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Hebrew Usage, Transmission, and Reform Hebrew Education

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This Thesis is Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Master of Arts in Religious Education Degree

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Summary Page

Number of Sections: 8

The Contribution of this thesis:
It is my hope that this thesis will make a contribution to the area of Hebrew education in Reform supplementary schools. Most Reform Jewish children receive their Jewish education in these settings. The history of how Hebrew has been used and transmitted over the centuries reveals that the challenges that plague these schools are in fact a culmination of past trends throughout the Jewish world and specifically within the Reform movement. This thesis will lay a foundation for a better understanding of the status of Hebrew education in supplementary schools.

The Goal of this Thesis:
The overall goal of this thesis is to help prepare supplementary schools in the Reform movement to develop an effective approach for teaching Hebrew. This thesis will provide background material to assist in this.

Thesis Divisions:

Materials Used

The materials used for this thesis include a number of secondary sources, some primary sources, as well an interview and numerous phone conversations with rabbis and educators within the Reform movement.

Hebrew Usage, Transmission, and Reform Hebrew Education

I. Introduction

There is wide spread concern among Jewish Educators over the status of Hebrew instruction in supplementary schools. As the principal of a supplementary school, I can attest to the frustrations expressed by my colleagues and teachers related to the challenges of teaching Hebrew in these settings. Yet at education conferences throughout North America, effective Hebrew education is rarely a major focus. This neglect is also true in professional journals, because "few serious attempts are being made to explore important questions regarding Hebrew language education" (Dori, 1992, p. 261). One of those 'important questions' concerns understanding and providing the most effective methods and materials of teaching Hebrew. Another is implementing accurate evaluation of Hebrew competency levels of students in a given school. This avoidance of addressing important Hebrew curricula challenges is especially true within the supplementary schools of the Reform movement in North America. The many factors that explain this phenomenon span historical, ideological, sociological, and linguistic arenas.

Some of the historical factors that contribute to the present state of Reform Hebrew instruction are connected with how Hebrew has been used and transmitted. For example, Hebrew has mostly been used for study and prayer, and not as a spoken language. In many ways, it is miraculous that Hebrew persisted at all, considering that, for thousands of years, it was an unspoken language (Chomsky, 1957, pp. 2-3).

Ideologically, the Reform movement has had a number of debates regarding Hebrew. In Europe, and later in America, the validity of Hebrew usage in Reform movement worship services was under discussion. Many Reform thinkers debated the fate of Hebrew in general. Consequently, the prayer books and worship service that appeared in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had less Hebrew text. In some cases, the content itself was altered in order to express new Reform ideological principles.

Another factor that influenced Hebrew transmission and instruction was the structure of supplementary schools. Historically, most of these schools met only once or twice a week which rarely provided the student with enough learning opportunities to successfully acquire Hebrew. In addition, supplementary school schedules were interrupted by Jewish and secular holidays, school vacations, and other interruptions (e.g., assemblies) that further complicated the existing time challenges. In addition, Hebrew has never been a high priority within the overall curriculum of Reform supplementary schools. Most schools have opted more for subjects like History, Bible, and Life Cycle Events -- all subjects that can be taught in English.

A related factor is the educational approach. Most supplementary schools have focused on teaching the mechanics of the language (decoding) for prayer purposes without teaching the meaning of the text. This can negatively influence the motivation to learn. Today, many Jews cannot even decode the Hebrew alphabet much less ascribe meaning to various words and this is, in part, because of the absence of a motivational approach. As a Jewish educator, I am not surprised by a student who cannot decode Hebrew accurately.

Sociological factors have influenced Hebrew education as well. In Israel, for example, Hebrew became the vernacular for most of its residents, thus making the transmission of the language more natural. The effects of Zionism also influenced the schools in America. For example, following the Balfour Declaration in 1917, which called for the British support of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, some Reform Sunday schools considered adding an additional day of study to the school week. Theoretically, this opened up the option of increasing Hebrew education (Gamoran, 1923, p. 12). Modern Hebrew became more predominant in North America and even the small amount of Hebrew curriculum which was developed by the Reform movement later in the twentieth century, contained Zionistic value.

This thesis will show how these factors influenced Hebrew usage and transmission historically, and ultimately, how they influenced current Hebrew education within Reform supplementary schools. In addition, it will show how the controversies and debates surrounding Hebrew within the Reform movement contributed to the current challenges that exist in these schools with regard to Hebrew education. How did the status of Hebrew become so problematic that improving its education in these schools became necessary? Lastly, in order to get a more complete understanding of Hebrew education within a Reform context, this thesis will analyze the Hebrew curricula that was developed by the Reform movement.

II. Hebrew Usage Historically

Although Hebrew was always spoken among a few individuals, most Jews traditionally thought of Hebrew as a literary language, used only for prayer, writing or study. Some had very limited comprehension skills (Schiff, 1996, p.9). Prior to the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. and the exile to Babylonia, Hebrew was the vernacular among the Israelites (Schiff, 1996, p.8). Following the destruction, Hebrew was no longer the dominant language among the Israelites, thus presenting one of the first challenges to Hebrew usage and continuity (Saenz-Badillos, 1993, p. 166). From this historical event forward, Hebrew was primarily an unspoken language, confronted with influences from outside cultures.

Not only had Hebrew become a less dominant language after the Babylonian exile, there was also concern that Hebrew would be lost forever. Both Nehemiah and Ezra took it upon themselves to educate the Israelites in the laws of the Torah and, one would assume, Hebrew. Nehemiah found that, "[the Jews'] children spoke half in the tongue of Ashdod; they could not speak Hebrew, nor any foreign tongue" (Nehemiah, 13:24). The Israelites, followers of the Torah, were losing some of what defined them as a group: their own distinctive language.

From the return of the exiles (around 538 B.C.E.) until the beginning of Rabbinic Judaism in the first and second centuries C.E., Hebrew continued as a secondary language and was exposed to the influences of other cultures. Because of this exposure to other cultures, Hebrew "spent more than half its existence...adapting to a wide range of cultural

and linguistic environments" (Saenz-Badillos, 1993, p. 50). Evidence of these influences upon Hebrew are the frequent insertions of different dialects and various words not of Hebrew origin, that are used throughout the Hebrew Bible (Saenz-Badillos, 1993, p. 50). Both Jews and Hebrew were exposed to other peoples, cultures, and different languages throughout time. Because of this, Hebrew transmission needed to adapt.

With the imposition of additional linguistic and social variables, Hebrew adapted by becoming more literary. Many texts were written in Hebrew. In many ways, the experience of the Hebrew language is a metaphor for the overall experiences of the Jewish people. Both persisted and survived, but not without sacrifice. Both were confronted with challenges and threats to their existence, and both were forced to adapt.

In the first and second centuries, which mark the beginnings of the Rabbinic period, Hebrew once again became both spoken and literary. One reason for this is that the Pharisees and first century rabbis tended to teach their lessons in spoken Hebrew (Saenz-Badillos, 1993, p.166). Both the *Mishnah* and *Gemora*, among other texts, were a part of the great literary works written in this period. By the end of the second century C.E., Hebrew again ceased to be spoken among the early Rabbis and was again relegated mainly to literary use.

In the sixth and seventh centuries, Medieval Hebrew grew and developed because of "a movement toward the revitalization of Hebrew" (Saenz-Badillos, 1993, p. 202). This "revitalization" led to a large influx of written Hebrew texts, exegesis, prose, and poetry during the sixth through the thirteenth centuries C.E. Hebrew was also becoming

"revitalized" during this time period through the development of vocalization systems. This was done, in part, because of the fear that pronunciation of Biblical Hebrew was no longer accurate, due to the fact that Hebrew was unspoken for many centuries. Therefore, a group of Jews attempted to authenticate Biblical Hebrew by establishing vocalization vowels which standardized pronunciation. The current system that exists in most vocalized Hebrew texts today is from the Masoretic family of Ben Asher of Tiberias, who began developing their system in the sixth and seventh centuries (Saenz-Badillos, 1993, p. 76).

In fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (if not earlier) Polish shtetl life, there were some additional sociological factors that influenced Hebrew usage. Hebrew education, the study of Bible and Rabbinic texts, was limited to boys whose parents had the means to pay for it (Eliach, 1998, p. 159). This practice is verified by the twelfth century scholar, Moses Maimonides, who claimed in the Mishneh Torah, that slaves, women, and minors were excluded from Torah Study (Birnbaum, 1967, p. 23). The same limitations were true in the *Yeshivot*, the Jewish Academies where a young man would seek higher Torah education, in the hope of becoming a *Talmid Haham*, a learned student held in high esteem. As a consequence, a gap developed between those who knew Hebrew and those who did not. The rabbis in communities who knew Hebrew, would often study the texts and teach the Torah, its words, or some of its sacred messages to the populace in the vernacular. The majority were of the Jews did not know Hebrew.

The Enlightenment was another major variable that influenced Hebrew usage. Beginning in the sixteenth century, many Jews aspired to become citizens of countries in

Western Europe and later in Eastern Europe (Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, 1995, pp. 8-9). With these aspirations, the walls of the shtetls, which separated the Jews from the gentiles, became more invisible. The idea of interacting with the non-Jewish world was becoming increasingly prevalent among many "modern" Jews. Many Jews sought to change their political status and became citizens of their countries.

The Enlightenment introduced new ideas which greatly influenced how Hebrew was to be used. The shtetls, still present in Eastern Europe during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, began opening schools for boys *and* girls, disregarding the economic status of the family. Hebrew speaking clubs developed too, with the members proudly distinguishing themselves by wearing a ribbon (Eliach, 1998, pp. 518). However, despite the resurgence of interest and academic opportunities for all Jews in Hebrew, most Jews still did not know Hebrew.

Subsequent to this increase in Hebrew study, many Jews looked once again to Zion and to the age-old connection between the people and their land. Hence, in the nineteenth century, political Zionism, the push for a modern state in Palestine, was born. The idea of establishing a Jewish state greatly impacted how Hebrew was to be used.

The most significant impact was that ancient Hebrew was transformed into a vibrant spoken language for all types of expression. This sociological and linguistic phenomenon reintroduced Hebrew as the dominant vernacular for the first time in nearly two thousand years. Alongside the development of modern Hebrew and the growing pull to Zion in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Biblical, Rabbinic, and Medieval Hebrew continued

to be studied in many Jewish communities. At this time, a group in Jerusalem was created to help monitor the progress and development of the language. It was in 1890 that *Vaad ha-Lashon* (The Language Committee) was established, becoming the authoritative voice on Hebrew development (Chomsky, 1957, p. 238).

In the diaspora today, Hebrew remains unspoken and foreign to the majority of Jews. Most Jews can recite some simple Hebrew blessings with or without comprehension, but most cannot communicate in Hebrew. For some, Hebrew is considered a holy language, only used in the recitation of prayer or in text study. In most Jewish supplementary schools, and certainly all of them within Reform movement schools, the education is open to all Jews despite gender. Though these schools can be costly, most offer scholarships so that most students are able to attend if they so choose.

III. Hebrew Transmission Historically-Prior to the Nineteenth Century

Even though Hebrew existed mainly as an unspoken language among the minority who knew Hebrew, the language persevered, evolved, and even grew (Chomsky, 1957, pp. 2-3). This happened despite the limited exposure that most Jews had to the Hebrew language. How this transmission occurred historically, despite the many factors impeding Hebrew usage, provides understanding and appreciation for the resiliency of the language. We know that, in order to truly grasp the nuances of any language, especially a foreign language, that there must be exposure to the language (Crystal, 1997, 372). How did Hebrew transmission occur?

One way in which Hebrew was kept alive was through the precise copying of written

and vocalized Biblical text (Saenz-Badillos, 1993, p. 76-77). The *sopherim* (professional scribes) would copy and vocalize Hebrew text with extreme accuracy. These *sopherim,* who cherished Biblical text and its correct vocalization, placed much emphasis on the accuracy of every letter within the Biblical text. Mistakes made in transmission could have resulted in serious consequences, such as having to copy an entire page over again for one minor mistake (Chomsky, 1957, p. 143-144). In Biblical times, *sopherim* copied text, read it aloud and translated it to non-Hebrew literate Israelites. In the first century C.E., the *sopher* copied text and taught Biblical text in schools which became know as *Bet-HaSopher, or* house of the scribe (Ibid. 1957, p. 144).

It was a common practice within Jewish communities for rabbis or scribes to read the Biblical text and the Oral Torah publicly, which helped with Hebrew transmission. They would read the Hebrew text and then translate it for the masses in Aramaic or the dominant vernacular (Chomsky, 1957, p 159). This reading and translating custom, which is still practiced in many synagogues today, demonstrates the value ascribed to Hebrew. The need for translation also stresses the inaccessibility of Hebrew.

Midrashic techniques were also utilized in transmitting Torah and its ideas, as well as other Hebrew texts. For example, the *Petichta* was a technique that rabbis used to teach weekly Torah portions. The rabbis would purposely stray from the weekly portion by reciting loosely related Biblical citations, eventually returning to the pertinent weekly portion. The listeners were challenged to grasp the nuance of the Hebrew words in order to understand the intricate connections from Biblical citation to Biblical citation (Encyclopedia

Judaica, 1997, CD Rom.). This would teach the congregation some basic Hebrew words while continuing to keep the Torah at the center of the lesson.

Storytelling developed as an additional way to express ideas in Hebrew, and hence keep the language alive. Some stories were written in Hebrew while, in other stories, Hebrew phrases were included within the texts in Yiddish, Arabic, and Ladino, amongst other languages. For example, *"Shalom Aleichem"* (Hello or Peace to You) is a common Hebrew phrase that was woven into many stories. There were a number of stories produced in the Middle Ages: The Aleph Bet of Ben Sira in the eleventh century, Sefer Hayashar also from the eleventh century, and Mishlei Shualim of the thirteenth century (Schram, 1993, pp. xxix). The ideas in these stories expressed certain values of Jewish communities, Torah-based ideas, and more.

In addition to being conveyers of Hebrew language, stories played a major part in Jewish communal life. "In the Shtetls of Eastern Europe, stories were exchanged by rabbis and traveling messengers, by *badhanim* (storytellers and improvising rhymesters who performed at weddings and other festivities), and by the common folk" (Ibid, pp. xxix.). Storytelling reached a creative climax in eighteenth century Europe with the development of the Hasidic movement, under Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov (Ibid, pp. xxx.). It is important to note that the stories included Hebrew words in the text, thus promoting some level of Hebrew transmission, while the actual recitation provided joy and entertainment. This was likely to spur a positive attitude toward Hebrew which could fuel a motivation to learn Hebrew.

The practice of ascribing metaphors or values to Hebrew characters also helped the language grow and develop. In the Middle Ages, the thirteenth century book, The Zohar (The Book of Splendor), reflected a tendency to raise Hebrew to a level whereby each letter of the Torah was evaluated according to its hidden meaning (Crystal, 1997, pp. 59). The same was the case in the Kabbalah. *Gematria*, the practice of assigning numbers to Hebrew letters offered an additional way to show value to the Hebrew character. This practice can be traced to the early Christian era (Ibid, pp. 59).

Hebrew was also transmitted by those Jews who immersed themselves in text study and prayer for hours each day. This education was important and was practiced among many of the men who studied of the Eastern European shtetls. By becoming literate in Biblical and Rabbinic (prayer-book) Hebrew, they strengthened their connection to the language. One can see that, although Hebrew may not have been the primary spoken language, there were a number of ways in which the language was transmitted, developed, and kept alive in the consciousness of at least some parts of the Jewish people.

IV. Hebrew and General Education Historically

The most direct way of transmitting Hebrew historically was through Hebrew instruction, which was the practice in most Jewish communities. Though in Biblical times, there is no clear blueprint outlining specific Hebrew or general educational methods, there are some key verses that show what general education may have been like. For example, Deuteronomy 6:6-7 says, "And these words, which I command you this day, shall be in your heart; And you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you

sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up." Here, the idea of children being taught by those older than themselves is presented.

In Second Chronicles 17:9, the Levites, with the Torah in their hands, were said to have traveled "throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people." Here, the Levites are described as traveling teachers of the Torah for the Israelites. Ezra was known as a teacher to the Levites. With the Levites he "read in the book, in the Torah of God clearly, and gave the interpretation, so that they understood the reading" (Nehemiah, 8:8). Ezra publicly read the words of the Torah, interpreted its words, and helped the Levites interpret them to better understand its messages.

Another Biblical verse that refers to education is in the fourth book of the Maccabees (18:10), where a father is described as the teacher. His method is described as reading out loud, reminding the students of their studies, and singing. This is the description of a more complex instructional method which goes beyond a simple teacher and student dynamic. It suggests transmitting the materials to the student through multiple techniques.

Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) describes an organized system of instruction in the Mishneh Torah, which is an anthology of many Rabbinic writings. In his chapter on knowledge, Maimonides describes a "systematic provision for the education of the young [that] existed in Eretz Yisrael... for thousands of years" (Birnbaum, 1967, p. 24). In Part Two of his chapter on "Knowledge," Maimonides describes a structured system that appointed elementary school teachers for children beginning at age six. In addition, he says that the teacher/student ratio should be one teacher per every twenty-five students. For a

group of twenty-five to forty students, there should be two teachers. Maimonides says that the curricular focus for students should be on Bible and grammar, thereby making Hebrew an integral part of their education.

In addition to student/teacher ratios, Maimonides also described in Mishneh Torah, some components of the teacher-student and the student-student relationships. He wrote that "since the destruction of the Second Temple, it [had] been a general custom to teach the pupils as they [were] seated" (Birnbaum, 1967, p. 26-27). He expressed that the student should not feel ashamed if he knew less than his peers, nor should the teacher shame him for not grasping concepts immediately. Maimonides' compassionate system of education was to be open to all males, with the exception of slaves and minors. All else could attend school, no matter what one's ability was to pay the tuition. Sadly, this was not the case with most houses of study that existed in the European shtetls of the Middle Ages, as tuition costs did limit who could study.

The most common system of education in Eastern European shtetls during the Middle Ages was the *Heder* model (literally "room"), which targeted children beginning at six years old. The *Talmud Torah* was the other main system available to children for families who could not afford the tuition of the Heder (Encyclopedia Judaica, 1997, CD ROM). The *Heder* was, however the "most important of the institutions responsible for molding the boy in the image of the community and preparing him to take his place in it" (Eliach, 1998, p. 147). The teachers, *melamdim,* were always men who generally received no training in teaching. Though the *Heder* was a pillar institution in the shtetl community, the *melamed*

was not in a position of high status and was often fulfilled by an ex-Yeshiva student as a last resort for employment (Eliach, 1998, p. 149). The higher the educational stage, the higher the *melamdim's* salary was.

Prior to the sixteenth century, the *Heder* consisted of a room on the side of the synagogue, or general adult house of study (*Beit Midrash*). Eventually, it was relocated into the homes of the respected teachers, the *melamdim*. The *melamdim* generally had a small room within their home, right in the thick of their family life, where they would hold classes from early morning to early evening (Eliach, 1998, p. 149). This shift in settings was outlined in the Cracow Ordinance (1594 or 1595 C.E.) which was one of the first printed education documents.

The *Heder* education was structured in three stages: early childhood, middle, and advanced *Heder*. Certain rituals marked a pupil's advancement from one stage to the next. Most boys in the shtetl community attended at least the first stage of *Heder* education up until the age of nine. Then the percentages of attendance diminished, usually because of financial reasons.

The main curricular goal in stage one was teaching Aleph Bet Hebrew decoding skills. The method consisted of the repetition of deductive phonetic drills in letter and vowel combinations without emphasis on meaning. Recognizing the monotonous nature of this method, Avraham Hayim Schorr proposed more creative ways of teaching the Aleph Bet (Eliach, 1998, p. 155). An example of Shorr's creative contributions is the process of attaching visual reminders (mnemonic devices) to letters in order to help the students see

more than a mere letter. Once the child knew the names and sounds of the letters, he used his newly attained skills to read various words and sentences. This led to the recitation of certain blessings which could then be read, but not necessarily comprehended, by the students. Reciting Hebrew blessings was motivating for some children as it allowed the student to have a preview of the adult world of blessings and prayer (Ibid, p. 156).

In stage two, Middle *Heder*, the curriculum content included the study of the Pentateuch, Rashi Commentary, and other rabbinic commentaries on the written Torah. Grammar was taught along with Biblical text translation in the same common vernacular (Pilch, 1969, p. 29). The method of instruction was repetition drills that included the students' recitation of a section of the weekly Torah portion, the teacher's translation into the vernacular, followed by the repetition by the student. Hence, learning Hebrew language was done through auditory learning, visual learning (via reading), repetition, as well as testing (Eliach, 1998, p. 158).

The third stage, Advanced *Heder* focused on the teaching of *Gemara,* "the traditions, rulings, and discussions of the *Amoraim*, the Jewish scholars of the third to sixth centuries in *Eretz Yisrael* and Babylonia, who had composed the Talmud" (Eliach, 1998, p. 160). The same "repetition method," used in Stage Two continued into this third stage of *Heder* education. To test competence, the student, "was assigned a topic in the Talmud, which he was expected to prepare and present to the class as proof of his having mastered the necessary techniques of analysis" (Ibid. p. 161). By the end of *Heder*, a student was expected to be able to read, comprehend, and analyze Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew texts.

This was in preparation for *Yeshiva,* the next step on the education ladder. Students who could afford to attend *Yeshiva* were usually sixteen years old.

With the ideals of the Enlightenment being presented, the *Heder* began to change within some shtetls. The new *Heder* was relocated to its own school building, which, to some degree, resembled the modern twentieth school setting. In addition, the *Heder Metukan* (reconstructed/repaired) was developed, which also resembled the modern school physically, but differed from the earlier *Hadarim* in that they offered secular courses alongside Torah Education for both boys and girls (Eliach, 1998, p. 172). Also, the *Heder Metukan* offered teaching Hebrew in Hebrew which had not happened since the Pharisees taught the early Rabbinic teachings in Hebrew.

An additional education system available in late nineteenth early twentieth centuries was called *Tarbut.* These schools were Nationalistic (Zionist) in their orientation in that they introduced the concepts of agriculture and pioneering in relation to Palestine (Encyclopedia Judaica, 1997, CD ROM). Modern Hebrew education was a major component of these schools. Though not as prevalent as the *Heder* system, the *Tarbut* system, in 1918, had fifty schools in Poland and, by 1935, there were two hundred seventy school serving about thirty-eight thousand students.

The Enlightenment also influenced Hebrew education in Germany, the home of the Reform movement. The Enlightenment emphasized the improvement of humanity through reason and education and, in Germany, Jews were also presented with "social and educational advancement into German gentile society" (Ellenson, 1988, p. 11). Many Jews

took advantage of the opportunities that were presented during the Enlightenment which meant that more Jewish children were attending secular schools rather than Jewish schools. Jewish children in Germany were being removed from their Jewish culture and, by the mid-nineteenth century, "most German-Jewish children possessed virtually no knowledge of Hebrew, and in places where religious instruction was included as a part of the general curriculum...[Hebrew was] no more than four hours a week of classroom time" (Ibid, 1988, p. 12). In many ways, Germany was the perfect place for the Reform movement to be born, as Jews were allowed, if not encouraged, to explore being Jewish outside of the shtetl walls.

In conclusion, we see that education, and specifically Hebrew instruction, has been an integral part of Jewish life from at least the sixth century B.C.E. until the twentieth century for some of the Jewish people. Hebrew was taught mainly as a means to study Biblical and Rabbinic texts. Hebrew education was restricted to men and to the elite, with cost limiting children from continuing through the *Heder* system and advancing toward *Yeshiva* study. Prior to the Enlightenment, Hebrew education took place mainly through the *Heder* system which had gone virtually without change for centuries. With the shtetl walls becoming more and more invisible, especially in Germany, and Jews intermingling more with the secular world, there were questions regarding the validity of Hebrew usage in general. As we shall see, the developing Reform Movement was thrust right in the middle of this questioning.

V. The Reform Movement and the Hebrew Language.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, following the Enlightenment, there were a number of Jewish thinkers who sought to live in the secular world. These thinkers became the founders of Reform Judaism in Germany and later, in America. These early reformers viewed Hebrew differently than past Jewish thinkers. Although earlier thinkers saw Hebrew as necessary for study and prayer, these new individuals began to question Hebrew's usage and validity. Thus, there was an additional variable that impacted the transmission, usage, and ultimately the education of Hebrew.

In the nineteenth century, the first rabbinical gatherings clearly expressed these sentiments in the Reform platforms. This eventually led to limiting the use of Hebrew in worship services as well as altering the content of the prayer book in order to reflect ideological concerns. This section will focus on the Reform experience with Hebrew in nineteenth century Germany, and nineteenth and twentieth century America.

A. The Reform Movement and Hebrew: Nineteenth Century Germany

The Jewish people's growing ignorance of Hebrew was one reason that the language was problematic for many of the early reformers. The early reformers (that is, those who founded the Reform movement) believed that exposing Jewish congregants to hear the uncomprehended Hebrew language was, in fact, contributing to their assimilation by excluding them (Midlarsky and Chargo, 1998, p. 2). Many Jews had rejected traditional Jewish *Halachik* practices in nineteenth century Germany and had achieved a great deal of success as secular citizens. Hebrew had become more removed from the lives of Jews,

especially since prayer and Hebrew text study had become less important for many secular Jews (Ellenson, 1988, p. 12). Jews questioned the validity of Hebrew usage as it was not relevant in their lives

In Hamburg, Germany, in 1817, the "New Israelitish Temple Association" was founded on principles which served as powerful antecedents to the emerging Reform movement. According to the "Association," unfamiliarity with Hebrew directly led to the Jews not attending worship services. An excerpt from its constitution best expressed their concerns regarding Hebrew usage: "Hebrew for public worship has for some time been neglected by so many, because of the ever decreasing knowledge of the language in which alone it [had] until now been conducted" (Plaut, 1963., p. 31).

Hebrew expression in worship services was changing in some synagogues as prayers were reduced in size. Through the government sponsored consistory, Israel Jacobson (1768-1828), often referred to as the "founder of Reform Judaism," introduced some of the first prayer reforms in Seesen, which was located in the Kingdom of Westphalia (Meyer, 1988, p. 30). Although Jacobson didn't change Hebrew language content, the amount of Hebrew used in the consistory worship service was reduced.

The liturgical reductions consisted of eliminating some *piyutim*, (medieval Hebrew poems), as they were deemed superfluous. Since most congregants didn't understand the words anyway, the repetition of ideas through Hebrew poems was deemed unnecessary. The consistory also made prayer uniform, adding regulations that contributed to the overall decorum of the worship service. Though Hebrew was reduced, the Hebrew that did remain

in the standard prayers was unaltered in content. The only prayer which was required to be read in the vernacular was the prayer for the king (Meyer, 1998, p. 36).

Abraham Geiger (1810-1874), living in Germany, contributed to many of the lasting principles of Reform religious practice and liturgy (Meyer, 1974, p. 3). Geiger published two Reform prayer books in Germany that reflected his belief in altering Hebrew texts. His first *siddur*, Israelitisches Gebetbuch (1854), served as the prime example for people who thought his changes too radical, in both Europe and America (Petuchowski, 1974, p. 42-3). Geiger justified his right to change text in prayer by citing Babylonian *Geonim* who saw standardizing prayers as God's task alone (Ibid, p. 47).

The alterations that Geiger made reflected some of his developing ideals. He no longer referred to the Jews as "*Am Yisrael* (the Nation or People of Israel)"; rather they were a "community of faith" (Ibid, p. 44). This reflected a more universal view of the Jewish people. He felt that Hebrew had no relevance in the lives of Jews because there was no Jewish nation. Similarly, he was also against the use of the *Tal* and *Geshem* (Dew and Rain) prayer supplements, which he felt reflected irrelevant Palestinian and Babylonian agricultural needs. In addition, he believed that Hebrew was no longer a living language and that its presence in the worship service was unnecessary. Finally, Geiger's views about Jerusalem and how it was to be reflected in his *siddur* were quite radical. Namely, Jerusalem was not to be a symbol for Messianic hope. Rather, "Jerusalem remains for us the holy source whence, in the past, sprang the teaching of truth....The present heap of ruins, Jerusalem, is for us, at best, a poetic and melancholy memory, but no nourishment for the

spirit" (Ibid, p. 44). Geiger removed words from his prayer books that reflected Jerusalem as more than just a place from the past where ideas had been developed.

Still considering themselves within the historical trends of Judaism, reformers went to great lengths to defend their right to change Hebrew in the prayer service. Eliezer Liebermann was asked to prepare *Halachik* justification for the Hamburg Association's reforms. In the first collection of responsa entitled, Nogah Hazedek (The Light of Righteousness), four rabbis discussed their *Halachik* justification behind the reforms. In the second, Or Nogah (The Light of Splendor), Liebermann prepared his own response to the reforms being made in Hamburg. Both of these texts were published in 1818 (Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, 1995, pp. 157-58).

Aaron Chorin of Arad, Hungary, prepared one of the responsum published in Nogah Hazedek, which addressed the centrality of Hebrew in the prayer service. Chorin found many *halachik* justifications for these changes including Judah Hanasi's statement that the *Tefila* may be said in any language, and that the essence was to be able to understand one's supplications (Guttman, 1977, p. 189). Further, he quoted Magen Avraham who, in Orach Chayim, cited the Sefer Chasidim: "it is better for a man to pray and to recite the *Shema* and benedictions in a language he understands than to pray in Hebrew without understanding it" (Guttman, 1977, p. 191). He further commented that the Men of the Great Synagogue purposefully wrote The *Tefilah (Amida)* in simple Hebrew with the hope that people would learn it. The *Mishnah (Sotah* 7:1*)* establishes that The *Tefilah* may be said in any language and Maimonides (*Hilchot Berachot* 1: 6) agreed with this in saying that benedictions may

be said in any language as long as they are said according to the formula established by the sages. According to Chorin, these decrees could be taken literally and therefore, Hebrew prayer changes were permitted by the authorities (Guttman, 1977, p. 192).

Eliezer Liebermann, in Or Nagah, referred to many of the same sources as Chorin but added a more modern, sociological justification for reform in Hebrew prayer (Guttman, 1977, 202). Liebermann believed that gentiles observing a prayer service, would realize that the Jews had no comprehension of the Hebrew being recited, and would look upon them disapprovingly. Thus, instead of having a positive opinion of the Jews, they would say, "They are a misguided and confused people, an impetuous nation" (Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, 1995, p. 165). This statement also reflected the intense concern about the manner in which Jews intermingled with the non-Jewish world. The early reformers wanted to break down barriers that separated Jews from non-Jews. Hebrew, they believed, was such a barrier.

There was a strong reaction to these changes. The Hamburg Rabbinical Court prepared a response in 1819, entitled, "*Eleh Divrei Habrit*" (These Are the Words of the Covenant). As part of this compilation, Rabbi Moses Sefer prepared a response that included comments on prayer in the vernacular (Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, 1996, p. 158). He found it reprehensible that a prayer service would be conducted in a language other than Hebrew. He argued that people should learn the meaning of the prayers in Hebrew before saying them in another language, and that those who prayed in any language other than Hebrew were shirking their responsibilities to understand the text (Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, 1996, pp. 171-72).

This topic was debated among participants in the 1845 Rabbinical Conference in Frankfort. There, the "Reform" rabbis asserted that there was no objective necessity for praying in Hebrew. The Talmud, with a few exceptions, did not mandate the use of Hebrew and therefore, they concluded, that prayer in other languages was allowed (Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, 1996, p. 178).

The issue of praying in the vernacular was debated in the mid-nineteenth century by Zacharias Frankel, Abraham Adler, and Ludwig Phillipson whose conciliatory position prevailed. Frankel left the assembly as a result of this discussion (Plaut, 1963, p. 162). Frankel believed very strongly that "the Hebrew language was the Bible itself which encompasses all our religious elements" (Ibid., p. 162). Furthermore, he saw the use of Hebrew as a constant reminder of Biblical words and our covenant with God. Finally, he believed that if Hebrew were not used in prayer, it would be forgotten among the laity, and thus a caste system would emerge in which the rabbis would know much more than the laity. He concluded that German should be integrated into the service, but that Hebrew should predominate as it edified the service as the language of God's revelation to Moses. He underscored his argument by noting that the 'Men of the Great Synagogue' allowed Aramaic only for those who were "weaklings in mind." He also stated that they (the 'Men of the Great Synagogue') would have ruled against the use of the vernacular had they known that it might lead to the reduction of Hebrew in the prayer service (Ibid, pp. 162-63).

Adler strongly opposed Frankel's arguments. He did not find Hebrew, or any language, to be sacred. Rather, he believed that only the content of what one said could be

sacred. In other words, simple recitation without comprehension was not a sacred expression, even if it was in Hebrew. He added that rote Hebrew recitation encouraged hypocrisy because people were praying with their mouths and not with their hearts (Plaut,1963, pp.163-4). Further, he argued that no language, including Hebrew, was capable of creating unity among a people (in this case, the Jews). Adler also believed Hebrew was lacking in both words and expressions and was, therefore, a dead language, as it did not live within the people as the vernacular. He supported this argument by using Frankel's reference, saying that the Men of the Great Synagogue understood the need for comprehension and, accordingly, held part of the service in Aramaic (Ibid, pp. 163-4). Thus, Adler justified prayer in the vernacular and not in Hebrew.

Philippson adopted a more moderate position and believed that both Hebrew and German should be integrated into the prayer service. He believed that people needed stimulation in prayer, and that Hebrew provided this. He added that Hebrew was necessary in teaching Torah. He remarked that in the civic realm, Jews were attempting to achieve unification with other Germans, but in the religious realm, they should distinguish themselves. He concluded by saying that Hebrew was neither dead nor lacking, and should therefore be integrated with German into the service (Ibid. pp. 164-5.) Philippson advised that Hebrew should be used when saying the *Barchu*, the *Shema*, the first and last three blessings of the *Tefila*, as well as the blessings before and after the reading of the Torah. Everything else could be adapted and said in German (Mendes-Flohr, Reinharz, p. 178).

This spirit of reform took place in various locales where there were changes in

Hebrew liturgy (Plaut, 1963, pp. 50). In 1844, in Berlin, the Association for the Reform of Judaism published a prayer book which eliminated almost all Hebrew (Ibid., p. 55). However, this was not popular among many Reform leaders. In 1848, in Worms, a strong statement was made on this topic in "The Program of the Friends of Reform": "We must no longer pray in a dead language when the word and sound of our German mother tongue are to us both understandable and attractive" (Ibid, pp. 61-62).

In summary, one can clearly see that in the beginning of the Reform movement, in Europe, Hebrew usage in the prayer service was altered by reducing its presence and altering the language of the traditional prayers. In a sense, the reduction of Hebrew usage symbolized the change from traditional Jews to modern Jews. It became the subject of debate which clearly marked the break between maintaining Jewish traditions and assimilating into a non-Hebrew dominant culture--namely, Germany.

In addition, a sociological concern among some of the early German reformers was that imposed Hebrew usage could eventually separate Jews. This was, in fact, already the case as Hebrew was not known by everybody in the pre-Enlightenment period. The Enlightenment in Germany brought this issue into the forefront and helped shape a changing world view for the Jewish people, calling into question the need for Hebrew study and usage. Arguers on both sides of this issue believed that their stance would help prevent assimilation. Some thought that Hebrew knowledge could prevent assimilation by reducing ignorance. Others felt that assimilation could be avoided if people learned the meaning of prayers through use of the vernacular. It is clear that, in Germany, many of the changes that took

place needed to be justified and defended. Changes in Hebrew usage in the prayer-books and services met with great opposition. In America, however, the Reformers found more fertile ground for these changes.

B. The Reform Movement and Hebrew: Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century America

The arguments regarding Hebrew usage in prayer services continued in America. The differences in America were in the intense drive that Jews had to "fit in" to their new society and conversely, a fear of assimilation. In Germany, change came more gradually with the influence of the Enlightenment. In America, Jews arrived with instant freedom and possibilities.

The decorum of the Reform Temples became an important issue among many of the new German Jewish immigrants. They looked up to the Episcopalians and other Christians because of the decorum of their churches, and the dignity with which they appeared in their Western garb (Dreyfus, interview, 1999). These immigrants wanted to start over in America. One decorum controversy that took place in some Reform Temples was the use of *Kippot* and *Talitot*, the skull caps and prayer shawls. For example, in the early twentieth century, Temple Israel, in Brooklyn, agreed to merge with Brooklyn's Temple Beth Elohim only if they would eliminate the usage of *Kippot* and *Talitot* in the prayer service (Ibid, 1999).

Setting the tone for what was to come with regard to Hebrew, Isaac Meyer Wise's 1857 prayer book, Minhag America, began with the statement both in Hebrew and English, "Pray in the language thou understandest best" (Minhag America, 1857, inside cover).

Though this prayer book had much of the traditional Hebrew prayers, it offered Hebrew on the right side of each page and English on the left. In addition, it opened from right to left, as opposed to left to right, which was the design of traditional prayer books. The Torah Service for Shabbat added prayers in German. There were also some changes in Minhag America that reflected a developing Reform ideology. Some of those include the elimination of prayers that referred to the sacrificial system, prayers for the coming of the Messiah, and prayers that called for the restoration to Palestine (Heller, 1965, p. 565). On this issue, Wise believed America offered great freedoms and anyone who really wanted to return to Palestine could simply go there. Like Geiger, Wise believed that the importance of Palestine should not be emphasized. The *siddur* did have much of the morning, afternoon, and evening services in Hebrew along with *Musaf*. Though Wise felt that Hebrew should be altered and reduced in the *siddur*, he was never an advocate for striking the Hebrew language from Reform Jews altogether, "because...our brethren in all parts of the world are conversant with the Hebrew service, and no Israelite should feel himself a stranger in the house of the Lord" (Ibid, 1965, p. 566). For Wise, Hebrew bound the Jewish people together.

The inclusion of German in American *siddurim* is a phenomenon worth exploring. German was symbolic to many of the early Reformers of the new type of Jew (Dreyfus, interview, 1999). It represented culture, sophistication, and reminded the new immigrants of their homeland where they lived their lives intermingled with the dominant, non-Jewish population. In addition, German and English were preferred in worship services by many of the new Jewish immigrants from Germany because Hebrew lacked consistency in its

pronunciation. Despite the vocalization systems developed in Tiberias in the sixth and seventh centuries, there were still different Hebrew dialects (Dreyfus, interview, 1999). For example, the word '*Kadosh*' (Holy) was pronounced 'Kadoush' (like 'ouch') by many German Jews, 'Kadaysh' by Lithuanian Jews, and 'Kadoish' by many of the Polish immigrants (Dreyfus, interview, 1999). In contrast, German offered uniformity and order.

A second Reform *siddur* was David Einhorn's Olath Tamid, which was published in 1858 (Plaut, 1965, p. 299). This *siddur* was to become the base for the Union Prayer Book which was completed in 1894. Dr. David Einhorn (1809-1879), who came to America in 1855, believed Hebrew to be a dead language and advocated the 'striking down' of the Hebrew language (Pilch, 1969, p. 28). The existence of both Minhag America and Olath Tamid in congregations was the center of heated debate between the conservative reformers (the followers of Wise) and the radical reformers (the followers of Einhorn). For a while, Minhag America was more widely used, but the ideals behind Einhorn's prayer book soon became more popular (Meyer, 1988, pp. 254-260). Despite his feelings about Hebrew usage though, Olat Tamid did include the *Shema*, *Mi Khamokah*, and other prayers in Hebrew.

Thirteen Rabbis attended the first Rabbinical conference in America which took place in Philadelphia in 1869. Among them were Samuel Adler, David Einhorn, Samuel Hirsch, and Isaac Mayer Wise, (Schwartzman, Sylvan, 1955, p. 92). Regarding Hebrew prayer usage, Article #7 of the resulting platform of this conference said the following:

> This language has in fact become incomprehensible for the overwhelming majority of our present-day co-religionists, and therefore in the act of prayer (which is a body without a soul unless it is understood) Hebrew must

> take second place behind a language which the worshipers can understand (Plaut, 1965, p. 31).

In America, just as in Germany, comprehending the language of prayer was important. Nevertheless, this gathering of rabbis ultimately did not call for the elimination of Hebrew, but concluded that it should be used in conjunction with the vernacular.

As the nineteenth century came to a close, a different attitude was expressed among some supporters of the Reform movement. The developing attitude called for the rejection of tradition. The Pittsburgh Platform (the result of the Rabbinic Conference of 1885), didn't directly relate to Hebrew, but contained a message rooted in altering tradition. Hebrew was considered irrelevant in the lives of Jews, and its usage was limited in prayer services. The platform stated that many Biblical and Rabbinic practices were no longer binding for Reform Jews (Schwartzman, 1955, p. 143). "Only the moral laws and those ceremonies adapted to modern life" should apply to the Jews (Ibid. 1955, p. 123). Modern morality and ceremony were to be the main focus of Reform Judaism, not Hebrew, which was considered irrelevant to modern life.

Reflective of this shift toward moral ideals was the content of the new Reform Prayer book, the Union Prayer Book, which was published in 1892. This *siddur* opened from right to left, and had all scriptural references in English. In the weekday morning service, the only Hebrew for example, was one sentence in the *Kedusha*, the *Barechu*, and the *Shema*. In a version published for the Armed Services, the *Kabbalat Shabbat* service contained *Mizmor L'David* in Hebrew. The first Union Prayer Book rejected Hebrew, showing a strong

preference for the vernacular, English.

In 1928, Samuel Cohon justified this type of change by saying, "prayer, as a means of moral improvement, explains the reduction of Hebrew in the Union Prayer Book to a bare minimum and its virtual elimination from the service of some congregations" (Blau, 1973, p. 263). Without comprehension, Hebrew was deemed a hindrance toward reaching the defined purpose of prayer, which he saw as leading to moral improvement. He then compared it to Protestantism, whereby the service was done in the vernacular, rather than in Latin.

In conclusion, altering Hebrew liturgy within Reform Judaism was as much an issue in America as it was in Germany. In Germany however, the focus of debate was whether altering Hebrew was *halachik.* In America, the focus was on the sociological consequences of continued Hebrew usage. Namely, it was seen as separating Jews from each other and from the Gentiles. Leaders in the Reform movement sought to avoid these separations. The positive notion of intermingling with the secular world of North America was predominant among the majority of Jews from Eastern Europe. For many of these Eastern European Jewish immigrants, coming to America meant experiencing freedom, opportunity, and acclimating to a new culture.

C. The Reform Movement and Hebrew Twentieth Century America

At the turn of the century, American Jews began to develop different attitudes toward Reform Hebrew prayer usage. Also, the State of Israel was in its pre-formative years and modern Hebrew was being revived. Many twentieth century Reform thinkers expressed pro-

Hebrew sentiments. Judah Magnes, a Reform Rabbi, who later became the Chancellor of Hebrew University in Jerusalem, emphasized the need for Hebrew knowledge (Plaut, 1965, p. 320). Magnes believed that Hebrew was the Jews' national language and had always been the necessary classic Jewish expression of "fears and hopes" by the Jews.

Emanuel Gamoran, a staunch Zionist and Educator, strongly believed in Hebrew usage in the worship service as well as in Hebrew education. In 1923, Gamoran was involved in the development of UAHC curricula for supplementary schools which emphasized Hebrew instruction (Gamoran, 1923). In 1936, he said that "intelligent participation in Synagogue life requires a knowledge and understanding of the Hebrew language" (Plaut, 1965, p. 322). Hebrew, he believed, symbolized an unwanted distinction to North American Jews who felt inferior to gentiles, and ashamed and embarrassed of their Judaism (Plaut, 1965, p. 323). Gamoran wanted American Jews to acknowledge their distinctiveness and opposed the needs of some to "fit-in" to American society. He added that Hebrew was exclusive to the Jews and a necessary part of their uniqueness as a people and of their national development.

This new support of Hebrew usage in prayer is clearly expressed in the 1937 "Guiding Principles," the resulting document of the Colombus Rabbinic Conference. It specifically states that, "Judaism requires prayer, observance of the Sabbath and Holidays, symbols and ceremonies, and the use of Hebrew" (Schwartzman, 1955, p. 143). The platform also emphasized a "greater use of Hebrew in services and religious education" (Ibid. p. 180). In addition, the Columbus platform specified that Hebrew should be used alongside

the vernacular in worship services. "Judaism requires the retention and development of distinctive forms of religious art and music, and the use of Hebrew, together with the vernacular, in our worship and instruction" (Borowitz, 1977, supplement). Thus we see that at least some of the leaders in the Reform Movement believed Hebrew education and usage in worship services ought to be increased.

Indicative of this shift in thought was the practice of adding Hebrew prayers to the *siddurim*. The new 1918 edition of the Union Prayer Book, added the *Alenu* in Hebrew. The 1940 Union Prayer Book, added the Hebrew prayers *Ma Tovu, Mi Khamokha, Tsur Yisrael*, and the *Amida*. It also offered three versions of the weekday services, one which was similar to the original Union Prayer Book of the late nineteenth century. Like its predecessor, it also opened from right to left. The Reform Movement still maintained its previous text alterations including the edited references to the Messianic return to Palestine and the rebuilding of the Second Temple.

The prayer book, Gates of Prayer (1975), and the Centenary Perspective (1976), both reflected greater choices in Hebrew for Jewish worship. The prayer book offered more Hebrew options with English translations than previous Reform *siddurim*. The English, however, was not only written on the same page as the Hebrew, it appeared directly below it. Sometimes each line of Hebrew was followed by a line of English. This layout, as opposed to translations on the adjacent page, allowed for the worshiper to choose English or Hebrew more easily. In addition, there were various options for services, especially for the Evening Sabbath services which offers ten options. Each service reflects theological

differences while varying in Hebrew usage. For example, some services contain the complete *Alenu* and others do not. It is also interesting to note that there were two versions of this prayer book: one that opened from right to left and the other, from left to right, continuing to offer options. Conversely, transliterated Hebrew appeared mainly in the back of the text, so that only the worshiper who was familiar with Hebrew decoding could participate in the Hebrew part of the service with ease.

Despite the increased amount of Hebrew found in Gates of Prayer, The Centenary Perspective referred to Hebrew only once. The Centenary Perspective is a collection of Reform beliefs published in the mid 1970's. Although it acknowledged that Hebrew had been the language that bound the Jewish people historically, there is no mention of Hebrew as it relates directly to prayer (Borowitz, 1977, supplement).

A new edition of the Gates of Prayer was published in 1994. This prayer book was considerably smaller with fewer service options than its predecessor. There were also fewer options for *Kabbalat Shabbat*. However, transliterated Hebrew appeared just beneath the Hebrew text for many prayers, as opposed to the back of the *siddur*. This made Hebrew pronunciation more accessible to the non-Hebrew reader and stressed the value of Hebrew participation in the worship service. The content changes also included adding gender sensitive words such as "*immahot*," in the Tefillah. This addition acknowledged, along with the male ancestors (*avot*), the importance of the matriarchs, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, and Rachel and thus, reflects egalitarian ideals.

The Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), is currently working on a new

edition of Gates of Prayer, which is expected to be completed by the year 2005. The Chair of the committee developing this new *siddur*, Rabbi Peter Knoble, indicated that discussions are underway regarding many issues related to Hebrew content (Knoble, phone interview, March 4, 1999). The amount of transliteration included and the values to be reflected in the new edition are among the topics under discussion. In addition, the committee participants are discussing adding prayers, such as *Tachanun,* and even bringing back the common term *Mechayeh Hametim.* Expressing the resurrection of the dead had previously been abandoned by the Reform Movement because of its messianic innuendos. Rabbi Knoble indicated that this new prayer book will have fewer versions of various prayer services than the 1975 version. He also noted that the committee is considering adding more Hebrew songs.

In conclusion, Reform attitudes regarding Hebrew are similar to German attitudes in some ways and different in others. In both locations, there were concerns that Hebrew usage among Jews would lead to assimilation. In addition, in both countries Jews feared the loss of their Jewish distinctiveness, and therefore resisted the Hebrew reforms. However, unique to the American experience was that the Reform movement first argued to decrease Hebrew in worship services and in fact did so. However, early in the twentieth century, a process of slowly reinstating Hebrew began. This process is still going on today.

The Guiding Principles of 1937 specifically addressed enhancing Hebrew education. How was this carried out? What educational methods were employed in order to successfully execute Hebrew instruction among Reform Jews? How are these sentiments

expressed by Reform thinkers reflected in Hebrew education programs in Reform supplementary schools? The following section explores these questions.

VI. The Supplementary School and Hebrew Education

Though Hebrew education in the twentieth century was offered in many settings, it was Sunday school that became associated with the Reform movement. This was despite the fact that, initially, Sunday school was not exclusively Reform (Sklare, 1974, p. 244). The first Sunday school in America is credited to Rebecca Gratz, who, in 1838, established the first classes in Philadelphia (Plaut, 1965, p. 316). The schools that followed this model usually met on Sunday mornings. Later, some extended the number of instructional hours to include one additional day during the week. In 1923, Emanuel Gamoran published a model curriculum for a two-day-a-week school in order to accommodate this trend (Gamoran, 1923). According to a survey conducted by Gamoran in 1924, there were over two hundred and fifty Sunday schools affiliated with the UAHC. Of his one hundred and twenty five respondents, eighty-five percent met only once a week. Most met on Sunday and a few on Saturday. The remaining schools usually met twice a week, with two of the responding schools meeting three times a week.

In the 1920's, in addition to Sunday Schools, Jewish education was offered to American children through the *Talmud Torah*, some Orthodox *Yeshivot,* Yiddish schools, and a few all-day schools (Sklare, 1974, p. 244). The *Talmud Torah* model was gaining popularity in the first quarter of the twentieth century, as it met more frequently than the supplementary schools. This became more common within the Conservative movement.

Within the Reform movement though, the Sunday school became and remains the primary setting where Reform Jewish children receive their Jewish education. Today, it is estimated that there are "more than 120,000 UAHC religious school students at any one time" (Joseph, 1997, p. 8).

Historically, there was debate over the amount of Hebrew education that actually occurred in these schools. In Gamoran's 1924 study, he stated that "there is a widespread notion that the Jewish religious school does not teach Hebrew. This idea is not altogether true" (Ibid. 1925, p. 17). Gamoran's 1924 survey indicated that a significant percentage of the respondents introduced Hebrew into their curriculum after 1917, which is logical in light of the political progress made toward the creation of a Jewish State. The Gamoran survey showed that 67.5% percent of the respondents offered Hebrew as a part of the overall educational curricula and 52.5% required Hebrew instruction (Gamoran, 1925, p. 17). On average, the schools met for 1.9 hours a week and .8 (48 minutes) of an hour per week was devoted to Hebrew instruction. Many schools had a high drop-out rate prior to eighth and ninth grade confirmation so that the Hebrew education that children did receive was for a limited period of time and was not required by all of the schools.

Just as there were debates over Hebrew usage in the worship service, there were also debates among those involved with Reform Hebrew education regarding how much Hebrew should be a part of the supplementary school curriculum (Plaut, 1965, p. 320). Limiting Hebrew instruction was deeply criticized by many of the influential Reformers such as Judah Magnes, Herman Cohen, and, of course, Emanuel Gamoran. Herman Cohen said that a

"knowledge of the Hebrew language will make it possible that among our youth there will arise the desire for Jewish scholarship, for its acceptance, and for its active and creative future" (Ibid, 1965, p. 321). Conversely, Max Freudenthal said that more modern philosophers such as Zunz, Geiger, Steinthal, and Lazarus, were more important than studying the rabbinic commentators in Hebrew (Ibid. 1965, p. 323). Freudenthal felt that the study of traditional rabbinic commentators in Hebrew was not as relevant or as important as the study of contemporary thinkers.

Despite Gamoran's optimism regarding the amount of Hebrew instruction, religious and moral education were considered more important (Sklare, 1974 p. 244). For younger children, the curriculum in the Reform Sunday schools focused mainly on moral issues as expressed in Biblical stories. In the 1930's and 40's, Jewish traditions connected with holidays and rituals and Jewish existence in relation to the non-Jewish world became an important part of the content taught.

Up until the early 1960's, Hebrew continued to play only a minor part in the overall curriculum of the Reform supplementary schools. By this time, there were over 580 Reform congregations, most of which had supplementary schools (Bennett, 1962 p. iii). In the early 1960's, the National Association of Temple Educators (NATE) conducted a number of studies that explored various aspects of the supplementary schools in Reform congregations in order to measure and evaluate educational programs within these schools. The first four surveys that were conducted focused on the following issues: job descriptions and personnel practices, confirmation practices, religious school organization and administration, and the

status of the Temple Educator (Bennett, 1962, p.43). The fifth survey focused on "Curriculum and Materials." According to the 160 schools surveyed, any type of Hebrew language instruction was not considered as important as such subjects as Bible, History, Jewish Heroes, and Life Cycle events. Even when Biblical text was studied, primarily in the older grades, an English version of the text was used. Hebrew still remained a minor part of the curricula for most Reform supplementary schools. This, however did not go unnoticed.

In March of 1962, a curriculum committee of the Commission on Jewish Education was established to make recommendations related to Hebrew instruction in Reform religious schools. This committee measured not only the amount of Hebrew, but the various goals and quality of the Hebrew instruction as well. Some of the reasons for the Commission are described in the words of Rabbi Samuel Glasner of the Baltimore Board of Jewish Education who said that,

> the Teaching of Hebrew is probably the most vexing area in Reform Jewish education today. Our curricula, our textbooks, and our methods are primitive in the extreme. Our aims are confused. And our teachers for the most part are completely inadequate to the task (Commission on Jewish Education, 1964, p. 9).

In addition to these acknowledged deficits, the commission was inspired by the "Guiding Principles of the Commission on Jewish Education," prepared by Dr. Solomon Freehof who emphasized that Hebrew is "the sacred tongue, the language of prophet and teacher...common to our brethren all over the world uniting the most far-off recorded past through the ages with our own day" (Ibid, 1964, preface). Freehoff goes on to state the

importance of Hebrew education in Reform religious schools. Hence, by the early to mid-1960's, the value of Hebrew education was being acknowledged along with an expressed desire to address the identified problems.

In order to develop recommendations, the committee considered the results of a survey of forty schools on Hebrew instruction in Reform religious schools that was administered in 1960-61. One finding was that, in 1960, three quarters of Reform congregations conducted Hebrew classes with Bar Mitzvah preparation as their primary goal (Grand, 1961, p. 2). The report showed that text books were not age appropriate, the amount of Hebrew language skills necessary for the Bar Mitzvah was unclear, and the precise content of the Bar Mitzvah was not uniform (Ibid. p. 3). The survey also showed that the majority of text books which were used, were primers that focused on phonetics and the mechanical reading of prayers. Grand indicated that these texts were boring and tended to reduce motivation to learn Hebrew. Structurally, Hebrew classes generally took place during the mid-week meetings of the school, meaning that the Sunday curriculum was, in general, not Hebrew related. In addition, the survey indicated that teachers were generally unqualified to teach Hebrew and that the schools had little training for teachers.

After reviewing the data, the commission came up with the following recommendations with regard to Hebrew instruction (Glasner, 1962):

1. Hebrew study should be directed toward the comprehension of selections from classic texts--the Bible and the Union Prayer Book.

2. Hebrew should be taught as a living language, including spoken communication

and comprehension skills.

3. Bar Mitzvah preparation should be a part of the above two recommendations.

The commission also recommended that the supplementary schools should meet three times per week with an annual total of one hundred and twenty hours of Hebrew instruction. In addition, the commission recommended that the Hebrew curriculum be separated into three divisions: Pre-humash (grades four to six), Intermediate Division (grades seven to nine) focusing on studying Bible and simple modern Hebrew literature, and Hebrew High School which would meet from grades ten to twelve. These recommendations were never implemented in Reform supplementary schools, as is demonstrated by the following study.

In 1995-96, Rabbi Samuel Joseph conducted a study which explored current trends in the Reform supplementary schools including profiles of educators, their gender, and the amount of Jewish education training they had, as well as the curricula of the supplementary schools. Of the approximately 850 surveys sent to North American Reform congregations, only 262 were considered usable, having completed 75-80% of the questions (Joseph, 1997, p. 2). The structure of the schools was explored in terms of how many days per week schools met, and on which days.

According to the study, schools, on average, provide about one hundred minutes per week of Hebrew instruction and about ninety-four percent of UAHC congregations teach Hebrew for participation in a prayer service (Joseph, 1997, p. 58). Surprisingly, less than half of these schools offer the prayer services for which the students were preparing. This fact begs the question of whether the Hebrew experience is made meaningful or relevant in

the students' lives. It also raises the question of the value of Hebrew education, since the students are not being given the opportunity to use the learned Hebrew. In addition, the major subjects taught related to holidays, Bible, history, and ethics, among others taught in English. Again Hebrew was less of a curricular priority (Ibid, 1997, p. 56).

In comparing conditions of Hebrew language instruction in supplementary schools with learning a foreign language in other settings, Bernard Spolsky found that the supplementary schools provided inadequate conditions for teaching Hebrew (Ibid. 1989, p. 212). The settings he compared included public school, a day or boarding school, private lessons and even living in Israel itself for the purpose of learning Hebrew. Hebrew in supplementary schools, he claimed "is much less an academic subject; there are strong attitudinal influences, and even the formal teaching is affected by values concerned with informal use" (Ibid, 1989, p. 205). Hebrew instruction in supplementary schools is not held to the same academic standards as in other settings. In addition, Spolsky said that Hebrew instruction is influenced by attitudes connected with its informal uses, attitudes toward Israel, questions over the validity of the language, and ambivalence toward learning (Ibid, 1989, p. 215).

When examining the results of the studies of Gamoran, Bennett, and Joseph, it is clear that, although there have been some changes in Hebrew education within supplementary schools, Hebrew was never the main curricular focus. In addition, the supplementary school hasn't been a serious place to learn Hebrew. There have been recommendations to increase Hebrew or to reshape the structure of these schools to allow

for more Hebrew education, but, throughout the twentieth century, morals, ethics, and Bible have remained the priority. Hebrew education did increase from an average of .8 hours(48 minutes) per week in the time of Gamoran, to one hundred minutes per week according to Joseph's 1995 survey, but the annual one hundred twenty hours (three to four hours of Hebrew per week) recommended by Bennett was never actualized.

VII. An Analysis of Reform Curriculum Designed for Supplementary Schools

The Reform movement did produce Hebrew curricula in the twentieth century even though Hebrew was not a major focus in the movement's supplementary schools. These curricula were available in the schools beginning in the 1930's. When these curricula were published, theories of foreign language instruction were not as expansive as they are today. There were the Grammar translation and the Natural approaches. The former method is a deductive approach that "makes use of translation and grammar study as the main teaching and learning activities" (Richards, Platt, and Platt, 1992, p. 161). This approach prepares the student more for reading classical literary texts, as opposed to spoken language. The Natural approach, which is more deductive focuses on spoken language, using objects and actions to enhance meanings. The main idea is that the student be exposed to the foreign language in meaningful ways in order to acquire language skills similar to how a toddler learns these skills--through "natural means." This approach gained more attention in the early twentieth century in part as a reaction to the Grammar-translation method which some felt was not a successful at teaching Hebrew or other foreign languages (Richards, Platt, and Platt, 1992, p. 241).

Glasner, who sat on the commission which examined the Hebrew School curriculum surveys in the 1960's, indicated that most supplementary schools tended to use the more deductive grammar translation method, which he saw as being archaic. He also felt that this method decreased motivation for the child to learn Hebrew (Commission on Jewish Education, 1964, p. 9). It was this premise--the idea that there was a need for Hebrew curricula that was motivating and meaningful for the student--that led to the development of the UAHC Hebrew curricula.

Since the 1930's, the UAHC has published four Hebrew curricula for their supplementary schools. In light of the controversies regarding Hebrew, it is remarkable that the movement even produced four. The first one, entitled, *Gilenu*, was published throughout the 1930's. This was written by Dr. Emanuel Gamoran and Abraham Friedland. They wrote a second curriculum called *Torah Li*, also in the 1930's, which focused on Biblical Hebrew. The next Hebrew curriculum published by the UAHC was a series of texts written by Abraham and Adaia Shumsky in the late 1960's and early 1970's entitled *Mah Tov* and *Olam Gadol*. In the 1980's, a phonetic primer was published. This limited Hebrew curricula contribution is not surprising when one considers the historical tensions between Hebrew and Reform ideology and education.

In the remainder of this thesis, I will analyze the three curricula published by the Reform movement in which modern, spoken Hebrew was the target language according the authors. For this thesis, Reform Hebrew curricula is defined as a text book or series of books published by the UAHC to achieve a level of Hebrew language literacy. The texts/curricula

analyzed will include:

1. The Gamoran and Friedland series, *Gilenu.*

2. The Shumsky series, *Olam Gadol.*

3. The Shumsky series, *Ma Tov.*

The analysis will be divided into three areas: Curriculum Design, Curriculum Method, and Curriculum Content. They are defined as follows:

Curriculum Design: This section of the analysis will look at text formatting, including the manner in which the text content appears on a page, color, illustrations, and letter size.

Curriculum Method: This section will analyze the curricular goals and objectives, as well as the foreign language teaching method as declared by the authors' descriptions and from the curricula materials themselves.

Curriculum Content: This section will analyze the various texts in order to understand what values and ideas are portrayed. It will also review the audience for whom the curricula was designed, based on the authors' claim and what can be concluded from the text.

A. *Gilenu*

1. *Gilenu* Design

The *Gilenu* series consists of a primer to teach Hebrew reading skills, a teacher's guide for Book Aleph, and three text books with corresponding exercise books. The entire series was published between 1933 and 1938. Each book has a number of pictures in black and white, except for the primer which contains some red splashed on the pictures. All pictures are in sketched design. All of the text books have colored covers.

As the books progress throughout the series, fewer pictures appear. They are replaced by additional Hebrew text. The primer includes exercises within the textbook itself called "higher steps" which provide exercises for reading as well as some new letters to practice. Even though there is no separate primer exercise book, there is a chart that explains to the student exactly when to refer to the "higher steps" exercises.

In the first texts (Aleph and part of Bet), English and Hebrew are combined on the pages in order to make comprehension easier. For example, the first and second lessons in *Gilenu,* Book Aleph teach Hebrew words that are inserted into an English sentence. "Here is a beautiful ספר for you to read" (Ibid, 1933, p. 1). This is followed by several additional English sentences with the Hebrew word inserted as part of the sentence. There is less English in the later books because it is presumed that the student will need to rely less on the mother tongue. There also are a number of songs in each of the texts that include piano music, music notes, and transliteration.

The lettering is very clear and large, approximately the equivalent of point 16 in size. At most, there are twenty Hebrew lines on any given page. Finally, the spacing and general appearance of the books show that the authors and editors were careful not to clutter pages.

2. *Gilenu* Method

The authors' stated method, the "Play Way," was developed to motivate the student and to create a positive attitude toward Hebrew. It seems to encompass the "Natural Approach" in that it emphasizes "natural communication rather than formal grammar study" (Richards, Platt, and Platt, 1992, p. 242). It also has some audio-lingual exercises, as well.

Like other Reform thinkers in the twentieth century, the authors believed that traditional methods of Hebrew education were not conducive to learning and did not help to develop an appreciation for the language. They stated that, "while many schools [were] engaged in teaching Hebrew, little attention [was] paid to the very serious problem of developing a favorable attitude to Hebrew on the part of the child" (Gamoran and Friedland, 1933, p. viii). The authors added that, without developing interest and love for the language in the child, the educational effort would be doomed to fail. The "Play Way" was designed to create motivation by teaching vocabulary through games, fun learning activities, and songs, which culminated in reading and comprehending stories with reappearing characters scattered throughout the series.

The various learning activities in the exercise books and text books helped the student to attain Hebrew decoding and reading skills, vocabulary development, and modern Hebrew speaking skills. The student was supposed to attain these skills with gradually increased fluency. The authors believed that script was not important to teach because reading took precedence and therefore did not focus on it (Gamoran and Friedland, 1934, p. iv).

There are many different types of learning activities within the series that reinforce vocabulary. In some of the exercises, the learner literally cuts and pastes words under matching pictures, thus practicing and reinforcing vocabulary. In other exercises, the student writes specific English translations, or reads with a partner as quickly as possible. Sometimes an exercise calls for the students to act out a story in Hebrew with provided dialogue. Vocabulary is also learned by introducing new words, like ילד, נער, תינוק and איש,

with accompanying pictures that are used in order to enhance meaning. The student might be asked to translate a sentence from Hebrew to English. Another vocabulary exercise helps the student measure what they know by writing down English translations of a list. The student is to grade him/herself, thus encouraging autonomous learning.

Grammar is not directly taught. Complex verb forms as well as verb/adjective agreement are taught as vocabulary. For example, the *Hiphil* (causative verb type) verb מביט, which is irregular given its root (נבט) is learned by hearing it and reading it with a masculine noun (Ibid, 1933, p. 109). The student learns that the verb means "look" or "is looking," depending on the content. There are no verb exercises that drill the student on appropriate noun/verb conjugation. Past and future tenses are taught similarly, beginning in Book Gimel by exposing students to the words in stories and learning activities.

Gilenu also aspires to teach the student basic differences between Biblical Hebrew and modern Hebrew. The authors familiarize the students with the Biblical verb constructs that enable them to identify and differentiate between them and their modern Hebrew equivalent. Book Gimel, for example, contains some lists of verbs constructed with the Biblical reversing *vav*. Next to it is the same verb without the *vav* (Gamoran and Friedland, 1938, p. 116).

Decoding and reading skills are taught mainly in the primer, which exposes the student to visual and auditory comprehension materials in conjunction with the more traditional phonetic method (Gamoran and Friedland, 1935, p. viii). The letters are taught by the word as opposed to individual letter vowel combinations without meaning. Conveying

the meaning of the word is as important as is the skill of decoding it. As mentioned, English is used to assist in this process. For example, the text reads (the teacher is encouraged to read it aloud, too), "Here is a beautiful ספר for you to read" (Gamoran and Friedland, 1933, p. 1). The student follows along while the teacher recites the word aloud. Theoretically, this teaches the ability to identify the word and the letter sounds in the future. Another type of learning activity that reinforces decoding and reading are the number of "reading races" whereby the student works with a peer to read as quickly as possible.

3. *Gilenu* Content

In their stories and pictures, the *Gilenu* series contain concepts that reflect general and Reform values. The three ways in which some of these ideas are reflected are through the specific written text, the pictures, and the songs. The values that are conveyed through the textbooks include appreciation of the Bible, traditional family values, Jewish holidays and rituals, and a belief in liberal strands of Judaism.

The curriculum stresses the value of the Bible as a text. The vocabulary chosen by the authors is primarily from the Bible. As the authors state in the preface, "more than ninety-four percent of the words occur in the Bible, about eighty per cent occurring in the Book of Genesis; seventy-one per cent occur in a series of passages selected from the Book of Genesis as appropriate study material for young children" (Ibid. 1933, p. viii). The texts introduce many Biblical names such as the matriarchs and patriarchs found on page thirty-five in Book Aleph. In addition, as mentioned, students are introduced to some simple Biblical Hebrew verb constructs.

Jewish holidays and rituals are also an important part of the text books. For example, in Book Bet, story forty-three presents the excitement that a young boy feels toward the upcoming holiday, Purim. In the middle of the story, there is a picture of a Cantor reading from the *Megillah* along with children with groggers. Another story describes a toddler named Hillel who eats *matzoh* (Ibid., 1934, p. 28). On the following page is a picture of a boy with his mother serving him *matzoh.*

Also in the texts, one finds support for less traditional strands of Judaism. This is seen in part by the lack of certain pictures. For example, in no picture is there a Jewish lay person wearing a *kippah.* This reflects a trend among many Reform thinkers who wanted to abolish the wearing of the traditional skullcap (Dreyfus interview, 1999). There are some pictures of rabbis or cantors wearing *kippot* as mentioned, but these are very limited. Most of the content of all the books reflects more universal themes. For example, some topics include rain, wind, and there is even a song that simply describes the destination of a flying bird (Gamoran and Friedland, 1934, p. 52-53).

What is prevalent within the content is the continuous reinforcement of family values. In part, this is done through repeated characters with whom, hopefully, the student will identify. Some of those characters include a toddler named Hillel, a baby named Carmi, a neighbor boy named Abraham, and a mother and father. The texts have the children performing age-appropriate activities such as Carmi taking his first steps, or throwing food from a chair to get a reaction (Ibid, 1934, p. 84). The mother does traditional tasks such as providing food for the children. The texts also reinforces "appropriate behaviors." For

example, in one story, Abraham doesn't just take an apple, he asks permission from his mother to do so and then thanks her when he receives it (Ibid., 1934, p. 44).

It is clear from the texts and the authors' remarks that the *Gilenu* series is designed for children. For example, one story has text and pictures of a little boy finger painting and another taking his first steps (Gamoran and Friedland, 1934, pp. 23-25). There are pictures of both children and adults but the adults are seen from a child's perspective, referred to as אמא or אבא, mother or father. The later books have fewer pictures as the authors believed that older students needed less pictorial stimulation.

Because many Reform thinkers during the early to mid-twentieth century still had ambivalent feelings toward Hebrew, the *Gilenu* series is a major accomplishment. Emanuel Gamoran and Abraham Friedland were among the Reform thinkers that were very much in favor of Hebrew education. In addition, this series was published at a time when there was movement away from traditional grammatical methods of foreign language instruction. This is especially evident in the primer, which differs greatly from the UAHC's, Hebrew Primer by Max Reichler (1922), which contains almost no pictures along with simple phonetic letter decoding drills with minimal comprehension. The *Gilenu* series is a marked shift away from this more grammatical phonetic approach. No other curricula identified their method as the "Play Way" approach to Hebrew. It is remarkable that the authors introduced a method that promoted meaning, relevance, and motivation for the learner -- the very ideas that are considered necessary conditions for foreign language acquisition today. In conclusion, the *Gilenu* series is a unique method that clearly reflects a carefully designed curriculum for

modern Hebrew.

B. *Olam Gadol*

1. *Olam Gadol* Design

Olam Gadol is the first of two curricula published in the late 1960's and 1970's by the UAHC. The second one is *Mah Tov*. Even though *Olam Gadol* precedes *Mah Tov* in terms of level of difficulty, *Olam Gadol* was published after *Mah Tov*. *Olam Gadol* consists of Olam Gadol Aleph (1972), which is a text and a workbook combined, and Olam Gadol Bet (1973), which consists of a textbook (1973), a separate workbook (1978), and a record. There is also a teacher's guide that serves both volumes which was published in 1974. Both the workbook for Aleph and Bet are soft covered books on eight and a half by eleven size paper. The textbook for Bet (hardcover) and the teacher's guide are printed on paper eight and a half by five.

Aleph is considered a pre-primer, meaning that it assumes no prior Hebrew knowledge. It is comprised of four units with a culminating story in the middle. Each unit begins with numerous black and white photographs that comprise half to three quarters of any given page. The first sixteen pages of Aleph (Unit I) are all photographs. Alongside the photographs are Hebrew descriptions of what is depicted in the pictures. There is no English on these pages. The remaining pages in Olam Gadol Aleph and the Bet workbook contain colors in black, white, red, and at times, shades of these such as grey or pink. There are also a number of colorful cartoons that are used throughout all of the books. The story in Book Aleph and the three stories in the text book of Bet are both are followed by a Hebrew English

Glossary.

On pages that do not contain photographs, there is a balance between English and Hebrew. In the stories, vocalized Hebrew alone appears on the pages along with cartoon illustrations. When there are exercises, English is used for directions and to introduce new letters or words if they are not in the story or glossary. For example, in Book Aleph, it reads, "This is the letter, ר..." (Shumsky and Shumsky, 1972, p. 101). The letter *resh* is introduced using an English sentence. There are a great deal of exercises in this curriculum.

2. *Olam Gadol* Method

Olam Gadol has two main goals which are equally emphasizes: teaching modern spoken Hebrew, and teaching Reform Jewish values. Their theoretical underpinning is tied to a mixture of three approaches. The first is the "Simplified Language Approach,: which uses simple Hebrew (עברית קלה) to convey certain values. The series does not delve into the past or future tenses, nor does it teach complex verb forms. It does, however, review singular and plural words and demonstrates how to conjugates adjectives. The second approach is the "Children's Literature Approach" which states that stories, if written on age-appropriate topics, can influence a child's motivation to learn. The authors claim that the selected stories would spawn creativity, provoke interest, and provide intellectual stimulation (Ibid., 1974, p. 7). The third approach to the *Olam Gadol* curriculum is the "Anthology Approach" which draws on the Jewish tradition of conveying Jewish values through stories, and passing them on through the generations (Ibid., 1974, p. 5). This represents the bank of

values that are to be told through the stories and exercises.

Olam Gadol does strive for a high level of fluency in modern spoken Hebrew. In order to accomplish this, the student will need to learn vocabulary, develop reading and decoding skills, and complete the learning activities that proved opportunities to use the language. Reading skills are developed through exercises that combine phonetic letter and vowel identification, with the "word sight" method. For example, the teacher is directed to read the photograph captions aloud and the student simply tries to follow along by associating the sound with the word. The idea is that, the next time, the student will recognize the letter grouping. This is in contrast to more traditional phonetic exercises that teach letter/vowel combinations through meaningless drills that have the student vocalizing sounds with no meaning.

Vocabulary is taught initially through exercises and drills and later through a story. A glossary is supplied at the end of each story. Words are taught through a process of matching words and pictures in a variety of different ways. One exercise has the child writing an X next to each word that describes an item on the *Shabbat* table, (Shumsky and Shumsky, 1972, p. 73). In addition, there are exercises in which the student matches together sentences that have something in common. For example, one exercise uses sentences that describe a day filled with rain that fell upon two trees. The student must match the sentences that best describe the day.

The photographs are also used for reinforcing vocabulary. Just as they are used for reading skill development through the "word sight" approach, they also are used to match

an item in the photograph with the Hebrew word(s) that appear in a given photograph. This process further reinforces learning by combining reading and listening activities led by the teacher who, reading the words aloud, will then point to the item in the photograph.

Throughout the basic skill building process of decoding Hebrew letters, *Olam Gadol* encourages students to use vocabulary to make simple sentences, either in writing or in speech. For example in Book Aleph, there are pictures of two boys exhibiting two types of behaviors. The student is asked to identify which behavior is preferred. The student is asked to check the picture showing this preference. If the student has an opinion about the topic, there will be more motivation to engage in dialogue.

These exercises add vocabulary which prepare the learner for the main story entitled "Olam Gadol," which is a twelve page section of Book Aleph. In Book Bet, the preparatory exercises are in the workbook, and prepare the student for the stories in the textbook for Book Bet. These stories are the crux of the "Children's Literature Approach" according to the authors. Their significance lies in their ability to create motivation through the content of the stories. The story in Book Aleph consists of a conglomerate of unrelated sentences that express certain values through simple sentences followed by a question. The question always asks the reader to make a decision related to a value conflict. This, hopefully, can create motivation to learn Hebrew. For example, one of the questions asks the student to consider which child the mother in the illustration loves more (Shumsky and Shumsky, 1972, p. 81).

In Book Bet, the student first completes a unit in the workbook and then reads the story. Book Bet has four stories. The corresponding workbook exercises prepare the student with the necessary vocabulary. In addition to reading the story, the stories are also recorded on the record which accompanies Bet. The teacher is given the choice of reading the stories aloud, having the children read it, have them follow along in their text while playing the record, or just listening to the record alone. Hence, this provides an opportunity for the student to hear the story recited in a dramatic manner.

The ethical values, dilemmas, and ideas that *Olam Godol* raises serve as a significant component of the teaching method. These values are deemed so important that the teacher is encouraged to lead discussions in English so that students can discuss these topics on a deeper level. The discussions serve to motivate the student by reinforcing vocabulary and helping to promote an interest in the content.

3.Olam Gadol Content

The content of *Olam Gadol* covers ethical themes that are discussed in the stories, through exercises, illustrations and photographs. The values conveyed include the human struggle with war, moral behavior, multi-culturalism, family life, Jewish holidays, prayers, and rituals, as well as a strong support of modern Israel. In addition to the themes connected to the content, *Olam Gadol* strives to teach students one hundred new words (Shumsky and Shumsky, 1974, p. 44).

The Reform value of "intermingling" with and appreciating the secular world is very clear in the *Olam Gadol* series through the photographs and written materials that promote

multi-culturalism. For example, in Book Aleph, there is a photograph of a Mexican girl carrying her brother. The same text shows cultural similarities by showing photographs of children dancing in Japan opposite children dancing in Israel on a Kibbutz. Also, in Book Bet, the third story compares people from Tel Aviv to people in Tunisia.

The content of *Olam Gadol* reflects unquestionable support for the state of Israel. This is interesting in light of the debates that occurred in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries over prayer book references of returning to Zion. The main historical events that occurred prior to the publication of this series--the establishment of the State of Israel, and the sweeping victory of the Six-Day War--are depicted throughout the texts. There are two Kibbutz photographs: one with a father helping his son, and the other with the children dancing. There is also a photograph of an Israeli soldier reciting the *Shema* at the Wailing Wall (Shúmsky and Shumsky, 1972, p. 115). Finally, the back page of Book Aleph has a game that is based on 'Chutes and Ladders' and is designed to teach families letters, cursive writing, and letter order. The game is called עולים and teaches the terms used to describe those who immigrate to Israel (עולים) and those who leave Israel (יורדים). While the early Reformers saw America as the one and only 'promised land,' the *Olam Gadol* series shows Reform support for the new Jewish state.

These texts were written when America was in the midst of the Vietnam War and protests against this conflict were frequent. *Olam Gadol* deals directly with the struggles of humankind with regard to war. (Despite the photograph of the Israeli soldier who carries a

gun.) This struggle is portrayed in Book Bet in the story called "In the Beginning." This story "portrays a vicious circle of war and destruction followed by peace, only to be followed again by war and destruction" (Shumsky and Shumsky, 1974, p. 34). The text and the pictures in the story direct the student's attention to humanity as a whole, as opposed to a specific group of people reflecting the Reform value of universalism. The message conveyed is optimistic in that it stresses peace and cooperation between peoples. This is stressed further by teaching the songs הבאינו שלום עליכם and לא ישא גוי אל גוי חרב , songs that promote peace and non-violence. These are also recorded on the record.

Jewish rituals, holidays, and traditions are laced throughout the entire *Olam Gadol* series. In fact at the end of Book Aleph, there are a number of Hebrew prayers and songs introduced. They include, שלום עליכם , the Four Questions in Hebrew, מי יודע אחד from the Passover *Haggaddah*, אדון עולם, and אין כאלהינו. There are photographs of a Purim parade in Israel, a family sitting down at a Passover Seder, a cantor blowing a shofar, and a mother and daughter lighting *Shabbat* candles. The third story in Book Bet describes the building of a *Sukkah* and an *etrog* box. Though theology and belief in God is not a major part of the content, God as the creator of the world is conveyed in story one in Book Bet, as the first line of Genesis appears.

The audience that the *Olam Gadol* series is geared for is middle elementary school, although the content of the stories in Bet and the degree of difficulty of the exercises would also be appropriate for junior high school aged children as well. The moral questions that

are asked are often abstract and therefore more appropriate for teenagers who are able to handle such questions. Developmentally, all the pictures are child friendly as many are cartoons. Even the photographs are of children, or adults who are with children.

The *Olam Gadol* series strives to teach modern Hebrew through its related goal of teaching Jewish and universal values. Students learn Hebrew by first doing certain exercises which acquaint them with new words. This is in preparation for the story which serves as the culmination of the vocabulary and concepts taught through the exercises up until that point. The approach is more "Natural" in its method because it de-emphasizes formal grammar and encourages conversational Hebrew. In addition, the positive attitude toward Israel as expressed through many of the photographs, also has the potential to provide personal relevance and motivation for the learner through identification with Israel. *Olam Gadol* represents a serious Hebrew Curriculum attempt from the Reform Movement.

C. *Mah Tov*

1. *Mah Tov* Curriculum Design

The *Mah Tov* Series was created by the same authors of *Olam Gadol*, Abraham and Adaia Shumsky. It is presented as the next step sequentially to *Olam Gadol* even though it was published before. Not only is it more difficult, it also has more texts. This series contains three text books with accompanying work books and teachers' guides, all published between 1969 and 1971. In addition, *Mah Tov* published The Shmueli Family (Books One and Two) in 1977, which contained stories alone with multi-colored illustrations. In 1983, the authors published a primer entitled, The Alef-Bet Primer Reading Practice Book, which

contained a number of games and exercises that taught decoding skills. There are no stories in this text.

All of the texts are in color and the formatting in each of the books has both Hebrew words and pictures. English is used only occasionally for translations of words and in some learning activities to reinforce directions. There are also Hebrew-English glossaries following each of the stories. Each of the three original text books contain ten stories. On every page of the story is a sketched illustration that reflects the content of the story. The Shmueli Family texts contain six stories each. The pages of these two cartoon texts contain four multi-color cartoon illustrations together with the Hebrew captions. Following each story in the cartoon texts there are two to three exercises that reinforce comprehension along with a story glossary.

All of the introductions to the teachers' guides begin with a description of the "Children's Literature Approach" and the general goals of the curriculum, which are transmitting Jewish values and Hebrew language acquisition. They then continue by describing the content of the text books and the workbook. Following this is the story theme, the story content that can be discussed in Hebrew, and a suggested learning activity like a role play. Next are questions in English, and relevant Biblical resources that could reinforce the subject. Some suggestions are made for culminating activities. At the end of each teacher's guide is an English translation of the stories for that particular text.

2. *Mah Tov* Method

The approach of *Mah Tov* is similar to *Olam Gadol* in that it provides the student

with Hebrew vocabulary from the work book before reading a story. Also similar is the fact that the stories express Jewish values in simple Hebrew and that they are written to provide motivation for the student to learn Hebrew, because of the age-appropriate content. Instead of calling it the "Children's Literature Approach" as in *Olam Gadol*, *Mah Tov* refers to it as the "Story Approach" (Shumsky and Shumsky, 1970, p. 4). he biggest difference in this series is the story to exercise ratio. *Olam Gadol* contains a total of four stories with sometimes over forty exercises which needed to be completed prior to reading the story. *Mah Tov* has forty-two stories with about half the number of preparatory exercises. One *Mah Tov* text, entitled, Asot Mishpat, for example, has eleven work book exercises that prepare the reader for the story.

The *Mah Tov* approach is clearly a "Children's Literature Approach" that uses interesting stories, in simple Hebrew which are written to spark interest in the learner and challenge him or her intellectually. This creates motivation for the student, especially if he/she is able to identify with a character in the story. The teacher's guides provide questions in Hebrew and English so that the teacher can then ask the students while reading the story to continue to build interest. The use of English in discussions is suggested to interpret some issues that contain concepts expressed on a high abstract level. English helps deepen the level of understanding until more fluency is attained in Hebrew (Shumsky and Shumsky, 1969, p. 13).

Most of the learning activities stress vocabulary acquisition as the main priority. The vocabulary exercises in the workbooks are similar to those found in *Olam Gadol* such as

providing words that the student needs to choose based on what fits the context. The first text tries to teach two hundred thirty-six new words, the second, three hundred eleven, and the third, two hundred ninety new words. In addition, the exercises in the workbook correspond to the stories in the text. The exercises are to be done prior to reading the story. There is some exposure to singular and plural nouns and adjectives but they are taught as vocabulary and grammatical rules are not emphasized. Vocabulary is also reinforced by having more discussions in Hebrew. The teacher is provided with a number of content-based questions in Hebrew and English that promote discussions intended to spark dialogue. For example, Ahavat Chesed, focuses on a boy named Moshe who doesn't speak up against a prejudice boy because he wants to play ball. An example of a Hebrew question provided is למה משה לא אומר דבר? ("Why doesn't Moshe say a thing?")

The two books in the cartoon series, A Cartoon Adventure and More Cartoon Adventures, also have an accompanying filmstrip that recounts the stories using the same illustrations. The authors indicate that the level of difficulty of these texts is not different from the other text books in *Mah Tov*. Once Asot Mishpat is completed, the student will be able to read the cartoon texts with little difficulty. The method, however is different in these texts than in either the *Olam Gadol* or the other *Mah Tov* texts, not only because of the filmstrips, but because of placement of the exercises in relation to the stories. In the other texts, the approach was to familiarize the students with the vocabulary first and then read the story. In the cartoon texts, the students are told to first read the stories and then do the exercises. The first texts require that students memorize vocabulary first and then read the

story, whereas the cartoon texts encourage the students to understand vocabulary through the context of the story.

3. *Mah Tov* Content

According to the authors, the target audience for the *Mah Tov* series, like *Olam Gadol* is geared toward middle elementary school students. The type of Hebrew in all of the texts is modern Hebrew. The animated pictures in the first three texts show people of all ages yet the main characters are children. The two cartoon adventure texts indicate in their "Dear Teacher" letter that its contents are appropriate for all ages, from elementary age children to adults (Shumsky and Shumsky, 1983, p. v). The main characters of these texts are both children and adults. I believe that adults will not be interested in learning with an entire book of cartoons, therefore I believe that The Shmueli Family books are more for children.

The goals and objectives of this series are not exclusively learning modern spoken or written Hebrew. Like *Olam Gadol, Mah Tov* strives to teach values. The difference here is that the values are Biblically based as opposed to the secular universal ones found in *Olam Gadol*. The entire content of the first three books in this series is based on spiritual values. This is defined according to values found in Micah, 6:8: "He hath showed thee, O man, What is Good, and what the Lord requires of thee, but to Do Justice (Asot Mishpat) and Love Mercy (Ahavat Chesed), and to Walk Humbly with God (Hatznea Lechet). It is these three themes that serve as the base for the content of each text as well as their titles.

In one text, Asot Mishpat, the spiritual values expressed in the text's ten stories are connected with various aspects of justice. One example in the first one, "Who is Worse,"

the plot focuses on two boys who give directions to a man who needs to get to the bus station. One boy just gives directions which he later is told are incorrect. He doesn't care that he gave wrong directions because his priority is to play ball. The second boy isn't sure of the way but gives directions to the man anyway. In contrast to the other boy though, he offers to accompany the man. The story ends with the question of which boy did the right thing. Questions are provided to the teacher both in Hebrew and English to explore this with the students.

Ahavat Chesed, contains ten more stories that all focus on the spiritual value of charity (Ibid., 1969, p. 3). One story, "Miriam Does Not Say Thank You," focuses on a girl named Miriam who is poor and who dresses in shabby clothing. A girl named Ruth talks with her mother about not liking Miriam because of her impolite behavior. Her mother convinces Ruth that Miriam may be bitter because she is poor and convinces Ruth to give Miriam some newer looking clothing, which she does. Miriam does not say "thank-you," which leads the teacher to have a discussion with students on the many aspects of giving and receiving charity. The teacher is provided with discussion questions both in Hebrew and English.

The final text, of the first 3 books of the *Mah Tov* series is called Hatznea Lechet, and it contains ten stories that focus on the concept of humility. "The House on the Mountain," deals with a talented builder who happens to be a wonderful singer. He tries to decide which of these two trades will he be most remembered by. He decides to build a huge house on a hill as this would guarantee his place in people's memories. The job is tedious. He returns

to the town and suddenly he learns that he is forgotten and his singing has been forgotten. He can't build nor can he sing. He learns, through humility ,that he truly wants to be in the village and to sing with the people and that is exactly what he does.

Each of the three texts contains a story that focuses on the town of Chelm, a fictional Jewish shtetl often characterized in Jewish stories. These stories are humorous and have illustrations of men and women wearing traditional Hasidic clothing. These are presented in cartoon fashion in shades of red and black. The story "Justice in Chelm," from Asot Mishpat uses humor to show in a very literal way how justice cannot be bought. The story begins with the poor people complaining to the mayor that there is no justice in Chelm, based on the fact that the rich have everything and the poor have nothing. It is suggested that the town try to "buy justice," which they try to do. They actually pay for justice which is delivered in a box. They learn that the concept of justice cannot be bought as they open the box and find it empty.

There are many other values that are found in the *Mah Tov* texts. Many stories focus on different ways of giving. For example, one story deals with the notion of a person who gives of himself in non-monetary ways. Another story focuses on a person who stands up for the rights of others even when it conflicts with his own immediate welfare and safety (Shumsky and Shumsky, 1970, p. 14). Other values expressed in the texts include, universal acceptance of all people, having a positive self-image and more. *Mah Tov*, though more connected with Biblically based values, doesn't have much content relating to the state of Israel. However, in the third workbook, there is a map of modern Israel and students are to

identify parts of Israel by using a Hebrew description that is given. For example, "Jerusalem is, (choose one) on the mountain, near the sea, in the desert, in the valley. In Story Ten, a theological theme is presented that features an ant seeking the "Master of the Universe." He asks many if they are the "Master," but they all say "no" except for a man. The man says that the true "Master of the Universe" can not be seen . The text continues by describing characteristics of God (Shumsky and Shumsky, 1972. p. 88). The Shmueli Family cartoon texts are less spiritual in content and reflect modern human interactions and emotions. For example in the story "Father and the Ball," a father is playing ball with his son and the ball bumps into people who get angry (Shumsky and Shumsky, 1977, p. 16).

In the twentieth century, the UAHC created three curricula that focused on instruction of modern Hebrew language. They were all substantial curricula with multiple texts based on non-traditional methods. In contrast to the traditional grammar-translation method, the UAHC's Hebrew curricula offered more "Natural" approaches that sought to teach Hebrew with meaning and comprehension, along with reading, writing, and speaking skills. Students were ideally motivated to learn about Jewish values in simple Hebrew, and thus be propelled to learn more. The authors created their own theoretical approaches that never went beyond these texts. There are no other curriculum called the "Play Way" besides the Gamoran-Friedland *Gilenu* series of the 1930's. While stories and texts are frequently used for general foreign language instruction, there hasn't been a specific approach called the "story approach" or the "Children's Literature Approach" since the *Olam Gadol* or *Mah Tov* curricula of the 1960's and early 1970's.

VIII. Reform Hebrew Education Implications

This thesis began by addressing the status of Hebrew education in Reform supplementary schools. In brief, Hebrew education in these schools has been ineffective for decades. In light of the history of conflicts among Reform thinkers over the validity of Hebrew, it makes sense that Hebrew education might suffer. In the twentieth century, there were a number of events that could have triggered a positive revolution in Hebrew education. They include the birth of Israel, the revival of modern Hebrew, the creation of some curricula, and new approaches for foreign language instruction. Still the supplementary schools struggled and continue to struggle in Hebrew education. In light of the material reviewed in this thesis, how can we understand that there has been little improvement in the area of Hebrew instruction in Reform supplementary schools?

One reason for this deficit is that the structure of the supplementary school has rarely supported the conditions necessary for effective Hebrew instruction. Only in the past few decades, through foreign language acquisition research, have some of these conditions become clear. Some of those conditions include: motivation to learn, the student's attitude toward the language, having meta-cognitive knowledge of how to learn a foreign language, regular exposure and practice of the language, exposure to native users, and having clear teaching objectives (Crystal, 1997, p. 375).

There are some structural qualities that make it difficult to meet these conditions within supplementary schools. One such condition is the limited and inconsistent hours of instruction. This prevents students from getting the necessary exposure to Hebrew.

Furthermore, Hebrew has never been a priority in the curricula structure which always showed a preference for subjects related to morals and ethics. Also, most supplementary schools teach prayer book Hebrew, but most do not provide regular practice opportunities through worship services as a part of the structure. This example also shows that students learn Hebrew without relevance, purpose and meaning.

Another reason for the lack of progress in Hebrew instruction is that the Reform movement has not implemented Hebrew curricula recommendations made throughout the twentieth century. In the 1920's and 30's, Gamoran recommended that more 'meaningful' methods of instruction replace the traditional rote grammar translation methods common in the Sunday schools. The surveys done in the 1960's, and again in the 1997 Joseph Report, indicate that the rote grammar translation methods continued to dominate the supplementary schools. The Glasner study of the early 1960's made content recommendations that were not followed. He recommended that Hebrew study focus on the Hebrew Bible, Prayer Book, Bar Mitzvah preparation, and modern spoken Hebrew. Though the UAHC's *Olam Gadol* and *Mah Tov* curricula tended to focus on these areas, the 1997 Joseph Report indicated that ninety-four percent of UAHC affiliated congregations taught Hebrew mainly in preparation for prayer services that generally never occurred in these schools (Joseph, 1997, p. 58). Hence, even though the curricula was used, as evidenced by the multiple reprinted editions, (*Gilenu* was reprinted into the 1960's) it is unclear why prayer book Hebrew remained, and continues to remain, the main focus of these schools, especially if there is not opportunity to practice the Hebrew learned. Clearly the recommendations were not followed.

Another reason explaining the challenges within Reform supplementary schools is that there has not been enough empirical research that can help determine the most effective approach to Hebrew instruction in these settings. The studies that were conducted focused on obtaining a general picture of the status of the Reform school. (For example, the size of the school, how the curriculum content broken down, etc.) There are now a number of foreign language approaches in addition to grammar-translation and the "Natural" approach. They include, the Direct Method, the Audio Lingual Approach, Total-Physical Response, the Communicative Approach, and the Whole language Approach, among others (Crystal. 1997, 378). As a movement, there has not been a scientific effort to evaluate the current methods of Hebrew education in these settings.

A final component explaining the current state of Hebrew education is what I believe to be the most important one because, if confronted, it could help in overcoming the above challenges. The Reform movement has had no consensus among its leadership regarding the validity of Hebrew in general, and for Reform Jews. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries were filled with debates over the validity and relevance of Hebrew for Reform Jews. Historically, this also makes sense because Hebrew has almost always been used in ways irrelevant to many Jews lives. This lack of commitment to Hebrew has been reflected in the curriculum of supplementary schools in which Hebrew instruction has been secondary to Bible, morals, and ethics. The many recommendations to change this, made as a result of studies throughout the century were rarely implemented.

In order for the Reform movement to reach a consensus regarding Hebrew instruction, it is important to first determine the importance and validity of Hebrew itself. Hebrew is a "symbol of Jewish ethnic and national identity" (Spolsky, 1989, p. 67). Hebrew is also connected to Jewish cultural identity (Morahg, 1993, p. 194). If Jews know Hebrew, then they have an authentic link to their Jewish cultural roots. For many, Hebrew satisfies the need for an ethnic identity within a secular world. "Hebrew alone can give children immediate access to their heritage" (Wisse, 1993, p. 273).

One way that this link to Jewish heritage can be made is embedded in the intricacies of Hebrew grammar. For example, the sentence, יושב הוא, 'He is sitting' can also be translated as 'He is a sitter,' thus defining the person through his action (Jacobson, 1993, 212). This nuance could not be understood in translation. Another example is in the verb עולה, which means literally, 'ascend' is also used in Hebrew to describe a person who immigrates to Israel. To associate this verb with immigrating to Israel, reflects the high value placed on Israel (Jacobson, 1993, 222). One ascends to Israel when he/she moves there.

Hebrew Education is important because it provides a historic link to the Jewish people and to the Bible. To lose Hebrew would mean to lose that link. To not promote Hebrew education would mean to cut off students in supplementary schools from a more authentic view of their Jewish heritage. The Reform movement needs to come to terms with the importance of Hebrew and turn this into effective Hebrew education.

Even if the majority of the Reform movement leaders did decide that Hebrew was valid, implementation of effective Hebrew instruction would be difficult because of the lack of necessary foreign language learning conditions in supplementary schools. In a sense, there exists a 'catch-22' situation -- Hebrew needs to be considered valid if the Reform movement wishes to improve the status of Hebrew education, but even if they unanimously declared the validity of Hebrew, the learning conditions still would not support effective instruction. Nevertheless, is important for Reform movement leaders --educators, cantors, rabbis, and lay leaders -- to not only learn Hebrew, but to confront their feelings regarding the validity of Hebrew. Only then will there be the motivation to develop and implement effective Hebrew instruction curricula within Reform supplementary schools.

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