

Tradition Today Summit

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Historical Realities and Educational Methodologies: Then and Now

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פנינה פעריל עטיל בת לאה פעשע ור' חנוך העניך

בין קדמך, משה משה אברהם

In our days, severe vicissitudes prevail, and all feel the pressure of hard times. The wisdom of our wise men has disappeared; the understanding of our prudent men is hidden. Hence, the commentaries of the Geonim and their compilations of laws and responses, which they took care to make clear, have in our times become hard to understand so that only a few individuals properly comprehend them. Needless to add that such is the case in regard to the Talmud itself—the Babylonian as well as the Palestinian—the Sifra, the Sifre and the Tosefta, all of which works require, for their comprehension, a broad mind, a wise soul, and considerable study, and then one can learn from them the correct practice as to what is forbidden or permitted, and the other rules of the Torah.

On these grounds, I, Moses the son of Maimon the Sefardi, be-stirred myself, and, relying on the help of God, blessed be He, intently studied all these works, with the view of putting together

הלכות יחידות. ומהם מי שפירש פרקים יחידים שנתקשו בימיו. ומהם מי שפירש מסכתות וסדרים : ועוד חיברו הלכות פסקות בענין האסור והמותר והחוייב והפטור בדברים שהשעה צריכה להם כדי שיהיו קרובין למדע מי שאינו יכול לירד לעומקו של תלמוד. וזו היא מלאכת יי שעשו בה כל גאוני ישראל מיום שחברו התלמוד ועד זמן זה שהוא שנה שמינית אחר מאה ואלף לחרבן : ובזמן הזה תכפו צרות יתירות ודחקה שעה את הכל ואבדה חכמת חכמינו ובינת נבונינו נסתתרה. לפיכך אותן הפירושים והתשובות וההלכות שחיברו הגאונים וראו שהם דברים מבוררים, נתקשו בימינו ואין מבין עניניהם כראוי אלא מעט במספר. ואין צריך לומר התלמוד עצמו הבבלי והירושלמי וספרא וספרי והתוספתות, שהן צריכין דעת רחבה ונפש חכמה וזמן ארוך ואחר כך ידע מהן הדרך הנכונה בדברים האסורים והמותרים ושאר דיני תורה היאך היא : ומפני זה

ויי ונראה וכל זה דוקא נאמנים שלפנינו שכל אחד היה דר במקום שבטו וקבלת האבות היה שוק מאוד מלא כל אחד ואחד להנהיג בדרך שדרתו אבותיו וכמאמר הכתוב שכל איש ויגדך בזה היינו יכולים למד שלא תלמוד תורה וספרה בהנהגה של אבותיה הישרים אבל כעת נעושה שקבלת האבות נחלש מאוד מאוד וגם מציא שיש דר במקום אבותיהם כלל ונפרס קוחן שחרניליו עומן ללמוד נחב ולבון העמים נדלוי חלוי רבה. ללמדם הומש וגם נניאום וכמונים ותוכרי חז"ל כון מסכת אבות וספר תנורה האמור וכדומה כדי שיחלחח אללם ענין אמונתו הקדושה דל"ה עלול שיסורו לעמרי עמור ד' ויפכרו על כל יסורי הדת ח"ו:

It seems that all this applies specifically in previous times when everyone lived in their parental home and the tradition of parents was very strong, allowing everyone to act in accordance with the ways of their ancestors, as the verse states: "Ask your father and he shall tell you." In such circumstances, one could say that she should not study Torah but, rather, depend for her behavior on her righteous parents. But now, due to our many sins, the transmission of the parents has become very weak and it sometimes happens that the child does not dwell in the place of her parents at all. This is especially the case among those who accustom themselves to study the writing and language of the nations of the world. In such a case it is certainly a great mitzvah to teach them Humash, also Nevi'im and Ketuvim, and the ethical teachings of the Rabbis like the Tractate Avot, the book *Menorat Ha-Maor*, and others like it so that the matter of our holy faith should become true for them. For, otherwise, it is likely that they will totally abandon the way of the Lord and violate all the principles of the religion, God forbid.

Shulamith Soloveitchik Meiselman, The Soloveitchik Heritage (1995), 213-14

It was in Warsaw that my formal education began, both elementary and secondary. From the age of nine, my parents added to my religious education a thoroughly secular course of study. This was contrary to the prevailing custom in other rabbinic families, which refused to expose their children to foreign influences, fearing assimilation or even conversion. They argued, "It's too dangerous to give our children a secular education. It would bring them in contact with the glitter and attractiveness of the free-thinking world, and their interest in Jewish tradition may disappear, *Chas Vecholila* [God forbid]."

Influenced by my mother's deep conviction that there is no room for ignorance in an observant Jew, Father adopted an entirely different approach to secular education. He now maintained a new philosophy: that in this changing world both religious and general education were necessary if one was to have an effective influence on Jewish young people. A pious Jew must be part of the world at large and must participate in all the endeavors of his community, provided they are not at variance with the tradition and do not threaten his uniqueness as an Orthodox Jew.

Secular education thus became part of our life. The best private tutors were engaged to prepare my two older brothers for the university. They responded enthusiastically to their new course of studies and within a few years were ready for their entrance examinations. To fulfill their lifetime dream about Joseph Dov's future role in Jewish life, my parents decided to leave the decision regarding his university education to him. His choice was the University of Berlin, famous for its philosophy department, which became his field of interest.

My second brother, Samuel, excelling in mathematics and science, chose to major in chemistry at the University of Brussels. Both brothers left home to face an entirely new world of secularism.

My youngest brother, Aaron, was too young for formal secular education. He had been completely occupied with his religious studies since the age of three. His general education was initiated at a much later date.

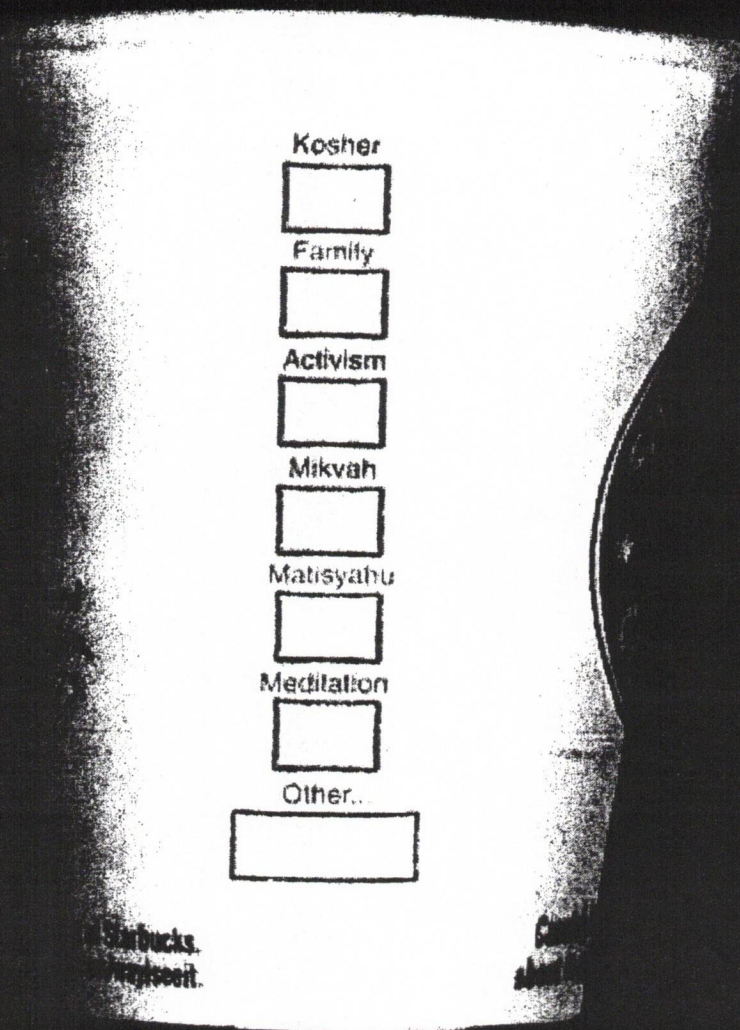
My sister and I were enrolled in a private Jewish Gymnasium, since the secondary schools administered by the government

Today religion in America is as private and diverse as New England colonial religion was public and unified. One person we interviewed has actually named her religion (she calls it her "faith") after herself. This suggests the logical possibility of over 220 million American religions, one for each of us. Sheila Larson is a young nurse who has received a good deal of therapy and who describes her faith as "Sheilaism." "I believe in God. I'm not a religious fanatic. I can't remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. It's Sheilaism. Just my own little voice." Sheila's faith has some tenets beyond belief in God, though not many. In defining "my own Sheilaism," she said: "It's just try to love yourself and be gentle with yourself. You know, I guess, take care of each other. I think He would want us to take care of each other." Like many others, Sheila would be willing to endorse few more specific injunctions. We will return to Sheila later in this chapter, for her experience and belief are in some ways significantly representative. But first we

Robert Bellah, et. al, Habits of the Heart: Individualism & Commitment in America (Berkeley, 1985), 220-21

"Grande Soy Vanilla Latte with Cinnamon, No Foam..."

Jewish Identity and Community in a Time of Unlimited Choices





"We're thinking maybe it's time you started getting some religious instruction. There's Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish—any of those sound good to you?"

Christian Smith, Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers (NY, 2005), 143.

EVERYONE DECIDES FOR THEMSELVES

→ American youth, like American adults, are nearly without exception profoundly individualistic, instinctively presuming autonomous, individual self-direction to be a universal human norm and life goal. Thoroughgoing individualism is not a contested orthodoxy for teenagers. It is an invisible and pervasive doxa,⁷ that is, an unrecognized, unquestioned, invisible premise or presupposition. U.S. teenagers' profound individualism informs a number of issues related to religion.

"Who Am I to Judge?"

For most teens, nobody *has* to do anything in life, including anything to do with religion. "Whatever" is just fine, if that's what a person wants. Consequently, certain traditional religious languages and vocabularies of commitment, duty, faithfulness, obedience, calling, obligation, accountability, and ties to the past are nearly completely absent from the discourse of U.S. teen-

Robert Cover,
Narrative, Violence
and the Law
 (Ann Arbor, 1995)

Obligation: A Jewish Jurisprudence of the Social Order

I. Fundamental Words

Every legal culture has its fundamental words. When we define our subject this weekend as human rights, we also locate ourselves in a normative universe at a particular place. The word "rights" is a highly evocative one for those of us who have grown up in the post-enlightenment secular society of the West. Even those among us who have been graced with a deep and abiding religious background can hardly have escaped the evocations that the terminology of "rights" carries. Indeed, we try in this conference to take a little credit here and there for the lustre which the edifice of rights reflects, perhaps suggesting now and again that the fine reflection owes something to some ultimate source of the light.

Judaism is, itself, a legal culture of great antiquity. It has hardly led a wholly autonomous existence these past three millennia. Yet, I suppose it can lay as much claim as any of the other great legal cultures to have an integrity to its basic categories. When I am asked to reflect upon Judaism and human rights, therefore, the first thought that comes to mind is that the categories are wrong. I do not mean, of course, that basic ideas of human dignity and worth are not powerfully expressed in the Jewish legal and literary traditions. Rather, I mean that because it is a legal tradition Judaism has its own categories for expressing through law the worth and dignity of each human being. And the categories are not closely analogous to "human rights." The principal word in Jewish law, which occupies a place equivalent in evocative force to the American legal system's "rights," is the word "mitzvah" which literally means commandment but has a general meaning closer to "incumbent obligation."

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אך הפירוש כך ומה מילה שהוא אחד מרמ"ח אברים שהוא אחד כלול זרמ"ח אברים דוחה שבת קו"ח כל נפשו שהוא רמ"ח אברים בפועל. ובאבר הברית כלול רק כל מקורין דשייפי נופא אבל לא שייפי נופא ממש. וע"כ אין סכנת אבר אחד וזולת אבר הברית דוחה שבת וא"כ נכונים דברי הש"ך שאם אנכי לעבור עבירה אחת שאינה מצות שבת שפיר יש ללמוד ממילה דוחה שבת כשה מצונו דכשם שתקין אבר הברית הכולל כל הנוף דוחה שבת הכולל כל התורה. כמו כן אבר פרטי דוחה מצוה פרטית. וזה נכון וברור לקיים דברי וקני הש"ך וז"ל: *

ומדי דברי זכור אזכור מה ששמעתי קצת בני אדם שזעין מדרך השכל בענין לימוד תורה ואמרו כי הלומד ומתענג ושמח ושמח ומתענג בלימודו אין זה לימוד התורה כ"כ לשמה כמו אם היה לומד בפשיטות שאין לו מה לימוד שום תענוג והוא רק לשם מצוה. אבל הלומד ומתענג בלימודו הרי מתענג בלימודו גם הגאון עצמו. ובאמת זה מעות מפורסם. ואדרבא כי זה היא עיקר מצות לימוד התורה להיות שש ושמה ומתענג בלימודו ואז דברי תורה נבלעין בדמו. ומאחר שנהגה מדברי תורה הוא נעשה דבוק לתורה. [ועיין פירשי מנהדרין ג"ח. ד"ה ורבק]. ובזוה"ק דבין יצה"ט ובין יצה"ר אין מתגדלין אלא מתוך שמחה. יצה"ט מתגדל מתוך שמחה של תורה. יצה"ר כ"י. ואם אמרת שני השמחה שיש לו מה לימוד נקרא שלא לשמה או עכ"פ לשמה ושלא לשמה. הרי שמחה זו עוד מנגע בח המצוה ומסכהה אורה וא"כ יגדל מזה יצה"ט. וכיון שיה"ט מתגדל מזה בודאי זה הוא עיקר המצוה. ומדינא דהלומד לא לשם מצות הלימוד רק מחמת שיש לו תענוג בלימודו הרי זה נקרא לימוד שלא לשמה כהא דאוכל מצה שלא לשם מצוה רק לשם תענוג אכילה וכהא דאמר לעולם יעסוק אדם כו' שלא לשמה שמתוך כו'. אבל הלומד לשם מצוה ומתענג בלימודו הרי זה לימוד לשמה וכולו קודש כי גם התענוג מצוה:

ובזה אמרתי ליישב דברי הרמב"ם בפ"ג מה' ת"ת ובפ"י מה' תשובה שהעתיק לעולם יעסוק אדם בתורה שלא לשמה שמתוך שלא לשמה כו' ואלו מצות שירה. ואין לומר כלל שלא היה בנייתו רק תורה. שגם בפיר"ח על פסחים נ: העתיק בתורה ובמצות. ועוד דמסקומו שם בנמרא הוא מוכרע דאמר רבא הגי נשי דמתווא אע"ג דלא עברו עבדתא במעלי שבתא

אין צורך
 50' 10'

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik

Avram Rakoff - Rosh Hashanah
The Rev, vol 2 (1999), 178-179

Tradition 17 (1978): 77

A Tribute to the Rebbitzin of Talne

pass on? I admit that I am not able to define precisely the masoretic role of the Jewish mother. Only by circumscription I hope to be able to explain it. Permit me to draw upon my own experiences. I used to have long conversations with my mother. In fact, it was a monologue rather than a dialogue. She talked and I "happened" to overhear. What did she talk about? I must use an halakhic term in order to answer this question: she talked me-inyana de-yoma. I used to watch her arranging the house in honor of a holiday. I used to see her recite prayers; I used to watch her recite the sidra every Friday night and I still remember the nostalgic tune. I learned from her very much.

Most of all I learned that Judaism expresses itself not only in formal compliance with the law but also in a living experience. She taught me that there is a flavor, a scent and warmth to mitzvoth. I learned from her the most important thing in life — to feel the presence of the Almighty and the gentle pressure of His hand resting upon my frail shoulders. Without her teachings, which quite often were transmitted to me in silence, I would have grown up a soulless being, dry and insensitive.

The laws of Shabbat, for instance, were passed on to me by my father; they are a part of mussar avikha. The Shabbat as a living entity, as a queen, was revealed to me by my mother; it is a part of torat Imekha. The fathers knew much about the Shabbat; the mothers lived the Shabbat, experienced her presence, and perceived her beauty and splendor.

The fathers taught generations how to observe the Shabbat; mothers taught generations how to greet the Shabbat and how to enjoy her twenty-four hour presence.

Let me make an admission here; I will confide in you. This is the toughest of all jobs, the most difficult of all tasks. I know from my own experience how difficult it is. I am not modest; I am far from being modest. I know that I am a good teacher. I can teach halakhah. I can explain the most abstract concepts. I can popularize the most complex talmudic debate and break it down into its component parts. I can explain and elucidate abstract ideas.

For instance, before Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur I used to study with my students (your rabbi [Rabbi Stephen Riskin] can confirm this) the halakhot pertaining to the Yomim Noraim [Days of Awe]. From time to time I would reach out for the aggadah or for philosophical ideas with which to elucidate the philosophy of those solemn festivals. If necessary I would also introduce a modern idiom in order to explain certain aspects of the sanctity of these holy days [Kedushat ha-Yom]. All these tricks I know.

But one trick I have not mastered. One thing I cannot do to perfection is to tell my students how I felt on Rosh Hashanah and Yom ha-Kippurim when I was their age. The emotions I experienced, and not what I knew about it. I knew a lot, and they know a lot. But what I felt on these days! How I lived it! I am unable to share with them, what I experienced, for instance, when the shaliach tzibbur [cantor] used to chant and sing: Veba-kohanim veba-am haomdim ba-azarah ["When the priests and the people who were standing in the Temple court"; from the Avodah, the procedure of the Temple service, which is recited as part of the Musaf of Yom Kippur; *High Holiday Prayer Book*, trans. Philip Birnbaum, p. 816]. If you know the melody, you will agree that there is so much nostalgia, so much longing and melancholy in this tune, in the melody of Veba-kohanim veba-am haomdim ba-azarah. I felt as if I had been transferred in time and space into a different world. I felt that I was in the Bet Hamikdash [Holy Temple]. How can I explain this to my students? I can tell them about it but I cannot pass on my experiences to them!

Or how can I pass on the emotion I felt on Kol Nidrei night when the congregation responded amen to the chanting of the Shehehiyanu blessing. It is difficult to transfer experiences and not just concepts; to give over themes and not just numbers. To pass on feelings, to tell the story of both inner restlessness and serenity, to relate the narrative of joy and awe, of trepidation and at the same time equanimity in one's heart, one must not use words. Words cannot explain it. Instead an unusual medium must be utilized: silence. That melamed of old in my heder knew how to pass on his emotional acquisitions, his ecstatic experiences, and his mystical outlook on life. He knew how to pass this on to his pupils without saying a single word.