external observer an image of weakness, not strength.

Imagine you have come to believe that a wonderful life-giving treasure is hidden in your backyard. Your neighbor, whether because he lacks access to your information or for some other reason, scoffs at your belief. You stop digging for the treasure; you will not get back to work until you have brought your neighbor around to your belief. Your neighbor reasonably concludes that since you don't pursue your commitment single-mindedly you either lack certitude in your own belief or that you don't really value the treasure. I would call this a projection of weakness, not strength. And the worst thing is that your belief may eventually ape your actions, so that you end up confirming his suspicion.

External observers are not all of one cloth, and not all of our skeptical neighbors will react like the one here invented. But I submit that being distracted from one's mission for fear of being perceived as weak is itself the most dramatic exhibition of weakness. A similar observation animates the Rav, in the letter just quoted:

I noticed in your letter that you are a bit disturbed about the probability of being left out. Let me tell you that this attitude of fear is responsible for many commissions and omissions, compromises and fallacies on our part which have contributed greatly to the prevailing confusion within the Jewish community and to the loss of our self-esteem, our experience of ourselves as independent entities committed to a unique philosophy and way of life.

3) *The missionary position*: Orthodox scholars should enter academic Bible studies in the hope of attracting their errant colleagues to the true faith.

To make this claim ingenuously requires almost unbelievable naivete. Each story of a human being assenting to the fundamental principles underlying either traditional Jewish belief or entrenched academic belief is both complex and mysterious, rich in implicit premises and barely avowed motivations. The vast majority of people, even thinking people, once having opted for a general network of beliefs, are unlikely to reconsider at the drop of an argument. When a sympathetic historian of the Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis grudgingly acknowledges of R. David Hoffmann, from the safe distance of several generations, that “[h]is work was well done and remains one of the best statements of scientific Conservatism,”⁴¹ we do not expect him to adopt Hoffmann’s views; we expect the author to move to the next item, and we are not disappointed. This is no different from what we do when a truth to which we were firmly committed, collides with some particularly knotty problem. The gap is too wide to be bridged by reason alone, especially when our side is in the minority and, by the very definition of the game, forced to concede the home court advantage and use the vocabulary and conceptual matrix of our opponents.

4) *Light unto the professors*: There is so much that we can contribute to the scholarly world. If we persist in using our own parochial language and categories they won’t listen to us.

It is difficult to judge how great an obligation, if any, we have to export Biblical research to the world. Assuming that we want to, the question is why we can’t be ourselves and speak in our own voices. The answer is either connected to the content—if we travel under our true colors, our message will be dismissed; or it is aesthetic—the kernel of truth, encased in the husks of Orthodox particularism, is harder to assimilate.

Both of these obstacles are real. I know this, because it is tiresome to “translate” the jargon of modern Biblical scholarship into my own idiom, and irksome to separate the data that may be useful to me from the host of presuppositions I don’t accept. But like it or not, not all jargon is obfuscation. The accretion of specialized concepts often reproduces authentically a network of systematic connections, subtle nuance and the interaction of a

discipline with its past, that cannot be encoded as well in any other way. Fortright intellectual relations, motivated by an honest desire to understand and appreciate, will survive the sometimes insurmountable imaginative challenge of translation.

5) *The only impediment to full participation is academic anti-Semitism:* Jewish opposition to Biblical scholarship has often been rallied by reference to the anti-Jewish ideology purportedly inspiring the academic enterprise. Who doesn't know Solomon Schechter's jibe that the higher criticism is the higher anti-Semitism? Most contemporary scholars are not card-carrying anti-Semites; it is not even clear that they come under the halakhic prohibition of "learning from a sorcerer [*magosh*]" whom Rashi defines as one fervently committed to leading Jews astray.⁴² It is therefore argued that our traditional revulsion towards Bible scholars is outmoded.

I don't know the prevalence of anti-Semitism or violent hatred of Torah among present day Biblical scholars (my own limited experience having been uniformly benign).⁴³ Leftist and/or feminist academic ideologues are disposed to the doctrinaire slur, and occasionally you come across something genuinely nauseous⁴⁴. It happens that the university career of a Bible scholar is sidelined or smashed because someone in power (usually a Jew) cannot brook the presence of a believing Jew in the profession, but these episodes are infrequent, if only because the profession's tolerance is so rarely tested.

But the entire attempt to judge academic Bible study by the personal ethics of its practitioners is inherently misguided. Even if it were true that each and every member of the regiment that liberated Dachau were an unreconstructed follower of Wellhausen, I would not expect these valiant and humane professors to nominate an Orthodox Jew to a tenured chair in their department. The insuperable gap is not academic politics, but belief, presumably sincere and deep-seated belief.

6) *The increased popularity of "neutral" specialties breaks down the barriers:* Earlier we noted the recent respectability of history of exegesis and similar safe havens. Methodological fragmentation in the humanities has led to greater tolerance for pluralistic approaches, which may open a crack in the door through which our own people can gain a foothold, if not in Jewish studies, then at least in departments of literature.

This is true up to a point. That a lifework encompassed by such an intellectual agenda would fall short of the literary-theological comprehensiveness we have described needs no repetition. But another caveat is in order. When we think of elements incompatible with Judaism in academic

ideology, we are quite alert to themes deriving from Christian sources. We often let our dukes down when the ideology is secular, and hence nominally neutral. Moreover, we must not forget that secular neutrality manifests itself in more than the adoption, rejection or bracketing of specific beliefs or methods. Let me explain by way of reference to the "Bible as literature" movement that has generated so much enthusiasm in recent years.

For Orthodox Jews, there are obvious attractions in applying to the Bible the methods that have been successfully developed for the study of great literature: literary close reading shares affinities with the insights of *Parshanut*, sometimes by dressing them up in a more contemporary, and systematic garb⁴⁵, sometimes by providing a theoretical framework that deepens the meaning of the midrashic enterprise⁴⁶; the literary approach tends to uncover the unity of the text; most (though not all) literary readers do not presuppose the Documentary Hypothesis in their analysis. Last but not least, the literary understanding of Biblical narrative and poetry is a potential ally in the cause of existential truth as most academic scholarship is not.

Of course the literary critics carry presuppositions of their own, and not every approach suitable to the study of some genre or period can be transferred to Bible. It makes an immense difference, for example, that the Biblical narratives contain historical information and moral instruction of the utmost importance for the original audience. Thus the modern literary reading of Genesis, for example, often combines keen attention to character development with indifference to the passages in which God speaks of the destiny of the Jewish people, ignoring the fact that the ancient Jews were at least as interested in God's promises to them as in those narrative units that still allure the modern literary sensibility. Most literary analysis has nothing to say about the vast amount of legal material, or even about its connection to the adjacent narrative. We know that scholars who do not share our beliefs are prone to miss these points, and that they may even consciously utilize the rubric "as literature" to prescind from the theological claims made by the Bible⁴⁷. Despite these pitfalls and shortcomings, we (I and many of my friends) look forward to the publications of Robert Alter, for example, and are not much perturbed by the complaint of an eminent non-Jewish student of literature, that "'Our' and 'we' are accurate only if Alter is addressing atheists, Low Church Protestants, and Jews who don't believe or practice the faith."⁴⁸ We can benefit from Alter's shrewd insights without imagining that we are part of his "we."

But the secular orientation that excludes us from Alter's "we" is not merely a matter of disputed doctrines. The secular approach often betrays a completely different conception of what is at stake in the quest for truth. This judgment is confirmed by an almost trivial throwaway comment in Alter's largely negative review of Harold Bloom's *Book of J*, with its "fiction or fantasy, and not necessarily a helpful one" that the so-called J document

of *Humash* was written by a woman.⁴⁹ His disapproval of Bloom's book does not prevent Alter from extending the following faint praise:

The decision about her gender, of which Bloom says he is intuitively convinced, is a fine way to *épater les fidèles*; every time the pronoun "she" occurs, readers are likely to find themselves shaken out of their preconceptions about the Bible, and that is all to the good.⁵⁰

The breezy epistemology of the last phrase can be accepted only if we assume that all traditional preconceptions are untrustworthy until proven true, or that the truth of those preconceptions doesn't much matter, so that shaking them up is nothing but good clean American fun, like giving your stuffy neighbor a hotfoot at the baseball stadium. Such frolics may indeed be appropriate in dealing with literature that invites playful ambiguity, from Sherlock Holmes to Nabokov. Tanakh does not fall in the same category. Hence, the committed Orthodox scholar who can pass a pleasant and profitable hour in the company of his secular counterpart, as one would with an amiable acquaintance at a well-appointed bar, will return to his own home when the time comes for work and sleep. It is like a wartime encounter in a neutral city. Were someone to declare that he or she had come there to find a source of living water, they would either be joking or misinformed.

7) *Bold scholar to the rescue*: It is conceded that those who participate, for whatever reasons, in academic Biblical studies will not be able to solve many of the most important questions within the framework of the current academic establishment. These major questions remain disturbing and unanswered and the professional response of these scholars, whatever their "private" beliefs might be, will again and again be *tzarikh 'iyyun*. This unfortunate state of paralysis can only be remedied when a bold scholar takes the initiative and solves one of these fundamental problems.

To the extent that this argument describes the dilemma of those engaged in academic scholarship rather than defining a comprehensive *derekh ha-limmud*, it has more to do with the topic of the next section. Yet I believe that the appeal to the "bold scholar" highlights one of the problems with our affiliation to the academic establishment. The genuinely creative literary-theological thinker, whatever the scope of his or her interests, must be firmly and persuasively rooted in his own vocabulary and *weltanschauung*; he must operate in the name of a rich, authentic *derekh ha-limmud*. Success in the academic world, however, is predicated on one's ability to distance one's religious identity from his professional activities. The "bold scholar," if she is to appear, is thus unlikely to be clad in academic raiment. Meanwhile piecemeal solutions, the kind that can be cultivated by less prodigiously gifted individuals operating within the autonomous framework

of a *derekh ha-limmud*, are deferred because many of those individuals, exiled in academia, are not in control of their own intellectual-religious vocations. A passenger cannot guide the carriage by holding on to the seat in front of him; he must get out of the carriage and at least guide himself. This is true, not only of the exceptional scholar, the *deus ex machina*; it is true for every thinking religious individual.

IV

I could make a more unified presentation by omitting the next section. I could then conclude that Orthodoxy would create a self-sufficient system of Biblical studies. Not only would we produce our own theology, our own integration of *Torah she-b'al Peh* and *Torah she-bi-Ktav*, our own perspective on history of exegesis and its relation to other dimensions of study, and so forth; we would also conduct an autonomous archaeology, Assyriology, Egyptology, Semitics and the like. Unfortunately this vision is utterly unfeasible at present. Any consideration of Orthodox Bible study and its relation to the secular university must make room for this fact.

At a practical level I would suggest a rough distinction between two domains pertinent to Biblical scholarship. The first includes archaeology, Near Eastern history and, to a lesser degree, Semitic languages. The second covers those areas where theological doctrines are more explicitly involved and where the results and formulation of one's study more directly influence theological experience⁵¹. Three factors lead me to place the first set of disciplines in a class of their own:

1) They can be practiced actively only by individuals who have undergone complicated, sophisticated, specialized training.

2) These disciplines generally do not supply the content of Torah study, but rather background information for Torah study.

3) Partly as a result of the second factor, conflict in these disciplines is less likely to interfere with Talmud Torah.

The first factor suggests that, where the critical mass (in both senses of the term) is lacking, it is just as well if these areas become the possession of the few. The second factor implies that lack of training in these areas does not impoverish the individual's *derekh ha-limmud*. His needs can be met by consulting the experts. The third factor implies that there is less of a risk that the *derekh ha-limmud* will be distorted if we make common cause with scholars outside our camp.

The last point may seem a bit puzzling, at first blush. An example may be helpful. We all know that it has so far proven impossible to harmonize completely the Biblical stories about the conquest of the land with the prevalent interpretations of the available archaeological evidence. Twenty years ago it was widely believed that much of this tension could be

resolved if the conquest were dated to approximately 1300 BCE. But this contradicted I Kings 6:1 which places the beginning of Solomon's reign 480 years after the Exodus, yielding 1400 BCE as the approximate date of the conquest. I recall one of my college teachers quipping that if the power were bestowed upon him to emend one, and only one, Biblical verse, he would choose to reduce the number to 380. In a more sober vein, a work professing to reconcile the various sources retreated before this problem, conceding "an abyss between the two [Bible and archaeology] as to chronology, a gap that cannot be passed over in any manner, that is distressing and unrelenting⁵²." With John Bimson's *Redating the Exodus*⁵³ the 480 years found a defender, but his view raised other difficulties. What is interesting for our purposes is that the correct historical solution to this puzzle, so long as we believe that there is a solution, need not affect the way we study Bible day by day.

To be sure the situation is not as neat as I have depicted it. As Barry Eichler shows in our book, the scholar of Mesopotamian civilization is more than a mechanical resource for background information to be made available to students of Bible; he or she also interprets the Bible in its relation to the non-Biblical cultural context. Shaping our conception of Biblical history, its continuity and discontinuity with the surrounding culture, is as much a theological as it is a purely historiographical task. So too my example in the last paragraph can be challenged by counter-examples: dating an incident, tracing the trajectory of a battle, and certainly ascertaining the truth of a new explanation based on cognate languages, often does alter theological interpretation. The reader of Isaiah 36, for instance, wonders why Hezekiah's stance towards Assyria moves from compliance to defiance. Rishonim already debated whether the two phases are reactions to two Assyrian campaigns, or a shift in the course of one.⁵⁴ The modern debate on this question includes the Prism of Sennacherib: what conclusion we draw from the aggregate evidence affects our entire conception of Hezekiah and his age. Lastly, of course, the archaeologists and philologists, despite the apparent "objectivity" of their data, are not free of their own presuppositions, reflecting their religious inclinations and intellectual biases.

Nevertheless, I think it unwise for us, at this time, to erect a "Jewish" archaeology or Biblical geography. Practically, I recommend that we refrain from putting weight on hypotheses in these areas, however congenial to our own firmly held beliefs, so long as these hypotheses have not passed muster in the conventional academic literature. This means that Orthodox scholars engaged in these disciplines will have to regard their academic colleagues as their primary peer group, even though this may diminish their ability to contribute to a *derekh ha-limmud* in the manner discussed here. The intellectual (perhaps even religious) sacrifice entailed can be compared to that of a diplomat posted to the capital of a hostile neighbor: he is doing his patriotic duty, but he risks losing touch with the life of his nation. The

ideal of splendid autonomous isolation, “calmly and persistently” navigating towards the truth must give way to *tzarikh 'iyyun*. Such a policy may be frustrating to us. It is also inapplicable to the Orthodox scholar whose own attainments in these fields permit him or her to buck the consensus. But, for most of us, selective theorizing in these areas smacks of propaganda and reinforces haphazard intellectual hygiene.

V

And in general, this is an important rule in the struggle of ideas: we should not immediately refute any idea which comes to contradict anything in the Torah, but rather we should build the palace of Torah above it; in so doing we are exalted by the Torah, and through this exaltation the ideas are revealed, and thereafter, when we are not pressured by anything, we can confidently also struggle against it.⁵⁵

This essay can be read as an extended commentary on these inspiring words of R. Kook. Our immediate, and primary, goal in confronting unsettling ideas is neither impatient or anxious refutation, nor is it paralyzed silence. We are to get on with our learning, to integrate the challenging ideas, insofar as this is warranted, into the seamless fabric of our *derekh ha-limmud*. The group around the Yaakov Herzog Institute at Yeshivat Har Etzion, who are responsible for the journal *Megadim*, has made a good start at making this ideal a reality.⁵⁶

If we wish to do the same, we must bear in mind the memorable formulation of R. Kook's close disciple-associate, R. Yaakov Moshe Charlop, who taught that Jewish thought appropriates foreign ideas, not by adopting them, but by converting them to Judaism, as it were. We must eschew the collective intellectual paralysis of the intellectual Marrano. We cannot become fixated on how we are perceived by others, whether this means caring too much how we are regarded by scholars at other institutions, or caring too much what our neighbors think of us in Shul, whether we lower our standards to play the galleries or lower our eyes with the humility of the feckless. We must be wary of being more preoccupied with what we say to others than we are occupied in thinking about what we say to ourselves. We must abjure the interminable hand-wringing over acceptable method that confirms R. Joseph Wanefsky's observation to the effect that richness of content in a presentation often stands in inverse proportion to the frequency with which the word “methodology” is invoked.⁵⁷

I return to R. Kook's fascinating image of the palace of Torah that expropriates the challenge of ideas contradicting Torah. I wonder if these words do not intimidate us as much as they spur us on to greater and more authentic achievement. Unable to build a palace in one fell swoop, we

build nothing and call for a *deus ex machina* to fill the void and get us off the hook. Our *derekh ha-limmud* must be built example after example, brick on top of brick. Before we build the palace we need a place where we can unpack our trunk, get our books out of storage and back into our hands. We want a room with a view, since there is knowledge to be had that we want to have for our enhanced study of Torah. But we cannot do our work, we cannot prepare to build the palace, unless we do it in a room of our own.

NOTES

1. *Arpelei Tohar* (Jerusalem 5743) p. 39.
2. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, tr. Swenson and Lowrie (Princeton, 1941) p. 147.
3. For more on this, see "Camino Real and Modern Talmud Study" in the volume referred to above, from which the present essay is taken.
4. See below and my "The Nature of Inquiry: A Common Sense Perspective" *The Torah U-Madda Journal* 3 (1992), pp. 37-51.
5. Christian readers will detect similarities to the approach championed by Brevard Childs. See his *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London, 1979) and *Exodus* (London, 1974). For analysis, see Mark Brett, *Biblical Criticism in Crisis?* (Cambridge UP, 1991).
6. See below and my "To Get the Better of Words: An Apology for Yirat Shamayim in Academic Jewish Studies" *The Torah U-Madda Journal* 2 (1991), pp. 7-24.
7. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Halakhic Mind* (New York, 1986), p. 4.
8. For an alternate approach to this question, see *Keli Yakar*. See also *Ha'amek Davar* to Deut. 31:26.
9. E.g. *Sanhedrin* 43b; my formulation avoids addressing the difference between R. Yehuda and R. Nehemia. On the function of "dotted letters" in Rabbinic hermeneutics, see S. Lieberman *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York, 1950) pp. 43-46.
10. Whether "dotted letters" constitute a dimension of *peshat* in Rashi's methodology is discussed by R. Menahem Schneerson, *Likkutei Sihot* 8: 61ff.,
11. *Sheva Berakhot* for Rabbi Daniel and Hannah Katsman, 9/10/88.
12. See G. Minette de Tillesse, 'Sections "u" et sections "vous" dans le Deutéronome' (*Vetus Testamentum* 12, 1962, pp. 29-87).
13. Naturally a well-established hypothesis is superior to a provisional one, as a theory of greater explanatory scope is preferable to a more limited one. My point is that a provisional and limited proposal is better than none at all, both because of the truth it contains and the truth its elaboration may lead to.
14. Introduction to *Milhamot haShem*.
15. See note 1 *supra*.
16. For an overview, see my article, "Biblical Exegesis, Jewish" (*Encyclopedia of Religion*, New York, 1987) 2: 136-142.
17. See the discussion of his views in the volume from which the present essay is taken.
18. This is, of course, a fundamental postulate in the thought of maran haRav Soloveitchik, most explicitly in *The Halakhic Mind*.
19. Even *Encyclopedia Mikrait* omits discussion of the classical super-commentaries on Rashi, who are thus included only in the *Encyclopedia of Religion* article (cited above n.16).
20. See, for example, the recommendation of Moshe Greenberg, *Al ha-Mikra ve-al ha-Yahadut*, ed. A. Shapira (Tel Aviv, 1984) pp. 330-337.

21. These two elements are touched on in S. Carmy and D. Shatz, "The Bible as a Source of Jewish Philosophical Reflection" (in *The Routledge History of Jewish Philosophy*, ed. D. Frank and O. Leaman, London, 1994).
22. *Divrei Hayamim* 1 (ArtScroll, 1987), xvii-xix and xlii-l. R. Nosson Scherman collaborated on the Overviews.
23. For a discussion with references to earlier literature, see Sarah Yefet, *Emunot ve-Deot be-Sefer Divrei ha-Yamim* (Jerusalem, 1977), pp. 322-327.
24. Cf. Jeremiah 23:7-8. This does not imply that commemoration of the Egyptian Exodus will be obliterated. See *Berakhot* 12b (parallel in *Mekhilta of R. Ishmael* to Exodus 13:2). On the Talmud's use of the Jer. 23 instead of ch. 16, see note of R. Zvi Hirsch Chajes *ad. loc.*, elaborated in *Kol Kitvei Maharatz Hayyot*, I 74.
25. Commentary to Exodus 12:2. See also R. Yosef Albo, *Sefer haikkarim* 3:16.
26. See my article (cited above n.6) and "Why I Read Philosophy etc." (*Commentator*, 1982 reprinted in *Torah uMadda Reader*, ed. S. Carmy, Yeshiva University Community Services Division).
27. "Genesis 22: The Sacrifice of Sarah," in Jason Rosenblatt and Joseph Sitterson Jr. "Not in Heaven": *Coherence and Complexity in Biblical Narrative* (Indiana, 1991), pp. 170-191; quotations are from pp. 178-182 and pp. 187-189.
28. Tribble does not remark on the possible relevance of a similar strategy of distancing in the next chapter. From the time he mourns Sarah until he accomplishes her burial, Abraham speaks of her as his "dead person" (*meti*).
29. Even as I write this paragraph, the August 1993 *Atlantic* arrives with a long cover essay by Cullen Murphy, "Women and the Bible" (pp. 39-64).
30. *Guide* 3:24. Note, however, that Rambam does not locate the purpose of the chapter in a lesson learnt by Abraham, but rather in the lessons taught through Abraham's exhibition of virtue.
31. Tribble p. 251, n.20.
32. See *Genesis Rabba* 55:2 (Theodor-Albeck pp. 585-6).
33. See his Commentary to 16:6 and David Berger's article.
34. See commentators, including Hatam Sofer on the Yerushalmi margin. Note that Maharsha's puzzlement induced him to offer a strained interpretation of this statement (*Taanit* 28b, s.v *Ba-rishona*).
35. *Eder ha-Yekar* (Jerusalem, 5727) pp. 37-38.
36. The phrase in quotes is from Michael Rosenak's poignant lament for the infirmity of modern Orthodoxy and right-wing Conservatism, "In (Not Such) Splendid Isolation" (*Forum* Winter 1983/4, no. 50, pp. 37-40), p. 39.
37. See Zvi Weinberg, "Jacob Barth's Lectures on Isaiah at the Berlin Rabbinical Seminary," in *Iyyunei Mikra u-Parshanut* [Toeg Memorial Volume], ed. U. Simon and M. Goshen-Gottstein (Bar Ilan, 1980) pp. 229-241, for Barth's lecture notes and M. Breuer, *Modernity Within Tradition*, tr. E. Petuchowski (Columbia U., 1992) pp. 186-188 and pp. 205-207, for an account of the controversy.
38. *Zikhronot* (Tel Aviv, 1955) p. 50; italics in the original.
39. Cf. the remarks of a Christian philosopher: "we should declare the impossibility of pursuing Critical Studies that are neutral on important questions such as the nature and authority of the New Testament and should argue instead that Christian biblical scholars ought to work out of basic Christian presuppositions regarding the nature and purpose of Scripture. Christian biblical scholars ought not, therefore, to pretend to hold a methodological neutrality about the nature, authority, and purpose of the biblical texts . . . why should they deny themselves access to truths they already accept as they press onward in the pursuit of truth? Affecting a methodological neutrality toward Scripture should be recognized, then as neither possible nor desirable." Ronald J. Feenstra, "Critical Studies of the New Testament: Comments on the Paper of Peter van Inwagen" (in *Hermes and Athena*:

- Biblical Exegesis and Philosophical Theology*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Thomas P. Flint, Notre Dame, 1993) p. 196. This volume seeks to open a dialogue between Christian philosophers and Biblical scholars, an attempt that recapitulates many of the conflicts described here.
40. Copy in Louis Bernstein "The Emergence of the English Speaking Rabbinate" (YU Diss. 1977), p. 561f. The Rav's classic published statement on interfaith dialogue is "Confrontation" (*Tradition* 6:2, Spring-Summer 1964).
 41. R. J. Thompson: *Moses and the Law in a Century of Criticism Since Graf* (Leiden, 1970) p. 81.
 42. Rashi Shabbat 75a, s.v. *ve-ha-lomed*. See R. Ahron Soloveichik, *Logic of the Heart, Logic of the Mind* (Genesis Jerusalem Press, 1991) 45-46 and compare to *Od Yisrael Yosef Beni Hai* (Brisk Yeshiva of Chicago, 1993) p. 11.
 43. Cf. the judgment of a distinguished philologist and Biblical scholar: "But, in so far as this criticism was at all valid, it was not at all specific to the critical approach. It derives rather from general structures within nineteenth century Christianity. . . . Regrettable as this teaching was, there was never any proper justification for the deplorable remark "Higher criticism—higher anti-Semitism," a remark which would never have been made by a great scholar, and yet is sometimes repeated." James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London, 1977) p. 286. I doubt Barr's claim that liberal Christian scholars are less prone to anti-Judaic bias than theological conservatives: militant resentment of Jewish particularism in the name of "third world" liberation and feminist hatred towards the "phallogocentric" ethic of the commandment are not conservative theological positions.
 44. R. J. Thompson (cited above n.41) upon mentioning the venerable German-Jewish periodical MGWJ which had predicted the fall of the Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis, cannot restrain an unpardonable sneer: "MGWJ . . . relapses into critical silence, broken only by another "demise" article on Wellhausen, a year before its own final demise in 1939." (p. 84, n.4).
 45. The early essays of Robert Alter stimulated interest among English readers, partly for this reason. See his *Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, 1981) and *Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York, 1985).
 46. I am thinking of Meir Sternberg's *Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Indiana, 1985) and similar works. By exhibiting the ubiquity of narrative gaps in the Biblical story, Sternberg both demonstrates the demands made by the Bible on its readers and encourages us to understand why, and how, Hazal respond to those demands.
 47. Harold Fisch has made an important contribution by contrasting the theological poetics of the Bible with the ingrained assumptions underlying modern responses to literature. See his *Poetry with a Purpose* (Indiana, 1988), in particular the essays on the Song of Songs and Job.
 48. Denis Donoghue, "Books of Books Books," *New York Review of Books*, 11/5/92, pp. 46-50, p. 47.
 49. Robert Alter, *The World of Biblical Literature* (Basic Books, 1992): "The Quest for the Author" (pp. 153-170), p. 168.
 50. *Ibid*, p. 161, italics in last sentence are mine.
 51. Some areas straddle the border between these categories. Dead Sea Scroll exegesis, for example is a fairly specialized pursuit, yet it has direct implications for literary-theological investigation.
 52. Israel Ben-Shem, *Kibbush Maarav ha-Aretz* (Diss. Tel Aviv University, 1978) p. 108. The sponsor was Y. M. Grintz.
 53. (Sheffield, 1982). A heated exchange between Bimson and David Livingston ("Redating the Exodus," *Biblical Archeology Review* 13:5 [Sept.-Oct. 1987] pp. 40-53) and Baruch Halpern, "Radical Exodus Redating Fatally Flawed," *BAR* 13:6 (Nov.-Dec. 1987) pp. 56-61, was followed by a volley of excited letters: see 14:1 (Jan.-Feb. 1988) 14-15 and 14:2 (March-April 1988) pp. 12-13; p. 58.
 54. See Gersonides (II Kings 18:19) and Abarbanel (Isaiah 36:1).

55. R. Kook, *Iggerot haReiyah* I #134; translated by Tzvi Feldman in *Selected Letters* (Ma'aleh Adumim, 1986), p. 14.
56. For a recent statement of their shared outlook, see R. Yoel Ben-Nun, *Megadim* 15 (Marheshvan 5752) pp. 99-102.
57. According to his biographer, Professor Ephraim Urbach was wont to make a pungent observation in the same spirit: *Über Methode spricht nur wer von der Sache nichts versteht* (Y. Zusman, "The Scholarly Achievement of Prof. Urbach," [in *E. E. Urbach: Bio-Bibliographia Mehkarit*, Supplement to *Jewish Studies* 1993] 26.