

Why Jews Quote

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Everyone Quotes¹

Interest in the phenomenon of quotation as a feature of culture has never been greater. Recent works by Regier (2010), Morson (2011) and Finnegan (2011) offer many important insights into a practice notable both for its ubiquity and yet for its specificity. In this essay I want to consider one of the oldest and most diverse of world cultures from the perspective of quotation. While debates abound as to whether the “cultures of the Jews”² can be regarded integrally, this essay will suggest that the act of quotation both in literary and oral settings is a constant in Jewish cultural creativity throughout the ages. By attempting to delineate some of the key functions of quotation in these various Jewish contexts, some contribution to the understanding of what is arguably a “universal human propensity” (Finnegan 2011:11) may be made.

“All minds quote. Old and new make the warp and woof of every moment. There is not a thread that is not a twist of these two strands. By necessity, by proclivity, and by delight, we all quote.”³ Emerson’s reference to warp and woof is no accident. The creative act comprises a threading of that which is unique to the particular moment with strands taken from tradition.⁴ In

¹ The comments of Sarah Bernstein, David Ellenson, Warren Zev Harvey, Jason Kalman, David Levine, Dow Marmur, Dalia Marx, Michal Muszkat-Barkan, and Richard Sarason on earlier versions of this article have been of enormous help.

² See Biale 2002 for use of this term.

³ Emerson 1968 [1859]:178. This quotation constitutes the first sentence of an important book on Biblical quotation; see Schultz 1999:9. Fishbane (1989:17) describes tradition as “the warp and woof of creative talent, the textual content whose lexical or theological knots are exegetically unraveled, separated, or recombined.” The image is employed in an 1899 essay to describe the pervasive role of the Bible within Jewish culture. See Feldman 1899:584.

⁴ There is a longstanding and deep connection between text and texture, and for that matter between sewing and singing. See for example McFarland 1995 and Chouard 1998. The craft of the rhapsodist calls for stitching together sources and themes. Regier (2010:104) quotes the seventeenth-century scholar Robert Burton who likened his activity to the work of a good housewife weaving a piece of cloth from “divers fleeces.” Compagnon (1979:15-17) argues that quotation is a basic instinct, foreshadowed when a young child plays with scissors and glue. The connection between dreaming and quotation deserves investigation. In dreams, phrases from quotidian life or from literature and culture often appear. The unconscious cuts and pastes.

the ancient world “[o]riginality consists not in the introduction of new materials but in fitting the traditional materials effectively into each individual, unique situation and/or audience.”⁵

The term “quotation” hardly does justice to the array of referential techniques to be found in most forms of literature through the ages: direct quotation, allusion, paraphrase, mention, cliché, echo, suggestion, pastiche, plagiarism, and many more. All of these are examples of “literature in the second degree,”⁶ and despite attempts to provide comprehensive taxonomies, the lines between the various techniques remain blurred.⁷ For our present purposes we may see all these as aspects of quotation.

In this essay I want to sketch some of the key aspects and functions within one ancient and still vibrant patchwork of traditions. Why do Jews quote with such enthusiasm? What is achieved by this activity, which seems to be prevalent in virtually every genre of Jewish creativity? Why have so many throughout history been keen to present their own views as nothing more than a rehearsal of previously stated sources?⁸

Jews Have Always Quoted

The prevalence of quotation in Jewish culture is attested to by the sheer weight of quoted sources to be found in virtually every genre of Jewish literature. It is rendered largely invisible, or at least pushed to the farthest recesses of Jewish cultural consciousness, because explicit references to the practice of quotation in Jewish tradition are few and far between. Just as the threads in a fine garment are rarely considered, so the key aspects of Jewish quotational practice have been largely ignored.⁹

⁵ Ong 1982:60. Harold Bloom (1973 and 1975) has written of “the anxiety of influence,” suggesting that every strong poet struggles with the fear that they will not be able to surpass their strong predecessors. It may be, however, that in more traditional societies the anxiety is of a different kind. For example, it has been suggested (quoted in Orr 2003:88) that in East Asia “literary language is, by definition, preceded language and if there is anxiety, it may be more properly be termed the anxiety of not being influenced.”

⁶ Gerard Genette (1997a and 1997b) lists five forms of transtextual relationship, and he risks confusion by identifying the first of these forms by Julia Kristeva’s term intertextuality. Quotation is adduced as the most direct version of this first type. See also Plett 1991, especially 8-17; Allen 2000.

⁷ Some scholars have attempted to mount a defense against the tendency to collapse all distinctions regarding the act of quotation. For examples of such attempts, see Beal 1992 and Charlesworth 1997.

⁸ Two examples of this phenomenon may suffice in our present context. In the introduction to his great work *Bet ha-Behirah*, Menachem ben Solomon Hameiri (1249-1306) states that what may appear to his readers as innovations are in most cases novel juxtapositions of existing Rabbinic traditions (see Hameiri 1965:29). The introduction to the eighteenth-century ethical work *Mesillat Yesharim* by Moshe Ḥaim Luzzatto (1707-1747) opens with the assurance that there is little new to be found in the book (see Luzzatto 1948:1). Rather, it contains ideas so well known to all that their true significance has become obscured through routine. Luzzatto claims that he aims merely to remind his readers of that which they already know well. This disclaimer is itself quoted by later authors. See for example Briskin 1895:2b. Significantly, both authors leave open the possibility that they have contributed something original, but this is conceded rather than trumpeted.

⁹ In this sense, Sabrina Inowlocki’s (2006:4) observation that “‘quotation technique’ is apparently lacking from the theoretical discussions of the ancients” can be extended to Jewish literature as a whole. The methods employed in Inowlocki’s study are of great importance. For a summary of her findings, see 287-98.

The literature, language and folklore of the Jews throughout history has included a cascade of sources and references. “Jewish culture is a cumulative culture par excellence; it assumes that the earlier is very often the better.”¹⁰ As a consequence, Jewish expressions from one era refer to precedents and echoes from previous generations.

It is difficult and perhaps futile to disentangle the textual from the oral dimensions of this Jewish pre-occupation with quotation. Noting with David Carr (2005:7) that “societies with writing often have an intricate interplay of orality and textuality,” we can assert that the tendency to cite sources is common to almost all kinds of Jewish expression, written and oral, as they have come down to us through the ages. This common thread has been illustrated well by Galit Hasan-Rokem (1981), who has traced the deployment of one Biblical verse through Rabbinic literature and in the words of a contemporary Jewish storyteller of Bukharan descent.

“In actual usage a quotation may be . . . experienced as acoustic reality as well as, or perhaps more than, through written apprehension” (Finnegan 2011:166). Finnegan’s assertion is borne out by a perusal of forms of quotation in a variety of Jewish cultural settings. With regard to rabbinic culture, Martin Jaffee (2001:20) has argued convincingly that “the oral-performative literary life of Second Temple scribal culture is the foundation of what would later emerge in ideological garb among the rabbinic Sages as Torah in the Mouth, an oral tradition represented as a primordial and necessary complement to a canonical corpus of sacred writings” In Steven Fraade’s incisive formulation (1999:45), “To love Torah as a revealed tradition is not so much to read it, as to return it repeatedly to the plenitude of its orality of reception,” all the while upholding the canonical status of the sacred texts. Quotation, in oral settings both formal and informal as well as in texts, plays a pivotal role in this oral-textual maneuver.¹¹

The Hebrew Bible is the *fons et origo*, the source back to which this torrent can be traced. The most quoted source in human history, it is the bedrock of the Jewish culture of quotation. It permeates virtually every subsequent stratum of Hebrew literature, and literatures from every continent. The pre-eminence of the Bible as a *quoted* source has obscured to some extent its standing as a *quoting* work, although recently a significant body of scholarship has turned its attention to the phenomenon of inner-biblical allusion, quotation and exegesis.¹²

Quotations, the words of one person or source reported by another, play a ubiquitous role in the Bible. The words of contemporaries are reported as part of Biblical narrative¹³ and in Biblical poetry we find quotation of one’s enemies, of oneself, of God, and of the community.¹⁴

¹⁰ Idel 2002:5. The Bible has a unique and unassailable role in any history of Jewish quotation theory and practice. See Fishbane 1989:41.

¹¹ See Niditch 1996, particularly 18.

¹² Any survey of scholarly works on Biblical quotation should perhaps begin with the contributions of Robert Gordis to the field. See Gordis 1949 and 1981. Michael Fishbane (1985 and elsewhere) has played a major role in furthering understanding of inner-Biblical allusion. See also Eslinger 1992. For an excellent study of the question, see Sommer 1998. A thorough review of and important addition to this debate is provided by Schultz 1999, particularly 216-39. See also Fox 1980.

¹³ See Goldenberg 1991; Miller 1995; Riepe 2009; Savran 1988. Savran’s book is a major contribution to the discussion.

¹⁴ See Jacobson 2004.

Quotations play an essential role in Wisdom literature, too.¹⁵ Only very rarely does the Hebrew Bible offer a source self-consciously quoted from a previous identifiable Biblical text. An outstanding example of this is to be found in Jeremiah 26.18, rendered here in the New International Version:

Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah. He told all the people of Judah, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says:
'Zion will be plowed like a field,
Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble,
the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets.'

By even the most stringent criteria, this verse contains a quotation of Micah 3.12, and it allows for a range of questions to be posed: how accurate is the quotation, and what ends does it serve? What is the relationship between the quoting and quoted source, and what authority does the original hold for the quoting text?¹⁶ In the main, however, quotation in the Hebrew Bible involves less explicit examples, and it requires more subtle techniques of identification and analysis.¹⁷

As Jewish history unfolds, the words of the Bible come to be seen as the original raw material from which any subsequent fabric may be spun. The primacy of the Biblical text does not obviate the need for creativity: it is the first word, not the last. But the existence of a canonical text with a unique metaphysical status means that deployment of these raw materials rather than invention of new ones becomes the standard means by which Jews "sing to the Lord a new song."

The as-yet unwritten history of Jewish quotation has been transformed by the discovery of the Qumran library.¹⁸ A number of studies have catalogued and analyzed the citation formulae and the Biblical quotations themselves. The existence of discrepancies between the Biblical text quotes at Qumran and Masoretic traditions has prompted different interpretations—while one opinion sees this as evidence of the existence of variant textual traditions, others are more inclined to regard this phenomenon as evidence of the sectarians' tendency to quote from

¹⁵ See Gordis 1949. For the suggestion that Ecclesiastes quotes from the Epic of Gilgamesh, see Senapatiratne 2008.

¹⁶ See Hoffman 1998.

¹⁷ Savran's (1988) analysis of the the role of quotation in Biblical narrative distinguishes between the imparting of new and "old" information, between neutral and strategic delivery, between quotation for the sake of self-justification and accusation, and more. For a systematic treatment of quotation and citation in the Hebrew Bible, see Spawn 2001.

¹⁸ See Fishbane 1988 and Fabry 2000. Important studies on the use of earlier sources in the scrolls have been produced since the 1950s. See Gottstein 1953; Wernberg-Moller 1955; Fitzmyer 1974; Vermes 1989; Bernstein 1994; Brin 1994; Høgenhaven 2002; and Metso 2002.

memory, and perhaps also of their more fluid understanding of the boundaries separating revelation and interpretation.¹⁹

Evidence from the Dead Sea Sect, the New Testament,²⁰ and other sources demonstrates that quotation was already a widespread and significant characteristic of Judaism in the period of the Second Temple.²¹ A sensitive reading of the available sources has led some to the conclusion that a major transformation took place in the first pre-Christian century. Earlier approaches to Jewish law privileged custom over textual support. It may even have been the influence of alternative models provided by the Qumran sect which saw the appeal to Torah as an authoritative source become a central feature of the Rabbinic worldview.²² The decades preceding and following the start of the Common Era saw the rise of a text-based culture, in which the Rabbis “found in the creation of an explicitly and pervasively intertextual literature the ideal generative and reconstructive tool” (Boyarin 1990:38-39). Whatever the dynamics which gave rise to this change, it is in Pharisaic and later Rabbinic culture that the practice of quotation attains a new level of variety and intensity, and the centrality of quotation in Jewish culture is established.²³

This pervasive quotation practice speaks to the very self-understanding of the entire literary and spiritual enterprise of the Rabbis, in which “Rabbinic documents . . . offer themselves to the reader as approximations of the ideal of a fluid totality of statements for which no arrangement is necessary—perhaps the ideal of oral Torah as the totality of all rabbinic knowledge.”²⁴ Quotation epitomizes the Rabbinic attitude to tradition and to the world. The term *shene’emar* (“as it is said”) appears in more than 3300 instances in the Babylonian Talmud alone,

¹⁹ For a discussion of these various positions, see Greenstein 1993. He suggests that quotation likely was from memory in most cases, so many of the discrepancies may best be attributed to *lapsus memoriae*. On the tendency of the sectarians to interlace Biblical quotations with their own commentary, see Baumgarten 1992 and Lim 1997 and 2002. One fruitful area for research would be the many examples of the Rewritten Bible from the Second Temple period and beyond, and the relationship of these works to the quotation of sources.

²⁰ For a number of articles on the Hebrew Bible, the intertestamental period, and the New Testament, see Carson and Williamson 1988. There is a large and burgeoning literature relating to citations in the New Testament. In recent years some important studies have been published. See Allison 2000; Brooke 2012; Daube 1987; Davies 1983; Edgar 1963; Menken 1996 and 2001; O’Day 1990; Porter 1997; Stanley 1992; and VanderKam 2002.

²¹ For various aspects of quotation in Second Temple literature, see Colson 1940; Dimant 1988; Jacobson 1989; Knox 1940; Lange and Weigold 2011; and Snaith 1967. For discussions of the first two books of the Maccabees, see Rappaport 1998 and Schwartz 1998.

²² For an important discussion of the “revolutionary innovation of first-century BCE Judaism,” see Schremer 2001.

²³ For an important comparison of Rabbinic literature with the literature of the Second Temple period, see Fraade 2007.

²⁴ Samely 2007:111. For examples of discussions of Rabbinic citation practices relating both to the Bible and to the reported speech of other sages, see Kalmin 1988; Neusner 1989, espec. 17-22, and Neusner 1992, 1993a and 1993b; Septimus 2004. The Mishnah is a particularly interesting area for research in this regard. Compared to other genres of Rabbinic literature we find a relative dearth of quoted sources, but a number of reflections on the ethics and mechanics of quotation. For the phenomenon of quotation in the Mishnah, see Metzger 1951; Pettit 1993; Samely 2003. A penetrating discussion of this phenomenon is offered by my colleague Jason Kalman (2004), who raises the possibility that some of the Scriptural citations in the Mishnah are later additions. I have learnt much about the citation of the Bible in Rabbinic literature from Kalman 2010.

and the term *dichtiv* (“as it is written”) appears there more than 3200 times. To quote in this literature is to embody and to exemplify a fluid, all-embracing Torah, both self-referential and self-propelling.

Over time the Sages’ attribution of canonical authority to Biblical sources underwent significant changes. Indeed, in later generations, the canon is extended even to include the key Tannaitic works.²⁵ As the theology of the Rabbis takes hold, the understanding of what represents the pure raw material from which new garments can be wrought extends to include the Oral Torah, or at least its written manifestations.

In the years following the redaction of the Talmud, as the foci of Jewish life and the range of cultural influences multiply and diversify, most genres of Jewish literature are marked by intense quotation—of the Bible, of the Rabbis, of legal and aggadic (non-legal) literature, of philosophical and mystical treatises, and more.

The efflorescence of the Jewish art of quotation reaches its apogee in the rich diversity of genres and styles that constitute medieval Jewish literature. The art of citation became an ever-present aspect of post-Talmudic Jewish creativity: poetry, kabbalah, philosophy, legal writings, ethical literature, the world of Hasidism—all are suffused with sources quoted with relish and enthusiasm.

In the Middle Ages Jews become exposed to other traditions of quotation which impact many aspects of literary and intellectual activity.²⁶ In principle, many of the great figures of philosophy and esoteric wisdom adopted the position that “an authentic disciple is a faithful transmitter: he is basically a witness to the tradition; he alters nothing, does not innovate, and certainly never disputes his master’s teachings.”²⁷ However, beneath the veneer of conformity, quotation is a significant vehicle for the inculcation of new ideas and approaches.

The role of quotation is no less central in poetry than it is in philosophy. In liturgical and secular poetry of the Middle Ages the use of Biblical and other ancient quotations was intensive and often virtuosic: the fact that Hebrew poets could rely on their audience’s familiarity with the Bible allowed for the possibility of creative allusion. Often these poems demonstrated great malleability in their treatment of the Biblical raw materials.²⁸ Indeed, the literature of *piyyut* has felicitously been described as “a *locus classicus* of intertextuality.”²⁹

²⁵ Chernick 2009, particularly 33-68. On the contrast between Tannaitic practices and those of Qumran, see Schiffman 1994, especially 222. Schiffman posits the theory that the Rabbis demurred from quoting the Prophets as legal prooftexts in response to the tendency of early Christian sources to make use of prophetic material in this way. The Qumran sectarians predate this polemical concern.

²⁶ See, for example, Decter 2006.

²⁷ See G. Cohen 1967, especially lviii.

²⁸ See Elizur 2006; Yahalom 2006. Laura Lieber’s work (2010:especially 93-131) on *piyyut* in general and Yannai (who lived in the Land of Israel probably in the sixth century) in particular includes a highly significant chapter on quotation and related topics. There is no doubt that approaches to quotation in Islamic and Christian culture influenced Jewish literature. For an example from the poetics of the medieval Arab world, see Scheindlin 2002, especially 67-68.

²⁹ Granat 2002:64. This article has many important insights about the relationship of *piyyut* in general to the Bible. See also Mirsky 1985, especially 80-98.

Quotation in Jewish preaching has its own distinct history. The deployment of canonical sources in a performative context necessitated and stimulated certain forms of quotational expertise. Evidence of this consciousness can be found in the Jewish *ars praedicandi* literature of Renaissance Italy,³⁰ but the phenomenon precedes its own self-conscious examination by centuries. Beyond the confines of homiletics, oral performance in traditional Jewish settings is replete with quotation. Analyzing the roles played by these quotations in the development of folklore and popular culture, and the existence of distinctions in quotational practice between written and oral settings, is one of the challenges to be met in the future development of this field.³¹

The literature of the Kabbalah and the rest of the esoteric tradition and its antecedents covers a wide range of quotational practices.³² Some works present themselves as accounts of secret wisdom imparted from teachers, others as commentaries, and yet others as systematic theological speculations. Of particular interest in our context is the phenomenon described by Moshe Idel as “mosaic writing,” in which the text produced is a tapestry of quoted sources.³³

Practices of quotation change through time. While much research remains to be done on these questions, it can be observed that in general the earliest strata of Jewish literature references are direct—a source is introduced and then cited. As works proliferate, and as technologies for reproducing them are developed, we observe a steep rise in the use of referential pointers, such as the instructions ‘*ayen* and ‘*reeh*, both of which encourage the reader to refer to a source which may not be immediately visible or available.

As in other aspects of Jewish history, it is important to trace lines of communication and influence between the quotational practices to be found in Jewish sources and those in use in other cultures and civilizations. Do Jews quote in different ways than Christians and Muslims, and do Jews influenced by these cultures quote in distinct ways? And does the inculcation of contemporary Western approaches to citation and reference mean the end of “authentic” patterns of Jewish quotation?

Modernity certainly represents a watershed in the history of the Jewish art of quotation. The practice of quotation both expresses and mediates the rupture between the past and the

³⁰ See Sosland 1987, especially 63-79; Saperstein 1996, especially 164-78. See also Altmann 1981. For medieval Christian parallels, see Bland 1997.

³¹ An excellent example of this kind of approach is offered by Hasan-Rokem (1981). She traces the role played by a verse as it attains the status of a “proverbial quotation” in Rabbinic literature and also in contemporary folklore.

³² See Hayman 1984. Liebes (2000, especially 66, 160, 230, 276 n.2 and 299 n.25) argues that this work saw itself at least at the level of the Biblical works and therefore had no reason to quote from them. For examples of how quotational practices are used to analyze the provenance of particular works, see Scholem 1941:183, 198, 199. The Zoharic image of the tailor cutting textual swathes to fit a certain design is worthy of further discussion. See Zohar III 27b Ra’ya Mehemna.

³³ See Idel 1998:18-32. It may be argued that the particular dynamics of Kabbalistic discourse place an emphasis on quotation. At its base, language in general, and the Bible in particular, is itself a quotation, so the lines separating originality and tradition are blurred. For a discussion of a fascinating echo of this idea in Nahmanides’ introduction to the Torah, see Pedaya 2003:127-30.

present.³⁴ Those seeking to articulate various Jewish responses to modernity quote different sources, and they do so in different ways. Some have adopted Western academic practices, while others perpetuate Rabbinic traditions of quotation. Yet others eschew quotation, since an emphasis on immediacy sees little merit in swathing self-expression with parallels and precedents. The stereotype of the “new Jew” promulgated by the Zionist movement was far removed from the Diaspora Jew swaddled in precedents and ornate allusions.³⁵

In a recent work by the Israeli novelist Haim Be’er (2010:176), two non-Jewish characters are discussing the protagonist, a Hasidic rabbi undergoing a crisis of faith. One of them comments that if the Renaissance painter Guiseppe Arcimboldo were to paint this rabbi’s portrait, it would not be rendered in the artist’s usual style by employing fruit and other foodstuffs taken from the marketplace. Rather, his portrait would be constructed using all the verses and adages and Hasidic sayings and homiletical teachings which the rabbi employs. The character goes on to wonder what the face of the rabbi would look like if it were stripped of all these referential cosmetics. Who is there behind the quotations? Here a modern sensibility challenges the hyper-quotation characteristic of traditional Jewish practice, and raises the possibility that the individual has been stifled by allusions and citations.

It is a prominent Jew of the twentieth century, Walter Benjamin, who is credited by many as being a key theoretician of modernity and quotation.³⁶ Benjamin collected quotations obsessively, but his project was far from any “traditional” approach to tradition. Hannah Arendt’s analysis of Benjamin’s fascination with quotation evokes the sense of rupture in the fabric of tradition (*Schriften* ii, 192):

Walter Benjamin knew that the break in tradition and the loss of authority which occurred in his lifetime were irreparable, and he concluded that he had to discover new ways of dealing with the past. In this he became a master when he discovered that the transmissibility of the past had been replaced by its citability . . .

This discovery of the modern function of quotations . . . was born out of despair . . . of the present and the desire to destroy it; hence their power is “not the strength to preserve but to cleanse, to tear out of context, to destroy.”³⁷

An examination of methods and sources in some key works by, say, Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), Nahman Krochmal (1785-1840), Abraham Geiger (1810-1874), Hermann Cohen (1842-1918), Emma Goldman (1869-1940), Martin Buber (1878-1965), Franz Kafka

³⁴ See Knowlton 1998, especially 15-80. See also Compagnon 1979:314-18. For an acute example of quotation as a meditation on past and present, see Goetschel 2004:266-78. For a profound reflection on quotation, anachronism, displacement and modernity, see Garber 2003:7-32.

³⁵ Almog 2000:138-59.

³⁶ For outstanding discussions of Benjamin’s approach to quotation, see Perloff 2010, especially 24-49; Sieburth 1989.

³⁷ Arendt 1968:38-39. See also Alter 1991:81 where he discusses Benjamin’s notion, developed in his 1931 essay on Karl Kraus (1874-1936), that only in quotation is language fully consummated. For a recent excellent discussion of Benjamin on quotation and Kraus, see Sax 2014.

(1883-1924), Shmuel Yosef Agnon (1888-1970), Gershom Scholem (1897-1982), Joseph B. Soloveitchik (1903-1993), Hannah Arendt (1906-1975), Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972), Ovadia Yosef (1920-2013), Philip Roth (born 1933), Dahlia Ravikovitch (1936-2005) and Haviva Pedaya (born 1965) would reveal much about commonalities and differences beyond the usual denominational appellations. Jews have always quoted, but today different Jews quote radically different sources in radically different ways. Why do they do it? Or to be a little less ambitious: which core functions of the act of quotation can be identified across Jewish history, and to what extent can they be identified in literature and discourse generated by Jews in our times?

I want to suggest a response to this question which takes six dimensions of the act of quotation into account. It may be helpful to consider six spheres to which the act of quotation is addressed. Quotation relates to every stage of a process which ranges from i) tradition in general, to ii) a particular quoted source, to iii) the quoting author, on to iv) a specific text produced by that author, to v) a community of discourse and thence to vi) the world in general. Taken together, the threads woven in these various directions constitute what may be termed a rhapsody of quotation. The functions of quotation in Jewish culture can best be understood in terms of this continuum which extends out of tradition and back into it, reaching from what might be termed “anteriority” toward posterity and eternity. Upon this framework the tapestry of Jewish quotation is woven.

Quotation and Tradition

To quote as a Jew is to speak. To speak as a Jew is to quote. More even than an individual speech act (what Saussure called *parole*), it is an expression of *langue*, “a hoard deposited by the practice of speech in speakers who belong to the same community, a grammatical system which, to all intents and purposes, exists in the mind of each speaker.”³⁸ Schisms and polemical disputes between Jews sharing a common *langue* are quite different in nature from confrontations of Jews with no such hoard in common. One of the characteristics of the contemporary condition of the Jewish people is that various parties address each other at cross purposes, armed with different canons, speaking in different *langues*.

To quote is to see the present through the prism of tradition. Contemporary events are understood to be echoes or correspondences of that which has already taken place. When a Jew remarks “This is the day the Lord made, we shall be happy and rejoice in it” (Psalms 118.24), the language of tradition is used to express a current response to a contemporary event.³⁹ Quotation places the quotidian events of life into the framework of tradition. By searching for correlations between earlier and later events, or apparently diverse concepts, the tendency to quote epitomizes the notion that “there is nothing new under the sun.” A quoting Jew places

³⁸ I have used the translation of Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics* in Culler 1986:40.

³⁹ To cite one example, this verse is the refrain of a poem sung at weddings in the tradition of the Jews of Cochon.

contemporary experiences into the framework of a particular tradition, and in so doing perpetuates and expands that tradition.

In the fourth Order of the Mishnah we are witness to two rare references to a kind of theory of halakhic quotation. In the first chapter of Tractate Eduyot, there is a discussion concerning the citation of opinions which are not considered normative:

Why are the opinions of Shammai and Hillel mentioned when they are not accepted? In order to teach generations to come that a person should not be obstinate in their opinion, since even the Fathers of the World [Shammai and Hillel] were not obstinate.

And why is the minority opinion brought alongside the majority opinion, even though the law follows the majority opinion? Because it may happen that a court in the future will prefer the minority opinion and rule according to it . . .

Rabbi Judah said: If so, why is the minority opinion brought alongside the majority opinion? So that if someone were to say: I was taught according to the following tradition, he might be told: your tradition is that of this particular sage.

Three kinds of reasons are offered for the citation of rabbinic opinions which do not seem to serve any direct halakhic (legal) function. The first is educational and ethical in nature—the example of these sages should provide a spur to humility and a corrective to arrogance. The second is in essence jurisprudential: the minority opinion, though rejected, may yet serve as a basis for a new decision. Implicit in this reasoning is the sense that the acceptance of a minority opinion is to be preferred over an act of innovation.

If the second reason is to provide the basis for change within the accepted boundaries of normative legal discussion, the opinion of Rabbi Judah offers a reading quite conservative in nature. It is of course ironic that this opinion be brought by a single sage, following the anonymous majority opinion!⁴⁰ His reasoning appears to be that by naming the tradition which a future interlocutor may cite, the potential of a novel opinion to overturn the hegemony of tradition is limited. By means of quotation, tradition acts to keep innovation and disagreement within its boundaries.

A further insight into the way in which the Sages quoted is provided by a Rabbinic aphorism which presents itself as a kind of Scriptural quotation. A passage in Sanhedrin 72a reads:

Rava said: what is the reason for the law of breaking in? Because it is certain that no man is inactive where his property is concerned; therefore this one [the thief] must have reasoned, If I go there, he [the owner] will oppose me and prevent me; but if he does I will kill him. Hence the Torah decreed, If he come to slay thee, forestall by slaying him.

The sense in which the Torah decrees such a teaching is certainly not literal: it is not a Biblical verse. We also find the phrase introduced with the same formula in Berakhot 58a, where this quasi-verse is used to support the notion of *din rodef*, mandating the use of pre-emptive

⁴⁰ This irony is removed in the parallel to this source in the Tosefta, where the opinions are reversed.

deadly force.⁴¹ The formula *ha-torah amrah* means literally “The Torah said” and would therefore appear to be a quotation formula. Indeed, many examples can be adduced to show that often this term or the almost identical term with these words reversed is used in Rabbinic literature to introduce a direct Biblical quotation. Invariably, it is the Pentateuch which is quoted as Torah in this context.⁴² How, then, is a term denoting the quotation of a supremely authoritative and canonical text employed to cite what appears to be nothing more than a Rabbinic aphorism? Clearly, there is more than one meaning to the statement “The Torah says.” Here it signifies “The Torah means,” or “Tradition teaches.”

This is certainly how Midrash Tanḥuma understands the phrase, and it suggests that the call to oppress the Midianites in Numbers 25.17 is the basis for this teaching.⁴³ Rashi, on the other hand, links the teaching with Exodus 22.1, emphasizing this point both in his commentary on the Talmud and on the Pentateuch.⁴⁴ Later, when the issue of pre-emptive force is discussed and the teaching quoted, it appears variously in the name of the Torah,⁴⁵ the Sages,⁴⁶ and as something “we” say.⁴⁷ In today’s Israel, this quasi-verse serves everyone from basketball coaches to defenders of the assassin of Yitzḥak Rabin.⁴⁸

Quotation both generates and preserves Tradition in general. In quoting, one places oneself within a tradition or network of traditions. We turn now to the particular men and women whose names are invoked as their quotations are cited.

⁴¹ See also Berakhot 62b, and Yoma 95b.

⁴² In the reverse order the phrase can be found in Mishnah Hullin 12.5 (Deuteronomy 22); See for example Sifre Numbers 107 (Leviticus 6); BT [Babylonian Talmud] Pesahim 27b (Exodus 12); Yoma 57a (Leviticus 16); Yevamot 25a (Exodus 23); Ketubot 17a (Exodus 23); Gittin 99a (Deuteronomy 24). Kiddushin 73a (Deuteronomy 23); Baba Kamma 34b (Exodus 21); Babba Kamma 72b, Sanhedrin 9a, 25a, 27a (all Exodus 23); Sanhedrin 72b [and Mekhila of R. Ishmael to Exodus 23.7] (Genesis 9); Avodah Zarah 62a (Leviticus 25); Zevahim 107a (Numbers 5).

⁴³ Tanḥuma Pinḥas 3. See also Numbers Rabbah 25.4; Hameiri, *Bet Habeḥirah* to Sanhedrin 72a, and Rabbenu Baḥya to Numbers 25.17.

⁴⁴ See Rashi to Exodus 22.1. See also Rashi to Berakhot 58a and Sanhedrin 72a, and an interesting reference to the aphorism in his commentary to Babba Kama 117b.

⁴⁵ For example *Sefer Ḥasidim*, 45, where the behavior of David in not attacking Saul is singled out for mention despite the fact that the Torah says to kill one’s putative assailant.

⁴⁶ See ibn Shuaib 1573. In the Zohar an Aramaicized version of the aphorism appears with the formula *taninan*, implying (accurately) a Rabbinic teaching. See Zohar I, 138a.

⁴⁷ Tosafot to Avodah Zarah 10b. The translation of this text from the political-judicial realm to that of the inner struggle in the literature of Ḥasidism is in itself fascinating, but ancillary to our current discussion. For an example of this reading, see *Sefat Emet*, Balak 5661.

⁴⁸ On October 22, 2010, the coach of the Maccabi Tel Aviv basketball team was quoted in a number of media ahead of his team’s match against Zalgiris Kaunas of Lithuania. He cited the saying to explain his gameplan. An entry in the website *Intifada* under the pseudonym Shushi states with confidence that the actions of Baruch Goldstein and Yigal Amir are sanctioned by this saying, which, he asserts, is written in the Torah. See: http://intifada.co.il/forum/forums.php?az=show_mesg&forum=111&topic_id=1942&mesg_id=1945&page=3, accessed May 21, 2011.

The Quoted Source: Citation as Resuscitation

A Rabbinic tradition suggests that whenever a Sage is quoted after their death, their lips are animated even in the grave.⁴⁹ So long as one is quoted, one has not yet finally departed this world. It is the words of the Sages which act as their memorial. In this sense, the bringing of sources is the ultimate act of inter-generational affirmation. This could be a precarious affair. Catherine Heszer (2010:84) has noted that “deceased sages’ views could be easily forgotten or remembered by one student only.”

The interplay between the old and emerging generations is given powerful expression in this passage from the Palestinian Talmud (PT Shabbat 1.1, 3a):

Whoever hears a passage of Torah from their grandson it is as if they heard it from Mount Sinai. And how is this proven? “. . . and make them known to your children and to your children’s children. The day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb . . .” (Deuteronomy 4.9-10). Rabbi Hezekiah, Rabbi Jeremiah and Rabbi Ḥiyya in the name of Rabbi Joḥanan: if you can link the teaching all the way back to Moses, do so. If not, relate either to the originator of the tradition or to the last tradent. And how is this proven? “. . . and make them known to your children and to your children’s children. The day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb . . .” (Deuteronomy 4.9-10). Gidel said: Whoever brings a tradition in the name of its originator, should see the source of the teaching as if he were standing before him.⁵⁰

The span of generations from Moses to one’s grandchildren is included in this rich source for the understanding of the dynamics of quotation. By bringing a saying of a predecessor the solitude of mortality is alleviated both for the quoter and the quoted. The quoted source is realized, almost revived.⁵¹ At that moment tradition is constituted. As Finnegan (2011:262) puts it: “The words and voices are from the past. But to quote is not only to see them as before and beyond, but to bring them to the present and to take them to yourself.”

Citation acts in this case as a form of resuscitation. When the words of a dead person are quoted, be they a recently deceased relative or a Talmudic sage, they are given life. Not to be quoted is a kind of death penalty, as is suggested in a story of political intrigue among the Tannaim as recounted in the Babylonian Talmud, Horayot 13a-b. The Patriarch Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel punishes Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Nathan for conspiring against his authority. Initially he has them removed from the house of study. When his colleagues object, he changes the punishment, allowing them into the House of Study but decreeing that traditions will not be brought in the names of these two eminent Rabbis. Traditions emanating from Rabbi Meir would

⁴⁹ See PT Shekalim 2.7 47a—this is an extraordinarily rich source for understanding Rabbinic attitudes to citation, and it deserves close attention. Immediately preceding this saying, for example, we find a reflection on King David finding eternal comfort in the fact that his words are quoted in synagogues and houses of study. For parallels to these traditions, see Yevamot 96b; Midrash Shmuel (Buber) 19. In Tanḥuma Ki Tissa 3, the tradition takes another turn, as the sages left in this world refuse to give the departed Master any peace in the grave!

⁵⁰ PT Shabbat 1.1, 3a. The source also appears in PT Kiddushin 1.7, 61a. For another intergenerational theme linked to the bringing of sources, see Tanḥuma Noah 3.

⁵¹ See Jaffee 2001:150-51.

be attributed to “others,” and those from Rabbi Nathan would be introduced with the formula “some say.”

Years later, so the source from the Talmud recounts, the Patriarch Rabbi Judah the Prince is teaching his son and cites a tradition in the name of “others” (Horayot 13a-b):

[His son] said to him: who are those others whose waters we drink and whose name we do not mention? He answered: they are men who tried to uproot your honor and the honor of your father’s house. The son said to his father: *Their loves, their hates, their jealousies have long since perished* (Ecclesiastes 9.6). The father replied: *The enemy is no more, but the ruin lasts for ever* (Psalms 9.7).

Following this exchange of views through the medium of quoted verses, the son persuades his father to relent, and the tradition is brought in the name of Rabbi Meir, although Rabbi Judah the Prince is only prepared to use the expression “They said in the name of Rabbi Meir” and not “Rabbi Meir said.”⁵² The Patriarch attempts to use his authority to exact a heavy punishment on the conspirators: he attempts to banish them from posterity, from admission to a trans-generational conversation which is at the heart of Rabbinic culture. To remove an individual from the canon of citation is tantamount to the Biblical punishment of having one’s name cut off after death. This is the ultimate excommunication.

The attempt to pronounce such a sentence on these two sages did not succeed. Whenever a Jew cites a source by name, it is not only tradition in general which is enlivened: citation acts as a form of resuscitation. Indeed, it is presented in tradition as a redemptive act. Perhaps the single most famous and explicit reference to the act of citation in all of Rabbinic literature is to be found in Tractate Avot. To be more precise, it is from the sixth chapter, a later accretion to the tractate known as *Kinyan Torah*. At the conclusion of a catalogue of forty-eight virtues through which Torah is acquired, we read (Avot 6.5):

⁵² The Maharsha (Rabbi Samuel Edels) in his commentary to this Talmudic pericope offers a remarkable comment on the use of plural forms for the anonymous citation. He argues that had the formula been “another said” and “someone says,” the students would be forced to ask the identity of the anonymous source. He suggests that the teaching from Avot discussed above according to which correct attribution brings redemption to the world would have been understood as an ethical imperative to find the source. Interestingly, it is just this curiosity which brings Rabbi Shimon the son of Rabbi Judah the Prince to investigate the source of the teaching. Note also the way in which father and son conduct a debate through the medium of quoted verses. This source is explicated in Rubenstein 1999:176-211.

... by being precise in transmitting what he has learned; by quoting his source. From this we learn that a person who quotes his source brings deliverance to the world, as it is written. “And Esther spoke to the king, in the name of Mordechai” (Esther 2.22).⁵³

In *Helkat Ya’akov*, a collection of *responsa* by Rabbi Mordechai Yaakov Breisch (1895-1976), we find a *responsum* relating to the provenance and application of the adage from Avot (Breisch 1992:63-65). Breisch writes a relatively short *responsum*, some six paragraphs in length, in response to a question posed to him by a Rabbinical colleague. All of the queries relate to the dictum from Avot—is it prescriptive or binding law? Does it apply to aggadic (non-legal) sections as well as halakhic (legal) passages? Is the reproof of masters towards students who omit to quote the source of their teaching merely a matter of honor, or are there other considerations at work? What is the status of traditions brought in the name of the Sages, with no specific appellation attached? If a tradition is in some way corrupted or incomplete, is it necessary to note this fact when quoting it? The questions posed here delineate the outline of an ethics of quotation.⁵⁴

The injunction to bring a teaching in the name of its originator appears not only as an exhortation, but also as a prohibition—it is forbidden not to do so.⁵⁵ Tellingly, a different verse is employed to make this point. “Never rob a helpless man because he is helpless” (Proverbs 22.22) is applied to the domain of attribution. To bring unattributed sources is not merely disrespectful and subversive. It is also regarded as an act of aggression and exploitation perpetrated against the defenseless. It is to dispossess a weaker party of his or her intellectual property.

These various motifs come together in a section of the Tanḥuma which I consider to be the most complete reference to our teaching in Rabbinic literature (Tanḥuma Buber, Numbers 27):

R. Ḥezekiah and R. Jeremiah the son of Abba taught in the name of R. Johanan: He who does not quote a source, of him it is said “Never rob a helpless man because he is helpless.” When a person hears a teaching, he should repeat it in the name of its originator, even at three degrees of separation. Thus our masters have taught [in Peah 2.6]: R. Naḥum the Scribe said: I have received from R. Mayasha, who received [from Abba, who received from the pairs, who received] from the elders, a law of Moses from Sinai. So it is with reference to whoever does not say something in the name of the one who said it that the text says; “Never rob a helpless man because he helpless.” But

⁵³ Some Rabbinic sources privilege accurate citation as a way of underscoring the appropriate way for the generation of students and descendants to relate to the generation of teachers and parents. For a Hasidic expression of this idea with reference also to Esther, see Tschernowitz 1938:71c. One’s deeds and teachings should be rooted in the soil of precedent. When Elazar in Numbers 31.21 cites God’s teaching in the name of Moses to whom it was imparted, he is exemplifying this kind of appropriate behavior. See Sifre Numbers 157, where Esther 2.22 is used as a comparison—Elazar is referring to Moses just as Esther was later to do with regards to Mordechai. So in this case the “precedent” for the use of precedent appears in a subsequent and less authoritative text. In the minor tractate known as Kallah the main focus is the relationship between master and student, where respectful distance is to be enforced on pain of death. See Kallah 1.24.

⁵⁴ Two highly significant works in this context are the introduction to Margalit 1989:7-37, and Shechter 1957. They both provide highly valuable compendia of rabbinic sources on citation.

⁵⁵ This is discussed extensively by Rabbi Ezekiel Landau (1960:11-12).

everyone who does repeat a source in the name of its originator brings redemption into the world. From whom do you learn this? From Esther. When she heard of the matter from Mordechai, she said to Ahasuerus according to what is stated [in Esther 2.22]: “And Esther spoke to the King in the name of Mordechai.” Ergo: if you hear a teaching, cite it in the name of the one who said it.⁵⁶

To quote is to be part of a continuous chain, to redeem the world, to affirm tradition, and to revive the quoted party. But what of the person doing the quoting?

The Quoter: Erudition and Misprision

In modern as in ancient times, the capacity to cite germane sources has been considered evidence of the *bona fides* of the quoter. Quotations have often been seen as “a kind of badge of learning.”⁵⁷ A thin line divides mastery of sources on the one hand and an obsessive concern with obscure source-hunting. In Jewish literature as elsewhere, the hyper-quotation of erudite scholars has been the subject of parody over the years.⁵⁸

In his introduction to Tractate Avot, Maimonides offers a famous dismissal of the practice of pedantic attribution and citation of sources, while promoting the culture of quotation nonetheless (1912:35-36):

Know, however, that the ideas presented in these chapters and in the following commentary are not of my own invention, neither did I think out the inventions contained therein, but I have gleaned them from the words of the wise occurring in the Midrashim, in the Talmud, and in others of their works, as well as from the words of the philosophers, ancient and recent, and also from the works of various authors, as one should accept the truth from whatever source it proceeds. Sometimes I may give a statement in full, word for word in the author’s own language, but there is no harm in this and it is not done with the intention of glorifying myself as presenting as my own something that was said by others before me, since I have just confessed (my indebtedness to others), even though I do not say “so and so said,” which would necessitate useless prolixity. Sometimes, too, the mentioning of the name of the authority drawn upon might lead one who lacks insight to believe that the statement quoted is faulty, and wrong in itself, because he does not

⁵⁶ For a related source which lists non-attribution as one of seven deadly sins, see Midrash Proverbs 6.16. See also the introduction to *Sifte Cohen* (Hamburg, 1690), 1b-2b. The author, Mordechai Hacohen of Safed (1523-1598), offers an important reading of the term “three degrees of separation.” His claim is that his only sources are Rabbenu Bahya, Rashi, R. Menahem Recanati, and the Zohar. Rabbenu Bahya ben Asher also alludes to the expression under discussion here. In his introduction to his commentary, he states that he will remain faithful to the commentaries of Rashi and Rabbenu Hananel, and adds: I will remember each thing according to the name of its originator, and not wrap myself in a tallit which is not my own.

⁵⁷ Morawski 1970:690. For a discussion of the role of quotation in modern academic culture, see Grafton 1977, especially 22. The social sciences and the humanities have adopted canons of authority and verifiability from the natural sciences, albeit with significant adaptation. The extent to which a work is cited in reputable scholarship has become a criterion for assessment and promotion. See Moed 2005.

⁵⁸ See Regier 2010:97-100. For an outstanding example of a parody of Jewish hyper-quotation in the name of erudition, see Levinsohn 1899:27-29, where Levinsohn quotes in the exaggerated manner of Samson Bloch.

understand it. Therefore, I prefer not to mention the authority, for my intention is only to be of service to the reader, and to elucidate for him the thoughts hidden in this tractate.⁵⁹

The precise attribution of sources is eschewed, purportedly for the sake of brevity and humility. Maimonides' readers over the centuries, defenders and detractors alike, have suspected that his ambivalence with regard to the citation of sources is not simply a safeguard against prolixity.⁶⁰

Despite Maimonides' arguments, the capacity to quote and attribute sources from the Jewish canon has long been regarded as a core virtue of Jewish scholarship. It was the signal lack of this attribution which had much to do with the ferocity of the Maimonidean controversy. Rabbi Abraham ben David (1125-1198), whose comments on the *Mishneh Torah* appear in the printed version of that work, decries the departure of Maimonides from "the authors who preceded him, for they brought proofs to support their words, and brought those proofs in the name of their originators."⁶¹ His view represents the overwhelming trend in Jewish literature of virtually every genre before the twelfth century and since.

Gauging the accuracy of a quotation, however, is less straightforward than may appear. To quote is to quote out of context, and thereby to corrupt an aspect of the original source. All quotation involves, therefore, an element of what Bloom (1973:7-8) calls "misprision," even if every word of the quoted text is rendered with precision. Even the source from Avot mandating accurate attribution discussed above is unattributed, and it has been mistakenly attributed in the course of its transmission.⁶² Thus the classic source enshrining the principle of accurate attribution is itself a classic example of the lack of consistent adherence to the principle it adumbrates.

While Rabbinic tradition privileged accuracy of citation, the very act of "cutting and pasting" gives rise to boundless possibilities of misprision. When Rabbi Moses Sofer (1762-1839) coined the expression *ḥadash asur min ha-torah*, "the new is Scripturally prohibited," he and his listeners were aware that an Halakhic teaching from a wholly different context was being appropriated for polemical purposes. Accuracy of citation can coexist with creative misprision.

An outstanding example of a traditional mandate for misprision can be found in the thirteen attributes of the Divine, recited in the Temple ritual and later the Jewish liturgy for the High Holydays. The undoubted source for this declaration is Exodus 34.6-7, and a slight variant

⁵⁹ Maimonides' Introduction to the tenth chapter of Tractate Sanhedrin, notable as it is for many theological innovations, is replete with references to references. Most of the prevailing five opinions noted at the start of the introduction are characterized by the way in which they bring sources to bolster their views, and Maimonides ends the introduction with the claim that he has brought appropriate proofs to bolster the veracity of his assertions. A close reading both of his sources and of his characterizations of other views may yield important insights.

⁶⁰ Different aspects of Maimonides' citation of sources are discussed in many works. For some outstanding examples, see Diamond 2002; Finkelstein 1935; Greenberg 1993; Twersky 1980, espec. 143-62.

⁶¹ Introduction to the *Mishneh Torah*. He uses the Hebrew term *beshem omram*, a direct reference to the language of the teaching in Avot mandating attributed citation.

⁶² See also Megillah 15a and Kallah 1.24, where the tradition is reported in the name of Rabbi Eliezer. See also Hullin 104b and Niddah 19b.

can be found in Numbers 14.18. In both cases, the Biblical list of Divine characteristics includes the expression *ve-nakeh lo yenakeh*—God does not remit all punishment.

The penitential liturgy quotes the words of Exodus 34, but it truncates the verse and reverses the meaning. By ending the list of Divine attributes with *ve-nakeh* the worshipper recites a verse which carries a quite different meaning to that offered in the Bible. Crucial words are omitted, and the meaning transformed.⁶³

If all quotation carries within it an element of misprision, Rabbinic tradition elevates it to an art form. Phrases and verses are taken out of their original context and re-assigned to perform a wide variety of roles. Misprisings of many kinds are to be found within Jewish culture. Some are the result of techniques of truncation and ellipsis. Others are the result of errors of transmission, while yet others would seem to be motivated by theological or polemical interest. Some may even result from a sense of intimate proximity to the quoted source. For example, when considering the degree of accuracy to the printed text with which Abraham Joshua Heschel quotes Jewish sources, it is striking that the greatest discrepancy is to be found when he cites Ḥasidic traditions. Heschel grew up immersed in these traditions, and if he appears to “mis-quote” it is not for lack of knowledge. It seems rather to imply that the version of certain traditions contained in books is not to be preferred to orally-transmitted versions.⁶⁴

The ways in which an author brings sources and the choice of sources have long served as a mark of quality and a badge of identity. Ḥayim Naḥman Bialik is reported to have described Naḥman Krochmal thus: “It is as though he has digested the Hebrew Bible, the Talmud, the Kabbalah, Jewish Thought and general philosophy, and one cannot tell that all this is external to him. It all seems to derive from within him, from within his very soul. That is how it ought to be”⁶⁵

This ideal holds sway in the halls of traditional Jewish learning and in the groves of academe, in the pulpits of Orthodox and Liberal congregations, in public discourse and private debate. Quotation indeed has its ethics, as it also has its politics and sociology. How one quotes and who one quotes provide major clues to one’s affiliations and presumptions. To quote Philo, or the New Testament, or a Gaonic *responsum*, or a *piyyut*, or an article from an academic journal, or Martin Buber—in all these cases and countless others the quoter chooses to be placed within particular contexts. Who and how you quote may say more about you than the opinions you declare or the commitments you profess.

The Text: Authority, Stimulation and Ornament

I have suggested that to quote as a Jew means to be in relationship with Tradition in general, and certain tradents in particular. I have also noted that the quoting individual quotes in

⁶³ Weisblit (1970) demonstrates that this liturgical change is influenced by Rabbinic readings of the verse. See Fishbane 1985:347; Newman 1998. See Tosefta Yoma 2.1; 4.9; Yoma 86a; Pesikta deRav Kahana 6, 1; Pesikta Rabati, Friedmann ed., 194.

⁶⁴ See Marmur 2005:218-60.

⁶⁵ Krochmal 1961:6. The translation is mine.

order to establish his or her own standing. We now turn our attention to the text or indeed the oral performance itself, and the particular claims made within it. What role does quotation play within an argument? Why the need to bolster claims with early precedents and parallels?

Three functions of quotations within texts and arguments are worthy of particular mention: they provide a basis of authority: they stimulate and amplify the text; and they also fulfill an aesthetic and ornamental role.

Authority, Testimony, Proof

Aristotle regarded the citation of sources as one of a number of rhetorical techniques at the disposal of the orator who is arguing a case. He described these sources as “witnesses,” parallel to the live witnesses which one might call to substantiate one’s case in a legal action. The ancient witnesses are more trustworthy than contemporaries, “because they cannot be corrupted.”⁶⁶ Following this approach, some see citation in its original form as a juridical procedure designed to assure the fidelity of testimony.⁶⁷ While this appeal to authority has been derided as “a device for ducking independent thought,”⁶⁸ Jewish tradition in its various manifestations has been far more generous in its appraisal of this function.

In Halakhic discourse, sources are cited to bolster claims and judgments. In legal literature from the time of Sages we are witness to what David Weiss Halivni (1986:4) has called “the Jewish predilection for justified or vindictory law.” Rabbinic assumptions about the validity of cited prooftexts may be adduced from the prevalence of an expression which can be translated as meaning “although there is no absolute proof, there is a suggestion for this.” The phrase is found in some sixty sources attributed to the Tannaitic period, so it occupies a significant place in an early stratum of Rabbinic literature. The phrase is employed when verses from a non-Pentateuchal book of the Bible or from a narrative section of the Pentateuch are brought to provide authority on a point of Halakhah.⁶⁹

Use of this term, at least in the School of Rabbi Ishmael, implies a certain set of assumptions about the basis of authority of Halakhic arguments and claims. Ideally, any such claims should be supported by a canonical verse. To quote such a source is to demonstrate this authority. If a text cannot be adduced for purposes of testimony and proof, then at least a “suggestion” should be found, indicating the correspondence between the current issue at hand and the sources of tradition.

As the literature of the Halakhah develops, the marshaling of sources on either side of a debate becomes the accepted means of conducting and controlling the argument. One contemporary example from the Sea of Halakhah may help illustrate this point. In a 1989

⁶⁶ See Aristotle, *Rhetoric* I.xv.13, and II.xx.9. Aristotle’s conception of cited texts as “witnesses” is discussed by Ricoeur (1980).

⁶⁷ Schapira 1997:108. On quotation and validity, see Hirsch 1967:169-73. Jacobson (2004, especially 7) takes issue with the applicability of this courtroom model as understood by Morawski (1970).

⁶⁸ See Morawski 1970:693.

⁶⁹ See Rosen-Zvi 2009; Chernick 2009:33-68.

responsum from his collection *Tzitz Eliezer* (Section 18, clause 39), Rabbi Eliezer Judah Waldenburg alludes to the question of sleeping lightly while wearing phylacteries. As is the case with *responsa* for more than a millennium, Waldenburg quotes or makes reference to a large array of sources ranged on either side of the debate, and he concludes with a witticism: he who dozes (while wearing phylacteries) has mighty pillars on which to lean. The opinions he quotes and cites act as authorities, and their support is palpable enough to allow a tired person to lean upon them.

It is not only in Halakhah that we find expert witnesses summoned. In classic works of Jewish philosophy, one often finds a tension between the appeal to reason on the one hand and on the other a tendency to ground assertions in textual precedent. The case of Saadiah's *Book of Beliefs and Opinions* provides a signal example of this tension. Saadiah presents arguments which are accompanied and bolstered by verses from the Bible. The Hebreo-Arabic term כּמָא קָאֵל as it is written, is often used to introduce the verse, implying a correlation between the philosophical ideas being promoted and the core texts of the tradition.

In all aspects of the Jewish literary tradition, legal or otherwise, in which the impact of Rabbinic literature has been felt, sources are quoted in order to provide an argument with heft and authority. It is worth heeding Walzer's (1968:1) reminder that "arguments from authoritative texts are not necessarily less controversial or erratic than the speculations of men who admit no authorities whatsoever." Nevertheless, most forms of Jewish expression through the ages have looked to canonical sources to provide proof of authority.

To illustrate this point, I will bring one example from a source whose provenance is much in doubt. Louis Ginzberg (1960:227) published a midrashic tradition found in a Yemenite liturgical work. In this tale, Samael comes to earth accompanied by a being in the form of a child. In the gruesome tale which unfolds, and which unsurprisingly did not become a staple of Jewish folklore, Adam and Eve end up eating this child, and then denying any knowledge of its whereabouts. Samael reproves Adam and Eve and constructs an argument designed to shame them into a confession. He says to them: you are lying, and in the future God will give the Torah to Israel, and in that Torah falsehood will be outlawed. He cites Exodus 23.7 explicitly. Here the devil not only quotes Scripture, but he does so retroactively and in the best tradition of legal argumentation.

In the case of modern Jewish thought from the German- and English-speaking traditions, the bolstering of argumentation with Jewish sources is more sporadic. Seminal works by Martin Buber (Buber 1958) and Mordechai Kaplan (Kaplan 1994) are remarkable for the extent to which they eschew the traditional Jewish art of quotation in the construction of their arguments. *I and Thou* is notable for its apodictic style. The claims of the work are made without recourse to the buttresses of tradition. *Judaism as a Civilization* does quote traditional Jewish sources: the Babylonian Talmud is cited over 20 times, and Rabbinic literature in general appears on more than 60 occasions. Rarely if ever, however, do we find Kaplan employing these sources to do anything other than exemplify one of his claims. Jewish sources do not underpin *I and Thou* or *Judaism as a Civilization*, and this absence may present as much of an obstacle to their acceptance into a broad Jewish discourse as the theological thrust of the works themselves.

It may be informative to contrast these works with Hermann Cohen's *Religion of Reason: Out of the Sources of Judaism* (1972), the very title of which implies that its arguments will be

hewed from the quarries of Jewish tradition, and Franz Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption* (1985). In these cases we find many of the key claims of the works surrounded and supported by an array of quoted and cited sources. In the closing sentences from the Introduction to the *Star*, allusions from liturgy and Scripture are sewn into the argumentation (Rosenzweig 1985:111):

. . . revelation is at all times new only because it is primordially old. It makes the primeval creation over into an ever newly created present, because that primeval creation is nothing less than the sealed prophecy that God "renews day by day the work of creation." . . . But the divine word is more than symbol: it is revelation only because it is at the same time the word of creation. "God said, Let there be light"—and what is the light of God? It is the soul of man.

Hermann Cohen's approach to quotation has been discussed with great acuity by Almut Bruckstein. She sees the art of citation as operating simultaneously in the past, the present, and the future. First, "[b]y being cited at the decisive moment in time at which reasoning reaches its impasse . . . the text has become the original warrant for the priority of ethics over ontology."⁷⁰ Second, it is not ancient monuments which are being respected in the moment of citation, but rather the continued validity of timeless ideals. And thirdly, most paradoxically, she suggests that the true reading of the text is to be found in the future. In modern Jewish thought the authority of the quoted source becomes a fluid commodity.

Stimulation and Amplification

The literature of Midrash is replete with bold statements, the proof of which is offered in the form of quoted sources. The following example from Leviticus Rabbah (1.14) is one of thousands, and it affords an opportunity to consider the ways in which quoted sources act not only as authorities but also as prompts and stimuli:

What difference is there between Moses and all other prophets? R. Judah b. Il'ai and the Rabbis [gave different explanations]. R. Judah said: Through nine *specularia* did the prophets behold [prophetic visions]. This is indicated by what is said, *And the appearance of the vision which I saw, was like the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city; and the visions were like the vision that I saw by the River Chebar; and I fell upon my face* (Ezek. 33.3); but Moses beheld [prophetic visions] through one *specularium*, as it is said, *With him do I speak . . . in a vision and not in dark speeches* (Numbers 12.8). The Rabbis said: All the other prophets beheld [prophetic visions] through a blurred *specularium*, as it is said, *And I have multiplied visions; and by the ministry of the angels have I used similitudes* (Hosea 12.11). But Moses beheld [prophetic visions] through a polished *specularium*, as it is said, *The similitude of the Lord doth he behold* (Numbers 12.8).

⁷⁰ See Bruckstein 2004:xxxv. For an extensive study of Rosenzweig's hermeneutic of citation, and of the role of quotation in modern Judaism, see Sax 2008.

Rabbi Judah and the Rabbis have distinct speculations concerning the difference between Moses and the other prophets. The verses they adduce in order to support their positions may not provide proof for such speculations, but they do serve as more than an appended afterthought: the nine versions of the verbal root *r-a-h* implying vision in the verse from Ezekiel are the basis for the assertion that the prophets saw through nine *specularia*.

The verse adduced by Rabbi Judah, and by extension many quoted sources throughout Jewish culture, are not only pillars upon which an argument leans. Such verses are also often employed as foundations for literary creativity and spiritual insight. In his taxonomy of functions of quotation, Morawski describes this as the stimulatory-amplificatory function. In his view quotation acts as (1970:694) “a kind of ‘surgical appliance’ doing duty for a part of his own argument, or as a springboard for speculations”

An outstanding example of the application of this stimulatory-amplificatory function in Jewish literature is to be found in the tradition known as *Shibutz*.⁷¹ Biblical verses are sewn into the text of the poem and come to serve a variety of functions. In point of fact the lines of distinction between the decorative and the generative aspects of quotation are blurred in the extreme. Just as a quotation beautifies, it also amplifies. The sources become the basis for almost unbridled creativity, and, at its apogee, the art of applying these verses blurs the distinction between the extrinsic and the intrinsic, much like the Bialik’s assessment of Krochmal, cited above.

Ornament

An example of the ornamental use to which quotation is put in Jewish sources through the ages can be found in the authors’ introductions to philosophical and ethical works throughout the Middle Ages. Bahya ibn Pakuda’s *Duties of the Heart*, *Sefer Ha-Hinukh*, Joseph Albo’s *Sefer Ha-Ikkarim*, Isaac ben Moses Arama’s *Akedat Yitzhak* (which span a period from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries) and a host of other works all conclude the introduction with one or more verses. Arama signs his name with verses, another ornamental flourish to be found in several works of the Middle Ages.

We may also note here the tendency to close a stanza, a section, a sermon or a poem with a quoted verse. Adherence to this structural convention can show virtuosity; it is stimulatory and amplificatory, opening up new possibilities of interpretation. Further, it adds beauty.⁷² The intensive use of quotation at the end of a section is certainly well known in early Rabbinic literature. The last Mishnah of Tractate Berakhot ends with the quotation of a number of Biblical verses:

. . . it was ordained that a man should salute his fellow man by using the Divine Name. For it says, “And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and he said to the reapers ‘may God be with you,’” and they said to him, “and may God bless you.” (Ruth 2.4) And it says, “The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor.” (Judges 6.12) And it says, “Do not despise your mother when she is

⁷¹ For one example in a host of possibilities, see ibn Gabirol’s *Aromimkha Hizki veHelki*.

⁷² See Bergman 1992.

old.” (Proverbs 23.22) And it says: “It is time to work for the Lord, your Torah has been made void.” (Psalms 119.126) Rabbi Nathan says: Your Torah has been made void, [so] it is time to act for the Lord.

A number of verses are strung together with the term *ve-omer* (“it says”).⁷³ This is a particularly ambivalent phrase, since by its use the distinctions between literacy and orality are blurred. The text speaks.⁷⁴ It is especially telling that the same term is used to quote the teaching of Rabbi Nathan, which is nothing more than an inverted quotation of the verse from Psalms.

To illustrate the particular role played by quoted sources at the end of sections, and to exemplify the blurring of the authoritative, generative and ornamental roles of quotation, Emil Fackenheim’s *To Mend the World* is worthy of consideration. Fackenheim concludes the introduction to that work by noting that the wish to “announce a new day while there is still night” necessarily makes theology written in the immediate aftermath of tragedy “both fragmentary and uncertain.” He concludes his introduction thus (1982:30):

In my earlier *Preface to Future Jewish Thought* I cited Rabbi Tarfon, to the effect that the day is short, the work is great, the laborers sluggish, the wages high, and the Householder urgent. Now, almost a decade later, another saying of the same rabbi seemed even more fitting for Jewish thought in our time:

לא עליך המלאכה לגמר
ולא אתה בן חורין להבטל ממנה

It is not incumbent on you to complete the work. But you are not free to evade it.

No other Hebrew work is cited in Hebrew in the body of the text of *To Mend The World*. Fackenheim turns to it in order to provide a resonant conclusion to the book’s introduction.

The work’s conclusion provides another example of this quotational style, and another example of Fackenheim’s self-consciousness about the way he quotes sources. The closing thought is that the Jews are indispensable to the world, and to God. Two midrashim are cited in furtherance of this idea, the second of which is based on the phrase from Isaiah 43, “You are my witnesses, says the Lord.” With considerable theological daring, a midrash reads the verse thus:

. . . if you are My witnesses, I am God, and if you are not My witnesses, I am, as it were, not God.⁷⁵

⁷³ The term is employed in the Mekhilta and the Shiur Komah literature, to name but two examples. Of the nine scriptural passages quoted in the entire tractate, five are to be found in this one Mishnah. Houtman (1996:89) describes this Mishnah as “difficult to understand.”

⁷⁴ See Alexander 2007. I am grateful to my colleague David Levine for bringing this essay to my attention, and for several fruitful discussions on themes related to this chapter.

⁷⁵ Fackenheim mistakenly attributes this teaching to the Midrash on Psalms. It can be found in Pesikta de Rav Kahana 12.6.

In a footnote to this Rabbinic teaching, Fackenheim comments that “I first cited this Midrash nearly thirty years ago [see *Quest*, 39]. The careful reader will notice that its significance has changed for me in these many years—with an immense burden now falling on the “as it were.”⁷⁶ So ends one of the most significant works of Jewish thought of the twentieth century—a (wrongly attributed) source followed by a reflection on the ways in which the author’s way of quoting the source have changed since its appearance in an earlier work (Fackenheim 1968:39).

One more example of quotation at the end of a chapter or section deserves mention, particularly in the pages of *Oral Tradition*. BT Temurah 14b cites Psalm 119.126 in order to overrule the ban on committing the words of the Oral Torah to writing. The nineteenth-century Ḥasidic sage Menahem Mendl of Kotzk commented that one flimsy verse was not sufficient to overturn the prohibition on writing down the Oral Law. Instead, he commented, in truth the Oral Torah was never written down.⁷⁷

The twentieth-century Jewish thinker Abraham Joshua Heschel was very taken with this teaching, and quoted it at least three times in his writings. One of them comes at the end at a crucial section of what is arguably Heschel’s most significant theological work, *God In Search of Man*. The second of that book’s three parts is devoted to Revelation, and its very last subsection pulls away from an intense discussion of the unique significance of the Biblical text. Heschel (1955:276) chooses to end the chapter, and indeed the heart of the book, by offering a paraphrase of the Ḥasidic teaching. It is intended to resonate in the ears of his listeners:

Rabbi Mendel of Kotsk asked: How could the ancient Rabbis abolish the fundamental principle of Judaism, not to write down what is kept as an oral tradition, on the basis of a single verse in the book of Psalms? The truth is that the oral Torah was never written down. The meaning of the Torah has never been contained by books.

These examples are intended to highlight three key functions of quotation across genres and eras. In sermons, *respona*, mystical speculations and philosophical investigations, in books and essays, quotations testify, amplify, and beautify. Our attention turns now from the functions—authoritative, generative, decorative—played by quotations within the fabric of a Jewish text, to the role they play within communities.

Quotation Within Communities: Citation and Recitation

Ruth Finnegan (2011:57) quotes an anonymous interviewee as saying: “The whole point of using quotations is surely that the listener will understand the reference; it’s a way of using shorthand, of bonding speaker and listener closer together.” In the act of quotation lines of demarcation are established. Quotation defines a community which transcends geography and

⁷⁶ Fackenheim 1982:331. For a discussion of this and other examples of the quotation of this tradition in the literature of modern Jewish thought, see Marmur 2012.

⁷⁷ This teaching can be found, for example, in *Emet MiKotzk Tizmah* (Bnei Brak, 1961):99, section 321.

history. To be a part of the community means, first of all, to be capable of identifying and understanding the material being quoted. Next comes the ability to quote successfully within the norms and conventions of the community. At the pinnacle of achievement one's own words are quoted, and themselves become part of this unfolding tradition.

The synagogue has been a central venue for Jewish communal life, which makes the great prevalence of quotation within Jewish liturgy particularly significant. Citation and recitation are intimately linked. The reading of the *Shema* is given theological significance as the acceptance of the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven, yet the act itself is one of mindful recitation of a number of Biblical verses. The *Shema* is the original example of a verse uttered "when you lie down and when you rise up." Each day is ended and begun with the recitation of verses.⁷⁸

Jewish prayer involves community maintenance through quotation. Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 4.6 relates to the Additional Service for the New Year:

One should not recite less than ten verses relating to sovereignty, ten relating to memory, and ten to the Shofar. Rabbi Johanan ben Nuri says: he who recites three of each has fulfilled the requirement. One should mention neither the memory of power nor the shofar of disaster. One should begin by quoting from the Torah and conclude with a prophet. Rabbi Jose says: he who concludes with a verse from the Torah has also fulfilled the requirement.

The entire liturgical unit known as *Malkhuyot*, *Zikhronot* and *Shofarot* comprise verses. It appears from the Mishnah here, which does not cite examples of the verses to be read, that broad guidelines were being established rather than a fixed litany. In this sense the phenomenon is distinct from the ritualized recitation from Deuteronomy 26, or for that matter the *Shema*. Here, the worshipper is enjoined to select verses which show a link with the theological themes ordained for that particular prayer, and is encouraged to quote a number of them, presumably for the sake of raising consciousness of these themes at this special time.⁷⁹ Citation becomes recitation.

This phenomenon, described as "collation of Biblical verses," appears in Richard Sarason's comprehensive introduction to the appearance of Midrash in liturgy. The range and intensity of citation of Biblical and other canonical literature within the corpus of Jewish liturgy is amply demonstrated in that survey, which concludes with the observation that "'praying with Scripture' in the synagogue is absolutely continuous with 'writing/discoursing with Scripture' in the study house."⁸⁰

Prayer formulae from every generation are included in Jewish liturgies, and the worshipper negotiates these sources. The Rabbinic injunction to make one's prayers flow on

⁷⁸ See Marx 2010:23-90.

⁷⁹ See Newman 2006. For a particularly insightful discussion of the Bible in Rabbinic liturgy, see Naeh 2006.

⁸⁰ Sarason 2005:478 and 492.

one's lips can be seen as an expression of the highest level of membership in this community of quotation.⁸¹

The communal dimension of quotation is not only expressed in prayer. When a Jew quotes, he or she also teaches. David Carr (2010:17) has argued brilliantly that "the main point of the textual production and reception process in the educational/enculturational context was . . . to 'incise' such texts word for word on the minds of the next generation." Hence the Biblical injunction (Deuteronomy 6.7) to impress these words on one's children. Constant quotation is in one sense a fulfillment of this commandment.

The Jewish art of quotation both relies on and contributes to an educational process. In the twelfth century we find Abraham ibn Ezra excoriating sages whose grasp of the Bible is deficient (presumably because of the primacy of Talmud learning in some circles). He argues (ibn Ezra 2002:74-75) that a person schooled in Rabbinic lore who has not learned Bible will not know how to read the verses quoted with such formulae as "as it is written" throughout the literature of the Rabbis.

A story recounted by a contemporary sociologist illustrates that the ability to quote has been seen as an educational desideratum. This researcher was interested in interviewing an Ultra-Orthodox Jew. After some conversation an agreement was struck: the interviewee would avoid the risk of *bittul torah* (wasting time which could be spent in Torah study) by agreeing to answer every question with a Biblical quotation. Quotation acts here as a form of demarcation between inner and outer reaches of a community. By answering mundane questions with sacred verses, boundaries are strengthened and distinctions maintained.

If Jewish quotational practices have depended on the existence of a wide audience capable of identifying quoted sources, they have also relied on the fact that the resonance of these quotations is not understood in the same way by all. Jewish manifestations of "persecution and the art of writing" (to use a term coined by Leo Strauss) have taken advantage of this fact, citing verses and teachings in such a way that initiates will understand their profound meaning without undermining the more naïve faith of the masses.

In BT Berakhot 8a we are told of the custom of the Jews of the Land of Israel to ask a newlywed husband the question: "found" or "finds"? Without an understanding of the context of these two words, it is impossible to know the true import of this question. In point of fact, two verses from Scripture are being referenced. The first (Proverbs 18.22) expresses a highly positive view of women, while the second (Ecclesiastes 7.26) finds woman to be more bitter than death. By making reference to these verses, the men of the Land of Israel make of quotation a private language, a shorthand of euphemism.

New referential devices developed in the course of Jewish history create new possibilities of concealment and hinting. By referring the reader to another source without quoting it directly, new layers of contact between author and audience are added. Only a select few will have access via memory or bibliography to the sources. And only an elite will be able to understand the nuance of the way in which a particular tradition is mentioned. A brilliant study of the rise of the footnote in the European academic tradition provides an example of a comparable phenomenon: Anthony Grafton (1977:8) notes that the reference cf. in an historical footnote "indicates, at least

⁸¹ See Naeh 1994.

to the expert reader, both that an alternate view appears in the cited work and that it is wrong.” Notes, allusions, and references add new dimensions, and new possibilities for the expression of ambiguity.

Quotation and Incantation

The recitation of verses and other canonical Jewish sources can be understood as being directed to the farthest reaches of the cosmos. The performance of excerpts taken from the tradition has been understood as offering protection and effecting change. Thus in one sense a Jew quotes in order that the words uttered intervene in the order of things. One list of the Jewish magical uses of Bible verses includes functions as diverse as driving off demons and evil spirits, curing sterility, causing an enemy to drown, and causing a man who has sworn falsely to die within a year.⁸²

The act of creation is described in the Book of Genesis as an act of speech. The notion that the utterance of words has the potential to impact the workings of the universe is in this sense a foundational notion in Jewish culture. Recitation of sections of the Bible and the liturgy has been seen as exerting influence on the person reciting and beyond. To cite two examples among many, two different verses in Genesis 49 found their way into Jewish folklore with prophylactic or apotropaic functions. While 49.22 is still used in some circles to ward off the evil eye, 49.18 was deployed as a response to hearing someone sneeze.⁸³

Examples of deployment of written or spoken excerpts from the Bible and other canonical texts for the purpose of exerting a degree of influence on one’s environment are plentiful, and perhaps the Book of Psalms provides an outstanding example of this phenomenon. Jeremy Smoak (2012:235) has suggested that certain psalms “contain vestiges of incantations that were recited orally and in certain cases scratched upon metal and worn around the neck for protection.”

Contemporary practices related to the recitation of Psalms demonstrate that this kind of activity is not limited to circles of mystic adherents, but rather has seeped into common practices in many communities.⁸⁴ On any public bus in the Jewish parts of Jerusalem today (if a non-empirical source of evidence be allowed), someone is reciting Psalms, perhaps both as a way of transforming mundanity into meaning, and in order to provide an extra layer of protection.

I mentioned above the recitation of verses and other canonical material every night and every morning. This quotidian ritual finds its echo at the end of life itself: a compendium of psalms and verses to be recited by others in a person’s final stages of life appears in the seventeenth century.⁸⁵ Isaiah Horowitz (1565-1630) explains that the recitation of these verses

⁸² Trachtenberg 1939:110-11. See also Bohak 2008:308-14.

⁸³ The connection between Genesis 49.22 and the evil eye is connected to a reading by Rashi of that verse, while the custom of reciting Genesis 49.18 after a person has sneezed is mentioned in Mishnah Berurah, 230.7.

⁸⁴ For an excellent discussion of the role of Psalms in various aspects of Jewish culture, see Hoffman 2003.

⁸⁵ See Isaiah Horowitz 1993:120-22. I am grateful to Dalia Marx for pointing me to Aharon Berachia ben Moshe’s *Ma’avar Yabok*, published in Mantua in 1626.

and the use of the Hebrew language creates a level of sanctity appropriate to the hour of death.⁸⁶ The funeral service itself consists in large measure of the recitation of Biblical and Rabbinic sources.

Quotation as Rhapsody

I have attempted to set out at least some of the major functions of quotation as they come to expression in Jewish culture. To quote as a Jew is to place oneself within a web of traditions, and to resuscitate past traditions. The way in which one quotes establishes one's own standing and integrity. Within a text, quotations provide authority to the claims, stimulation and amplification to the ideas, and beauty to the work. Quotations fulfill an educational function, and they provide a means by which complex or controversial ideas can be communicated to some while being concealed from others. As acts of performance, quotations bolster the life of the community, and have been believed to effect cosmic change. Quotation speaks from "anteriority," reaches out to posterity, and brushes shoulders with eternity.

To return to the warp and woof mentioned by Emerson at the start of this essay, I might suggest that the act of quotation is rhapsodic in the original sense of that term. A rhapsodist sews song, creating poetry from patchwork. As Finnegan states (2011:183): "However it is defined, quotation in one or another of its many transformations weaves through the literary arts and rites of humankind, as creators and hearers evoke and play upon the words and voices of others." The garment resulting from the Jewish art of quotation is like the priestly robe described in Exodus 28:32:

וְהָיָה כִּי יֵאָשׁוּ בְּתוֹכּוֹ שְׂפָה יִהְיֶה לְפִיו סָבִיב מֵעֲשֵׂה אֶרֶג כָּפִי תִּחְרָא יִהְיֶה לוֹ לֹא יִקְרַע

The opening for the head shall be in the middle of it; the opening shall have a binding of work round about it—it shall be like the opening of a coat of mail—so that it does not tear.⁸⁷

In this act of interlacing traditions and inserting teachings, Jews span the generations and form a multi-generational community. Woven together in a unique way, the strands of tradition are used to create a new song, with a binding of work round about it that does not—that may not—tear.

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⁸⁶ It is worth bringing to mind the example of a recently deceased scholar who asked friends to read Bible passages in their original language to him on the telephone during his final hours.

⁸⁷ The Hebrew of this verse includes four references to mouth and tongue, and the interpretative possibilities of that ambiguity were explored by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apt (1748-1825). See Heschel 1863:102-03.

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