

Rabbi Dr. Barry Kislowitz has served as a head of school and currently directs Educating for Impact, which supports and serves 18 schools across Europe.

FROM INTUITION TO EVIDENCE: FAITH DEVELOPMENT THEORY AS AN EMPIRICAL FOUNDATION FOR JEWISH EDUCATION

Within an Orthodox framework the purpose of Torah education is not merely to convey knowledge or to impart skills, but most importantly to foster the religious growth of our students as they mature. While we might quibble about methods, priorities, and details, this basic truth, underscored in our liturgy and rabbinic sources, is central. The dream and prayer of teacher and parent alike is, or ought to be, not merely to produce knowledgeable graduates but to foster love and awe of God. Yet, despite the centrality of this goal, our collective educational efforts in this arena are often haphazard at best as educators make choices based on personal experience and intuition and not as part of a carefully planned, coherent approach. This is regrettable both because the goals of religious development are so vital to our efforts, and because there exist relevant theories and viable empirical studies on the basis of which coherent and effective approaches might be crafted.

What is Missing?

To bring this lacuna more clearly into relief we need turn no further than a recent issue of *TRADITION* in which leading educators at the high school and post-high school level share a fascinating array of perspectives on the place of Jewish thought in our curricula.¹ While the perspectives of the symposium contributors are varied, a common understanding underlying essentially all the essays is the imperative to proactively consider the religious development of the learner as we craft our educational program. At the same time, when we analyze the symposium responses as a body of work we note a striking gap, which parallels a general omission in this area of current Jewish educational scholarship. The contributions include

¹ “Symposium: Jewish Thought in the Contemporary World—Educational Challenges and Goals,” *TRADITION*, 52:4 (2020).

philosophical and ideological justifications for giving Jewish thought its rightful place within the larger curriculum, discussions about how to approach such works from a textual perspective, and arguments as to the benefit that learning Jewish thought holds in developing a student's capacity for critical thought as well as their religious development.² This last argument interests me most directly, and it is notably supported by autobiographical anecdotes and vignettes from the writers' experiences rather than by pedagogical or psychological research.

This creates a stark contrast between the nature of the arguments for what to teach and the arguments for how to teach it. To take one example, Netanel Wiederblank notes that "[m]ore important than teaching Torah knowledge is bringing our students closer to God.... Remaining ever mindful of this goal helps determine the content and methodology of our teaching."³ In light of this goal, he builds a sound argument based on sources including Rambam, R. Moshe Isserles, R. Kook, and others to support the contention that we must include texts that focus directly on an understanding of God within the *mahshava* curriculum. In contrast to these text-based arguments, his arguments on the pedagogic side, like those of the other contributors, are based on personal experience and teacher's intuition. Without impugning any of the contributors' knowledge and experience or undervaluing the reliability of a teacher's professional judgment, it is possible to construct a more systematic, well-founded approach to examining how to teach students about the key issues within *mahshava*.

To further illuminate what we are missing, consider an analogy to the creation of a mathematics curriculum. It is clear that content experts would be essential in designing such a curriculum. Only someone with extensive knowledge of everything from the fundamentals of computation through algebra and on to calculus could possibly determine which concepts and skills must come first to form key scaffolding for more advanced topics. Yet, a course of mathematical study based only on the logical coherence and order of its contents without any regard for the development of the learner would certainly be lacking.⁴ We would have no way to determine, for example, how and when it is appropriate to move from concrete computation to algebra, and what forms of algebraic reasoning children may

² Mali Brofsky, "Introduction," *ibid.*, 4.

³ Netanel Wiederblank, "Why and How We Study *Mahshava*," *ibid.*, 82–88.

⁴ Lee Shulman coined the term pedagogic content knowledge to refer to such awareness, and in doing so launched a stream of research that spans more than twenty years. See his seminal article, "Those Who Understand: Knowledge Growth in Teaching," *Educational Researcher*, 15:2 (1986), 4–14.

have the capacity for at a given age. This is one of many crucial decisions in building an effective curriculum, as a child who learns algebra before developing the capacity for abstract thought will tend to memorize procedures rather than understanding concepts, undercutting the foundation for studying more advanced mathematics in the later high school years. Faced with this task it is doubtful that many of us would choose to rely on hearsay or intuition. Indeed, we would be well-justified in seeking a research-based assessment of children's typical cognitive development in order to align curriculum content in an effective manner, not just for the discipline or the text but for the learner as well.⁵

While turning to the research on cognitive development as it relates to mathematical understanding is seen as a given, the parallel research on religious development has rarely managed to find its way into the Jewish studies classroom. Were this the result of a thoughtful analysis that had examined the research undertaken by non-Jewish scholars and found it to be lacking, unhelpful, or perhaps even at odds with a traditional Jewish approach, it would be lamentable though understandable. Unfortunately, a more accurate portrayal is that most Jewish educators have simply never encountered the research on religious development and have certainly not explored it in depth.

In his classic essay, "Torah and General Culture: Confluence and Conflict," R. Aharon Lichtenstein posits, based on Ramban's commentary on Torah, "the principled assumption of the importance of knowing man and nature."⁶ What is the goal of "knowing man" and how might we go about implementing it? Pursuit of this goal requires us to undertake serious study of those disciplines that illuminate human nature. This might include literature, which R. Lichtenstein was known to champion, and I would argue that it must also include the study of psychology and human development broadly.⁷ In our case, it would seem imperative that we conduct a thorough examination of studies in religious development to understand what light they may shed on the human condition generally and the inner religious lives of our students specifically. Here, a note of

⁵ For this reason, academic articles and teacher guides focusing on the connection between cognitive development and the teaching of algebraic reasoning abound.

⁶ Aharon Lichtenstein, "Torah and General Culture: Confluence and Conflict" in *Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures: Rejection of Integration?*, ed. Jacob J. Schacter (Jason Aronson, 1997), 238.

⁷ For a survey of R. Lichtenstein's thoughts on the value of the humanities in general, and literature specifically, and their spiritual value, see Jeffrey Saks, "The Best That Has Been Thought and Said by R. Lichtenstein About the Role of Literature in Religious Life," *TRADITION* 47:4 (2014), 240–249.

caution is essential. While arguing that religious developmental theories built on the basis of empirical research conducted in non-Jewish contexts can help us pursue the imperative of “knowing man,” we do not look to these theories to help us know God. As we begin to explicate these theories, we will further highlight the manner in which we can make use of their insights into the human condition and, most significantly, the systematic manner in which these insights have been woven into a comprehensive psychological understanding of religious development.⁸

The Faith Development Research

One notable exception to the lack of awareness of religious development theory appears in a prior issue of *TRADITION* where Jay Goldmintz makes the argument that “there is much that the typical educator can learn and glean from these [religious development] studies.”⁹ In his article, Goldmintz takes an eclectic approach rather than focusing on one particular theory, as he aims “to sensitize us all to think and talk to one another about that [religious] growth in a way that often finds too little articulated expression in our field and in our practice.”¹⁰ Almost two decades since that article, we still lack such an articulated expression.¹¹ While Goldmintz purposefully takes an eclectic approach in order to glean knowledge from a variety of theories, we propose that it is possible to make greater progress if we focus more directly on the most impactful systematic theory of religious development, put forth originally by James Fowler and later updated and adjusted by Heinz Streib.

Until this point we have used the term religious development, which is likely to be more familiar to the reader and perhaps more appropriate

⁸ This is not to say that there are no Jewish sources that have created or incorporated psychological insights. Obviously, examples ranging from Rambam’s path to learning *lishmah* to the Vilna Gaon’s commentary on Proverbs (especially 22:6), to *Hovot ha-Talmidim* (especially the introductory chapter) clearly exist. However, none of these lay out a comprehensive theory of religious development from which we can gain the insights currently available in modern psychological research.

⁹ Jay Goldmintz, “Religious Development in Adolescence: A Work in Progress” *TRADITION* 37:4 (2003), 50.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹¹ Goldmintz’s article is certainly not the only time this issue has found expression in academic circles. *Studies in Jewish Education*, vol. 5, ed. Howard Dietcher and Abraham Tannenbaum (Magnes Press, 1990), includes a full section devoted to developmental studies. Yet as Alvan Kaunfer remarks in his contribution to that volume, “classroom teaching is seldom analyzed critically from the point of view of the child’s development.” More recent examples include Eli Kohn’s studies of adolescent attitudes towards prayer and Eli Gottlieb’s work referred to later in this paper (see, *infra*, notes 16 and 35).

within a traditional Jewish framework. Fowler, however, prefers the term faith development. He chooses this term because he believes it is more fundamental and all-encompassing, both in its applicability across different individuals and in what it includes within an individual. On the one hand, Fowler suggests that “[f]aith, rather than belief or religion, is the most fundamental category in the human quest for relation to transcendence. Faith, it appears, is generic, a universal feature of human living” and as such it is the appropriate term for a study that seeks to illuminate elements of human nature that hold true regardless of ethnicity or religious group.¹² At the same time, “[f]aith, classically understood, is not a separate dimension of life, a compartmentalized specialty. Faith is an orientation of the total person, giving purpose and goal to one’s hopes and strivings, thoughts and actions,”¹³ it is “the search for an overarching, integrating and grounding trust in a center of value and power sufficiently worthy to give our lives unity and meaning.”¹⁴ On the one hand, the inter-religion applicability of the concept of faith is important as it highlights Fowler’s focus on the underlying psychological nature of these issues rather than on their manifestation within a particular religious tradition, and as such supports our efforts to appropriate this theory for traditional Jewish education. On the other hand, the comprehensiveness of the term faith as “an orientation of the whole person” aptly parallels the all-encompassing, shaping influence we expect Torah, broadly speaking, to have on our students and how we hope their religious outlook will shape the entirety of their lives. With this note in mind, we will use the terms religious development and faith development interchangeably in the remainder of this article.

Fowler’s approach to studying faith development falls squarely into the cognitive developmental school among the neo-Piagetians.¹⁵ As such, Fowler focuses primarily on forms of religious thinking rather than on the affective or behavioral realms. Some educators may intuitively recoil

¹² James Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1981), 14. Fowler himself chronicles the various responses to his theory in his article “Faith Development at 30: Naming the Challenges of Faith in a New Millenium,” *Religious Education* 99:4 (2004), 405–421. Fowler (1940–2015), a minister in the United Methodist Church, was Professor of Theology and Human Development at Emory University, and director of its Center for Research on Faith and Moral Development.

¹³ *Stages of Faith*, 14.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁵ Fowler was part of a small group of cognitive developmental scholars who studied extensively with Lawrence Kohlberg at Harvard and was significantly influenced by that experience. Kohlberg, in turn, was heavily influenced by the pioneer of cognitive development, Jean Piaget.

from an approach that seems purely intellectual; “are not religious faith and practice matters of the heart and body rather than of the mind?”¹⁶ While we will indeed see later that Streib’s modified version expands Fowler’s cognitive focus, it is worth noting Gottlieb’s pragmatic assertion that “there is no way to educate the heart or body, save through the mind.”

Fowler’s model consists of six developmental stages. In the tradition of Piaget, these stages delineate the structure, though not necessarily the content, of how the individual searches for and creates meaning and coherence. The stages are intended to be universal, with each further stage integrating and repurposing the structures of the previous ones such that regression or backsliding is not possible. Movement between stages is often triggered by cognitive dissonance, which in the case of faith development often relates to crises or major life events. Fowler’s six stages are summarized in the table below.

Table 1. Fowler’s Stages of Faith

Stage	Age	Description
Stage 1 Intuitive- Projective	3-7	“[F]antasy-filled, imitative phase in which the child can be powerfully and permanently influenced by examples, moods, actions, and stories of the visible faith of primally related adults.” ¹⁷
Stage 2 Mythic- Literal	7-11	“Beliefs are appropriated with literal interpretations, as are moral rules and attitudes.... Symbols are taken as... literal in meaning.” ¹⁸
Stage 3 Synthetic- Conventional	Adolescence to adulthood	“[S]tructures the ultimate environment in interpersonal terms.... It is a ‘conformist’ stage in the sense that it is acutely tuned to the expectations and judgments of significant others and as yet does not have a sure enough grasp on its own identity and autonomous judgment to construct and maintain an independent perspective. While beliefs and values are deeply felt, they typically are tacitly held.” ¹⁹

¹⁶ Eli Gottlieb, “Development of Religious Thinking,” *Religious Education* 101:2 (2006), 242.

¹⁷ Ibid., 133.

¹⁸ Ibid., 149.

¹⁹ Ibid., 173.

Stage 4 Individutive-Reflective	Late adolescence to adulthood	"[M]arked by a double development. The self... now claims an identity no longer defined by the composite of one's roles or meaning to others.... To sustain that new identity it composes a meaning frame conscious of its own boundaries... and aware of itself as a 'world view.'... Stage 4 typically translates symbols into conceptual meanings. This is a 'demythologizing' stage." ²⁰
Stage 5 Conjunctive Faith	Mid-life	"Involves the integration into self and outlook of much that was suppressed or unrecognized in the interest of Stage 4's self-certainty and conscious cogitative and affective adaptation to reality... symbolic power is reunited with conceptual meanings.... Alive to paradox and the truth in apparent contradictions, this stage strives to unify opposites in mind and experience." ²¹
Stage 6 Universalizing Faith	Rarely attained	"The rare persons who may be described by this stage have a special grace that makes them seem more lucid, more simple, and yet somehow more fully human than the rest of us." ²² This stage serves as the "normative endpoint, the culminating image of mature faith." ²³

While we argued earlier that we would have little problem working with Fowler's broad definition of faith, it is likely we would have theological objections to certain aspects of Fowler's terminology and key assumptions embedded in his description of these stages. We do not intend to gloss over these points of difference, but as our ultimate focus will rest on Streib's reformulated approach we will return to these issues later in this piece.

Fowler is unique among structural developmentalists in that he focuses on multiple structural aspects drawn from the earlier work of a variety of theorists. Unlike Kohlberg, for example, who focuses only on the form of moral judgment, Fowler's stages are complex constructions comprised of seven unique aspects, including (1) form of logic, (2) perspective taking, (3) form of moral judgment, (4) bounds of social awareness, (5) locus of

²⁰ Ibid., 182.

²¹ Ibid., 198.

²² Ibid., 201.

²³ Ibid., 199.

authority, (6) form of world coherence, and (7) symbolic function. The structures of an individual's thought within each of these integrate to form the overall thought structure at each given stage of faith. Because Fowler's focus is squarely on the individual's progress from one stage to the next, the seven individual aspects are assessed in the Faith Development Interview (FDI) but rarely treated as independent objects of study.

Religious Styles: Streib's Revisions

Structural developmental approaches fit well with the worldview of the 1980s when Fowler began to make his impact, but more recent research has begun to question many of the key assumptions of this approach. This also holds true for Piaget in the realm of cognitive development, and for Kohlberg in moral development. While in many cases, such as that of Kohlberg, the field has largely moved on to alternate approaches, Fowler's central role in faith development has made his theory a key topic of discussion even 30 years after its introduction, the sort of longevity that very few academic theories merit. In addition to its longevity, the fate of Fowler's theory differs from Kohlberg's in that rather than moving on from it, other researchers have sought to use it as a foundation which can be adapted to better account for current concerns.²⁴

Central among these is Heinz Streib, who has devoted much of the last 25 years to examining and reformulating Fowler's approach. Ultimately, Streib has suggested a revision of Fowler's 6 stages of faith into 5 "religious styles" based on a number of key critiques. Broadly speaking, the transition from stages to styles moves the theory away from the cognitive developmental framework established by Piaget, developed by Kohlberg, and adapted by Fowler. That framework, as we noted earlier, focuses on the structure of the individual's mental processes as the crucial factor in development and as such relies on three core tenets. First, that mental processes are the core of a universal path of human development. Second, that this development proceeds in a linear fashion, without the possibility of regression outside of clinical trauma. Third, that this development proceeds by moving from one holistic stage to the next and does not dwell in between stages other than for a brief transition period. Streib challenges each of these premises. He contends that we must broaden

²⁴ For a survey of Kohlberg's impact and use in Jewish education see Steve Bailey, "Educating for *Menschlichkeit*: A Kohlbergian Model for Jewish Day Schools" in *Wisdom From All My Teachers: Challenges and Initiative sin Contemporary Torah Education*, ed. J. Saks and S. Handelman (ATID/Urime, 2003), 137-158.

our perspective from looking entirely through a cognitive lens to include interpersonal relationships including “biography... interpersonality, social relations and life world”²⁵ as a key element of the developmental dynamic. In addition, Streib argues for the inclusion of a psychodynamic view, particularly that of Rizzuto,²⁶ on the basis of which he argues that Fowler’s stages are not universally invariant, sequential, and hierarchical.²⁷ Instead, Streib suggests that “religious development is a complex process of entangled factors: of structural development, of *schemata* of interpersonal relationships, and of *themata*.”²⁸ Since it differs fundamentally from the core tenets of stage development theory, religious development is better described not as religious stages but as religious styles. Such styles do not imply an “assumption of structured wholeness”²⁹ and do allow for the possibility of backsliding and of the co-existence of multiple styles within more of a milestone developmental model. In Streib’s concise definition:

Religious styles are distinct modi of practical-interactive (ritual), psychodynamic (symbolic), and cognitive (narrative) reconstruction and appropriation of religion, that originate in relation to life history and life world and that, in accumulative deposition, constitute the variations and transformations of religion over a life time, corresponding to the styles of interpersonal relations.³⁰

This model may best be represented by a series of waves, with each wave remaining as an undercurrent while the next one washes over it. Finally, we should note that Streib has renamed Fowlers’ first five stages (having removed the sixth entirely). These names connote the increased emphasis on interpersonality as a driving factor in religious development, but the nature of each style still corresponds to the equivalent numbered stage in Fowler’s terminology.

²⁵ Heinz Streib, “Faith Development Theory Revisited: The Religious Styles Perspective,” *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 11 (2001), 145. Streib received his doctorate at Emory University under the guidance of James Fowler. He is Professor for Religious Education at the University of Bielefeld, Germany, where he has established the Research Center for Biographical Studies in Contemporary Religion.

²⁶ Ana-Marie Rizzuto, *The Birth of the Living God. A Psychoanalytic Study* (University of Chicago Press, 1979).

²⁷ Streib, “Revisited,” 145–146.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 149.

³⁰ Ibid.

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We noted earlier that Fowler suggested that each stage was comprised of seven aspects. In his approach, these aspects may be individually relevant during transition points but that they reintegrate at each stage to create a unified whole. As such, Fowler does not pay much attention to these individual aspects, preferring to focus on the house and not the individual bricks of which it is built. In contrast, Streib's re-conception of stages as styles assumes a gradual rather than step-wise transition from one style to the next, and with it the continued existence of previous styles alongside new styles. All of this makes sense only if we take a granular focus which places continued importance on each individual aspect. While both Fowler and Streib use the same Faith Development Interview in their core research, Fowler's interest lies in the final stage determination produced by the interview, while Streib's preserves the original aspect ratings, focusing on them and their interplay as well as the final determination of religious style. As a result, he presents a much more complex picture of where the individual is at any point in time. For example, two of the aspects within the styles are perspective taking and locus of authority. For Fowler, if the individual is in stage two in the aspect of perspective taking, they must also be in stage two in the aspect of locus of authority. In fact, aside from the brief transition period between stages the aspects meld into the background, and only the holistic stage is important. However, for Streib's religious styles approach each aspect is treated independently and does not meld into a holistic stage. Therefore, an individual may be in the subjective style (style 1) within the aspect of perspective taking but in the instrumental reciprocal style (style 2) in the aspect of locus of authority. The correspondence of each aspect to a particular style is best summarized in Table 2 (in the appendix to this article). This table was prepared by Streib's colleague Barbara Keller in an unpublished presentation of their joint work and includes the previously noted renaming of Fowler's original stages to balance "the overemphasis on the epistemic self in Fowler's work and [place] stronger emphasis on the life-world, life-history and inter-personal world of the individual."³¹ In line with this rebalancing, Streib and Keller have removed the pure cognitive aspect, since their research has led them to conclude that it is not a primary driver of religious development but rather a parallel trajectory, which must be disentangled from religious development per se.

³¹ James Fowler, Heinz Streib, and Barbara Keller, *Manual for Faith Development Research*, fourth edition (Center for Research in Faith and Moral Development at Emory University, 2004), 10.

The final significant change which is evidenced in this table is the removal of Stage 6. We noted earlier that Fowler's Stage 6 provides a normative endpoint for faith development based on Fowler's theological perspective, and that such a framing might indeed pose a challenge to our efforts to use his theory in the context of Jewish education. Streib and Keller as well contend that "a psychologically plausible model of religious styles does not need, and should not be based on," any theological perspective, and they purposely work to strip it of such perspective.

Potential Concerns

As we noted earlier in reference to Fowler's Stage 6, it is likely that Streib's description of religious style 5 may be cause for concern on an ideological and philosophical level. Ideas such as multiple perspective taking, openness to differences, and holding disparate models in tension may smack of a religious relativism incompatible with traditional Jewish views. In relating to Streib's theory it is important to emphasize that while Fowler's Stage 6 was a normative endpoint clearly influenced by his own theological perspective, Streib critiques such an approach and deletes Stage 6 entirely. Streib preserves religious styles 1 through 5 as these perspectives are clearly evidenced in the interviews conducted as part of his and Fowler's research. Thus, Style 5 is not a prescriptive but rather a descriptive portrayal which means that, like it or not, such perspectives are likely to appear as an individual's religious style matures. Streib's theory enables us to be aware of this trajectory and adapt our educational approach accordingly. It is further worth noting, at least parenthetically, that the vast majority of individuals will not reach style 5 until well after their formal education concludes.

At the same time, in the coming sections we will portray the individual's development to more advanced religious styles as a desideratum, when it would theoretically have been possible to advocate purposely aiming to slow such development with the goal of reaching a plateau at style 4. Therefore, we will attempt to provide a basic philosophical justification for this choice.

First, our choice comes from a basic principle of education. John Dewey famously defines all education as growth. While we may or may not subscribe to the full array of Dewey's educational philosophy, it would seem self-evident that promoting students' development should be a central principle of any educator's creed. On a pragmatic level this is buttressed by an awareness that our students will continue to encounter an increasingly complex world that often runs counter to our religious

sensibilities. A black and white approach will not give our students the tools they need to navigate such a world while continuing to grow and develop as religious Jews. And on a fundamental level, full development of the human being, particularly in the cognitive, emotional, and religious realms, is not only practical but ideologically important. For one example among many in support of this view, R. Lichtenstein's previously quoted essay, "Confluence and Conflict," repeatedly emphasizes that necessity and importance of pursuing general wisdom alongside Torah learning in the service of ideal human development.

Second, within the realm of traditional Jewish thought a number of significant figures have embraced the possibilities inherent in a post-modern perspective. This approach may best be exemplified by R. Shagar,³² and, while a full presentation is beyond the parameters of this essay, it is significant to note that adherents of such an approach would likely feel no need to justify the content of style 5. For those like R. Lichtenstein,³³ for whom a post-modern approach like that of R. Shagar poses a danger to religious development, we would suggest that style 5 does not necessarily need to be understood as a post-modern perspective. In truth, examples of the validity of multiple perspectives already play themselves out in how our schools approach, for example, the concept of *elu ve-elu* in halakhic debates, *peshat* and *derash* explanations of *Humash*, attitudes towards different philosophical streams within traditional Jewish thought, or attitudes towards different groups of Jews within the halakhic spectrum.

These explanations are admittedly preliminary and additional work on both the theoretical and empirical planes ought to be pursued.³⁴ At the same time, given the current state of the field and the lack of psychological and pedagogical theories to support efforts to educate towards religious development, we believe that an attempt to apply Streib's theory to Jewish education is justified and necessary.

Applying the Theory to Jewish Education

This is an appropriate juncture at which to return to our original goal of marshalling Streib's theory for use in the context of Jewish education generally, and more specifically with respect to its core aim of fostering

³² R. Shagar, *Faith Shattered and Restored: Judaism in the Postmodern Age* (Maggid Books, 2017).

³³ Aharon Lichtenstein, "Law and Spirituality: Defining the Terms" in *Jewish Spirituality and Divine Law*, ed. Adam Mintz and Lawrence Schiffman (Yeshiva University Press, 2005), 3–33.

³⁴ Some elements of the empirical research can flow from the application suggested below.

religious growth. What can Jewish educators, whether they teach in a day school, yeshiva, synagogue, informal education, or as parents, gain from understanding and applying this theory? And, even more broadly, what can the enterprise of Jewish education gain from such an effort?

First, this effort would enable us to dramatically enhance the educator's understanding of the learner.³⁵ While disconnected instructors focus only on the subject matter at hand, we know that sensitive educators often make an intuitive attempt to understand their students. Yet we also know that, despite our emotional reactions to the contrary, an intuitive, general sense of where the learner stands simply cannot compare to the accuracy of even the most rudimentary rubrics.³⁶ With this in mind, imagine a yeshiva high school that has undertaken to use Streib's psychological research to better understand its students' religious development. Teachers (or local graduate students) could conduct Streib's Faith Development Interview (FDI) with all students on an annual basis. The FDI is a relatively user-friendly narrative interview, in which the interviewer poses 25 open questions and later categorizes responses by stage (as noted in Figure 2). Straightforward instructions for conducting this interview can be found in the *Manual for Faith Development Research* cited earlier. Additionally, or if necessary, alternatively, teachers would be asked to assess each students' style in each individual aspect according to the table below.

There would be multiple benefits to this initial step. First, the very existence of a concretely outlined developmental trajectory would significantly enhance teachers' sensitivity to how students' psychological development exerts a direct influence on their religious development, challenging the black and white notions we sometimes fall into when thinking about the religious behavior of adolescents. Second, introducing such a trajectory into a school setting would create a common language for educators to discuss issues of religious development, thus creating an opportunity for collaboration in an area that is often left to individual judgment. Third, it would help to disentangle educators' understanding of a student's religious development from the relationship between that

³⁵ Eli Kohn shares striking examples of teacher misunderstandings in the case of student avoidance of daily prayers. See his article, "Prayer Services in Jewish Religious High Schools for Boys in Israel – Students' Perspectives," *Greek Journal of Religious Education* 1:1 (2018), 23–40.

³⁶ See for example, Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 222. Kahneman argues convincingly for this point, and the resistance he faced should alert us to the resistance we will likely encounter from educators who naturally believe their intuitive judgments will be more accurate than a pre-set scale.

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Table 2. FDI Rating Scale

1 Life chapters	Perspective-taking	1	2	3	4	5
2 Past relationships						
3 Changes in relationships						
7 Parents						
5 Breakthrough	Social Horizon					
6 Crises						
8 Current relationships						
9 Groups						
12 Beliefs, values, commitments	Morality					
16 Action right/wrong						
17 Always right						
23 Sin						
10 Your life meaning	Locus of Authority					
11 Change one thing						
15 Important decision						
18 Purpose of human life						
13 Harmony with universe	Form of World Coherence					
19 Death						
24 Evil in the world						
25 Religious conflicts						
4 Changes in world view/ image of God	Symbolic Function					
14 Maturity						
20 Religious person?						
21 Religious ideas, symbols, rituals						
22 Pray, Meditate						

student and a particular teacher. For a window into the level of specificity offered by such an interview, see the sample rating scale below.³⁷ This rating scale enables us to see not only each individual aspect but how the

³⁷ This rating scale is an adjusted format based on the scale presented in the *Manual*.

student rated relative to specific lines of questioning within each aspect.³⁸ Finally, it would set the stage for teachers and schools to begin adjusting their techniques in light of these understandings, a process which we will expand on below.

Parallel to this assessment process, teachers would be offered a basic introduction to the theory, including a particular emphasis on how students in various styles/aspects might respond to everything from formal classroom lessons, to prayers, experiential programs, and even discipline around religious norms and behaviors.³⁹ Of particular interest to teachers will be specific examples located within the context of the yeshiva high school. While the simplest examples may relate to students who fall solidly in a single style, Streib's research has shown that the vast majority of individuals are spread among at least two different styles in the FDI.

Take, for example, a student who tends toward an instrumental style (2) in perspective taking, form of world coherence, and symbolic function, and toward a mutual awareness style (3) in social horizon, morality, and locus of authority. Imagine you have this student in your class while you are navigating a complex, loaded text such as *akeidat Yitzhak*. Perspectives and interpretations abound, but how is the student likely to perceive and respond to any of these? With the student's religious style profile in mind, we know that they are not likely to fully comprehend the emotions of Avraham or Yitzhak (style 2 – perspective taking), that they are likely to value adherence to norms (style 3 – morality), and that group expectations will be very influential (style 3 – social horizon). There remain a myriad of ways in which the specific content of the student's response to the story may express itself, but what is more valuable for us is to understand the underlying structures indicated by these styles/aspects. If we do not understand the structures that shape the student's response, they may as well be speaking a foreign language, and it is likely that we will misinterpret their concerns and questions by referencing our own underlying structures rather than theirs. These misinterpretations would typically range from the innocuous misunderstanding to a teacher mistakenly rebuking a child for being rude or disrespectful, doing damage to the crucial teacher-student relationship in the process.

Similarly, imagine that this same child is not participating and is perhaps disruptive during *shaharit*. It is unlikely that the teacher thinks in

³⁸ For a full understanding of each of these lines of questioning the reader is referred to the *Manual*.

³⁹ Ultimately, we would advocate for the inclusion of such training in pre-service teacher preparation programs.

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terms of the concrete causality characteristic of style 2 – form of world coherence, but this structure shapes how the child can think about the impact their prayers may have on them and on the world. Understanding the child's thought structures can help the teacher make a more effective choice of how to explain the value of prayer in the attempt to help the child reengage. At the same time, being aware of the value the child places on social group authority (style 3 – locus of authority) will help the teacher understand, beyond the platitude of “peer pressure,” why the child cannot accept the teacher's directive over the implicit directive issued by their friends in the back row.

Just as it can be applied by the individual teacher in his or her classroom, this theory can be applied to the sphere of curriculum planning—regardless of which method of curricular design we may favor from a pedagogic perspective. We can illustrate this most simply by returning to our earlier example of *akeidat Yitzhak*. Imagine now that rather than a teacher equipped with the FDI assessment of one child, we are curriculum designers armed with a range of FDI results administered across the grades in which our curriculum will be implemented. Beyond the factors of philosophical choice of content and pedagogic choice of skill progression we can now bring an entirely new field of knowledge to bear on our design process. Rather than intuitively guessing as to students' concerns and religious sensitivities, we can take a research-based approach to make curricular design decisions based on religious style development.

As we create a broad map for our curriculum we can bear in mind Table 2. While the sequence outlined here according to Streib's model, unlike Fowler's, includes the possibility of an uneven distribution of aspects across styles, style overlap, and backsliding, the map still provides a key to understanding an individual's progress across six key aspects and relates these to an overall sense of that individual's religious style(s). This understanding should be taken into account as we plan which texts, figures, and themes to include along a curricular spiral, how to sequence these and how to approach them at various ages and developmental levels—understanding, for example, which concepts may resonate strongly with certain styles and which may be incomprehensible or even radioactive. Doing so moves us from the haphazard mode of each teacher making their own intuitive choices and into a broadly considered framework where a curricular map that extends across classrooms and age levels provides the foundation for a consistent and evolving nurturing of students' religious development. It is true that individual trajectories vary, and any effective curriculum map must allow the teacher the ability to differenti-

ate their instruction, but a map of general trajectories must exist as well if our efforts are to have any coherence.

In addition to the general map described above, nuanced data gleaned from FDIs portraying students' actual religious styles and their associated aspects in a given school provides the possibility for a more highly tailored curricular sequence. Equipped with a broad curricular mapping, a school that gauges students' development with a periodic FDI will be able to adjust curricular planning on an annual basis for each particular group of students. This will enable that school to provide the most appropriate program for each grade and class, and over time it will also generate a bank of data that allows the school to fine-tune its understanding of how its own students typically progress through religious aspects and styles. Such data, in turn, can be used to refine overall maps and further sensitize both teachers and curriculum designers to student needs. While it is beyond the scope of this article to demonstrate how this would impact the planning of specific unit cycles, this brief explanation should suffice to evidence the fundamental changes that would result from the introduction of this new discipline to the design process.

As these examples illustrate, the curriculum designer or attentive teacher equipped with the concepts and language of religious development theory is able to better understand the student's perspective and capacity in areas crucial to religious growth. This is an important first step, and it is in and of itself a significant contribution to our educational efforts. Beyond mere understanding, however, we would suggest that religious development styles offer a promising avenue for directly stimulating and guiding students' religious growth and development.

We can briefly sketch how this may take shape on two levels. While Fowler's theory focused almost entirely on faith development as a process of cognitive development, Streib adds a significant focus on the interpersonal (self-other) and intra-personal (self-self) relationship dimensions.

We will begin with the cognitive aspect of development. As noted earlier, Fowler was part of a group of researchers following the general cognitive developmental approach of Lawrence Kohlberg, who himself focused most directly on moral development. Another of Kohlberg's students, Moshe Blatt, sought to operationalize Kohlberg's theory for use in education via what he termed the dilemma-discussion model.⁴⁰ Blatt's experiment showed that exposure to moral reasoning one devel-

⁴⁰ Moshe M. Blatt and Lawrence Kohlberg, "The Effects of Classroom Moral Discussion Upon Children's Level of Moral Judgment," *Journal of Moral Education* 4:2 (1975), 129-161.

opmental stage above their own in the context of a classroom-based discussion of moral dilemmas generated a dissonance that stimulated cognitive moral development.

It stands to reason that cognitive aspects of faith development would be subject to the same effect. However, while the famous “Heinz dilemma” and others provide a wealth of research-based material for educators to use in the Blatt-Kohlberg model, few parallels readily exists in the area of religious development. Questions of morality lend themselves to dilemmas in a way that questions of religion may not. Nonetheless, the same principle should apply to other modes of generating cognitive dissonance. For example, in our choice of texts, ideas, and modes of presentation contemplated above, we suggested aiming for the students’ current religious style. This may be true for ideas that will be presented by the teacher. However, if the teacher aims to engage students in a discussion of an idea, particularly one in which students will dialogue directly with their peers, it may be more appropriate to structure a discussion that will elicit understandings that fit with students’ current style as well as those which make sense only in the next style along the trajectory. These understandings, especially if they come from other students, will challenge students’ current conceptions and create the dissonance that helps their perspective within any given aspect to evolve into a more complex religious style.

If we are relying on Blatt’s research we must honestly consider the objections to his methodology.⁴¹ These objections, which came from practitioners and researchers, essentially suggested that Blatt’s approach enabled students to advance their levels of moral thinking but had little to no impact on those same students’ real-life moral decisions. Parallel to Blatt’s approach there emerged an alternate model for operationalizing Kohlberg, which was known as the “just community” approach.⁴² Essentially, the just community approach suggested that rather than dealing with theoretical moral dilemmas the school itself should become a laboratory in which students were empowered and charged with navigating real-life moral issues. In just community schools, students collectively held significant power to determine issues ranging from school schedul-

⁴¹ We are not referring here to critiques of Kohlberg’s approach itself, of which there are many, but rather to the major critique of Blatt’s approach to operationalize Kohlberg’s theory.

⁴² Clark Power, “Moral Education Through the Development of The Moral Atmosphere of The School,” *The Journal of Educational Thought* 15:1 (1981), 4–19. For two Jewish examples, see Bailey, *op. cit.*, and Earl Schwartz, “Three Stages of a School’s Moral Development,” *Religious Education* 96:1 (2001), 106–118.

ing to student expulsions for drug use. These schools typically evidenced growth measured in terms of students moral thinking and behavior related to collective norms developed using the just community model.⁴³

Before we discuss the implications of the just community approach for religious development, it is fitting that we examine the interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions that Streib added to Fowler's cognitive-centered theory. In including these dimensions, Streib argues that "interpersonal relationships and their psychodynamics are both indicators and promoters of religious development."⁴⁴ Similarly, Rizzuto, one of the key theorists on whom Streib bases his contention, writes, "the enzyme for the transformational process from one faith stage to the next requires specific internal representations based on concrete interactions with others in a personal and also social-religious context."⁴⁵ Rizzuto's words illuminate two key points in our endeavor. First, the intrapersonal dimension is impacted directly by the interpersonal dimension. Second, the interpersonal dimension, in the form of "concrete interactions with others" in both a general and specifically religious context is a primary factor in catalyzing the individual's religious development.

While these two points suggest a direction, some caveats are in order before we proceed. First, we should be clear that no teacher should play psychologist in the classroom, most certainly not in the realm of psychoanalysis or psychodynamics. Second, the existing research does not attempt to analyze which types of interpersonal experiences are most likely to serve as the "enzyme" that stimulates development across religious styles. Third, insofar as we may look to psychodynamic theories for general clues most of these theories will focus on familial relationships. Despite these caveats a basic direction for the educational process seems to emerge, which in many ways parallels the realizations of those educators who transformed the Blatt-Kohlberg dilemma discussion technique into the just community school model.

If indeed interpersonal relationships are at the heart of the individual's religious development, then even if we do not have a precise map outlining cause and effect, it stands to reason that we should examine the social dynamics and interpersonal relationships within our schools, homes, and synagogues. We are not suggesting that schools currently ignore social dynamics. Just the opposite, most schools care deeply about

⁴³ Ibid., 16–17.

⁴⁴ Streib, "Revisited," 146.

⁴⁵ Ana-Mari Rizzuto, "Religious Development Beyond the Modern Paradigm Discussion: The Psychoanalytic Point of View," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 11 (2001), 204.

their students' social-emotional health and employ a range of counselors and psychologists to assist them in this effort. However, we often consider students' social-emotional health to be an area unto itself—one that occasionally spills over when a student who is struggling socially or emotionally has more difficulty in their academic pursuits or religious engagement but which is still seen and treated as fundamentally separate. While we should continue to pay direct attention to students' social-emotional health we also need to see their interpersonal experiences as a key factor within the context of religious development. This is true in the classroom, in the hallways, and across the school.

We cannot provide a recipe, which would be inappropriate due to the caveats noted above, but we can suggest key points to consider in undertaking such a reassessment. In the classroom content is typically king. But what about how the content is delivered? We suggested earlier that a discussion model could best create the dissonance necessary to stimulate cognitive development. We must similarly examine what sorts of interpersonal dynamics (teacher-student and student-student) are likely to be generated in the day to day classroom experience with any given pedagogy and incorporate this analysis into our schools' pedagogic choices. Many schools offer extensive experiential education alongside formal teaching. This programming often has a higher emotional valence and addresses issues of religious import. We must assess how not just the planned content but also the interpersonal dynamics at play within the context of such programs may impact students' development. Across the school we must pay specific attention to the student-student and student-adult interactions in the context of religious development. This includes everything from the way rules and behavioral norms are enforced, particularly those of a religious nature, to passing interactions in the hallways, to mentoring relationships. We must reiterate that it is not our contention that these areas are completely ignored in our schools but rather that they are not understood within the context of religious development generally, and certainly not examined with the assistance of a comprehensive rubric such as that of Streib's religious styles. Such an examination would bring a new logic to bear in designing the student experience of education, and in doing so could enable us to move towards the religious development equivalent of Kohlbergian just community schools, immersive environments purposefully designed to include both cognitive and interpersonal support and catalysis of students' religious growth and development.

I began with the contention that the systemic approach to religious development available to us from modern psychological research could

fundamentally enhance our ability to support students' religious growth. To illustrate this point we have chosen to explicate Streib's religious styles theory, founded on the basis of Fowler's highly influential theory of faith development. Based on this explication we have outlined starting points for how Streib's theory could be operationalized and appropriated for use in traditional Jewish schools, and how doing so could bring new paradigms to bear on formal curriculum design and pedagogic choices on the one hand and experiential education and school environment on the other. However, the reader should not confuse the specific example with the larger point. Many have found Streib's approach compelling, but whether one chooses to look towards their research or prefers other approaches towards different systematic theories advanced within the psychology of religion, my most fundamental argument is that if we seek to fulfill the religious goal of knowing man, as R. Lichtenstein highlights, and all the more so if we seek to live up to our responsibilities as Jewish parents and educators, we must move beyond intuitive choices to make use of the best available research on religious development to enable our students and children to become true *ohavei Hashem* and *yirei Elokim*.

Table 3: Streib and Keller Religious Styles by Aspects

Style/ Aspect	Perspective Taking	Social Horizon	Morality	Locus of Authority	Form of World Coherence	Symbolic Function
1 Subjective – undifferentiated orientation toward caretaker/powerful other, physical indicators	Parallel monologue, no perspective-taking or awareness of interiority of the other	Moment-to-moment responses to others	Orientation toward physical consequences, toward reward and punishment	Dependence on caretakers or powerful others	Partial, fragmented, and intuitive picture of the world	No distinction between symbol and what it symbolizes, no “as if”
2 Instrumental- reciprocal distinction between true or false	Perspective taking limited to if-then relations and on outer appearance, limited awareness of interiority of the other	Identification with primal group, those like us vs. not like us	Reciprocity or <i>do-ut-des</i>	External authority, orthodoxy and absoluteness claims	Concrete causality of empirical cause and effect	Rudimentary semiotic difference, but authoritatively fixed vs. literal interpretation of symbols
Cf. psychic equivalence						
3 Mutual awareness of shared/common reality, implicit	Awareness of interiority of the other is based on mutual and uncritical perspective-taking, on social roles, implicit and stereotypical; oriented toward emotions in others	Peer group, network, tacit group norms; emphasis on harmonious relations and consensus	Meeting interpersonal expectations; compliance with norms and laws	Group authority, grounded in tacit interpersonal values consonant with the social group	Tacit systems, simple and uncritical pluralism; conventional ways of thinking	Pre-critical awareness of semiotic difference and multiple interpretations, symbols have power to evoke feeling and emotion, but conventional interpretation influenced by group/authorities

4 Individuative-systemic awareness of constructed realities, which can be compared and systematized	Third-person perspective, explicit reasoning, ideology, awareness of other's interiority focused on thought and ideas; relations as a system	Ideological compatibility, individuals as members of groups, parts of systems; changes in one's life in relation to system/society	Awareness of social implications of individual actions, of impact of/on social structures	Self-ratified ideological perspective, Internal authority, explicit relationship to authority; and rules	Explicit system, ideologies are examined critically, motivated by striving for closure	Full knowledge about semiotic difference, but critical & demythologizing: Symbols are translated into concepts or ideas
5 Dialogical Reflections on constructions, tolerant of tensions due to perspectivity of one's own and others' constructions	Multiple perspective taking; consciously conceptualized, critical self-awareness in a non-defensive way (walking "in the moccasins of the other"); openness to being changed/challenged by the encounter with others	Seeking contact with groups different from one's own, openness to differences; reflected pluralism	Prior-to-society, principled morality/ethic without losing touch with individual and social concerns	Dialectics of multiple authority claims, critically reflected subjectivity	Multi-leveled and complex reality, holding disparate models in tension, sensitivity toward history and culture; open for the inexplicable (mystery)	Post-critical naïveté, evocative power of the symbol and knowledge about the semiotic difference are kept in (complex) tension

See: Barbara Keller, "Exploring Religious Development Based on Faith Development Interviews," presentation delivered at Conference on Stress, Resilience and Character Development Across the Life-Span, Society for the Study of Human Development, Portland, OR (October 11, 2019). Presentation accessed at www.researchgate.net/publication/336749308_Exploring_religious_development_based_on_Faith_Development_Interviews