DIGITAL RABBI

by

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Digest

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Judaism has survived millennia because it has been able to successfully respond to the challenges of changing media. The rabbi has consistently been at the center of these changes as a guide for the community in periods of stability and transition. Our current culture presents tremendous challenges to the future of Judaism. Many of these challenges are a direct result of immense changes in media technology. Media has affected the role of authority, the participation of laypeople, the relationship between learner and content, and the nature of Jewish ecology.

This thesis is an examination of the role of the contemporary rabbi through the lens of the interdisciplinary field known as Media Ecology. The thesis assesses how changes in mediums affect the environment of Judaism. I explain central concepts in the theses of foundational scholars in Media Ecology. I explain how changes in mediums affect changes in: authority, participation of the layperson and the relationship between the learner and content. I provide a survey of the current cultural trends developing in the transition to digital mediums, their Jewish expressions and their affect on culture. I continue by focusing on challenges to democratic access, quality, and authority due to transitioning mediums. Finally I examine the role of the rabbi in a media literate Jewish environment.

Contents

Introduction

200,000 years ago, one human being turns to the other and grunts, the other grunts back; they agree. 30,000 years ago, in a cave located in what would eventually be called Southern France, a human being dips his fingers into charcoal and begins drawing animals and handprints on the walls. 4,250 years ago, along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, a tax collector sticks his stylus into dampened clay, recording that taxes of sheep and goat were delivered. 2,579 years ago, a demoralized psalmist sits by the same rivers and pens on papyrus, "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat, sat and wept, as we thought of Zion." 2,100 years ago, in Alexandria, a librarian places a scroll of Torah into its proper shelf. 1,800 years ago, a scribe in Rome copies words of *Mishnah* from a scroll onto a codex. 400 years ago, an old printer runs his printing press producing a first edition of the *Shulchan Aruch*. 40 years ago, a professor, uses his typewriter to produce the phrase, "the medium is the message..."

The year is now 2008; a young rabbi sits at his desk. He calls his wife, while scrolling his curser down his favorite website; she tells him that he needs to buy milk on his way home. So he picks up his PDA and makes a note of it with his stylus. He is completing his sermon, copying a verse from a book on his lap. He types a few more words, and then hits the print button and sheets spew out of his printer. As he gets up to leave he presses his finger to the screen, turning his computer off. A single finger print is smudged on the screen, and remains.

This thesis will apply the theoretical framework known as 'media ecology' to an analysis of the role of the contemporary and future rabbinate. Media Ecology is, "the

matter of how media of communication affects human perception. understanding. feeling.
and value; and how our interaction with media facilitates or impedes our chances of
survival. The word ecology implies the study of environments: their structure. content.
and impact on people" (Postman 1990). Media Ecology is a way of studying the impact
of changing media technology on the way people think. feel. behave and organize
themselves. For the purposes of this paper. the ecology will be Jewish culture. The rapid
movement into digital mediums is having a tremendous consequence on the 'ecology' of
Judaism in three specific ways: First. changes in mediums have affected the role of
authority in Judaism. Second. changes in mediums have affected the degree of
participatory input of the layperson. Third. changes in mediums have changed the
relationship between the learner and content. Fourth. changes in mediums have changed
the nature of the Jewish ecology. traditionally consisting of rabbi. content and layperson.
Fifth, changes in mediums have provided the rabbi with new opportunities to extend
themselves into the Jewish ecology.

In Chapter 1, I will briefly explain the field of Media Ecology and why it is
significant for the study of Judaism in the past and present. To that end, I will explain
some of the basic theses of Media Ecology's founding scholars. In Chapter 2. I will
provide a survey of the current cultural trends developing in the transition to digital
mediums. In Chapter 3, I will assess some of the current thoughts on the changes to
universal media ecology due to changes in media technology and their subsequent impact
on Judaism. Specifically, I will focus on challenges to democratic access, quality, and
authority. In Chapter 4, I will examine the current effect of the digital revolution on
religious education.

Chapter 1

Judaism and Media Ecology

For centuries Jews have been referred to as 'the people of the book.' Indeed Jews have written books, indeed Jews have read books, and undeniably the book has played an integral role in the development of Jewish culture. However, this title, 'people of the book,' fails to fully attest to the scope of mediums of communication and transformations used by Jews to insure its successful transitions in time and space. Rather, it does attest to the fact that the Jews have made the Bible transcend the media into which it has been placed. Jews have been the people of the word, the scroll, the codex, the book, and most recently the internet. A goal of Judaism has been to pass on its living culture; its theology, Law, customs, and history, from generation to generation. This 'information' has traveled using whatever 'vehicle' or 'medium' has been most successful or available. Therefore the Jews are not, 'the people of the book,' they are 'the people of the medium'.

Presently, the world is in the midst of a digital revolution akin to Gutenberg's invention of the movable type printing press. The consequence of the printing press, according to scholars of media ecology, was a restructuring of relationship between political or theological movements and the individual. Regional languages were harmonized into a fixed national language-giving rise to nationalism. At the same time, greater access to information led to greater resistance to traditional sources of authority (Kertcher and Margalit 2006). Therefore, the relationship between author and audience was forever changed. While information contained within a book was the same as it had been when passed from scribe to recipient, the audience was now more numerous. This precipitated a multiplicity of individual perspectives resulting in tremendous change in

the religious and political authorities of the Western world and their relationship to the individual (Rushkoff 2003). An example of these changes was stated originally by Susan L. Eisenstein in her two volume work The Printing Press as an Agent of Change, in which she outlined the ways increased literacy and the reach of printed texts such as "Luthor's 95 Theses" changed beliefs about the Bible and traditional Catholic authorities and was therefore the impetus for the Protestant reformation.

Movement into digital mediums is having a similar affect today. It has changed the way we receive and transmit knowledge and the way we learn and teach. Traditional 'key holders' of information have been rapidly changing. For instance, 'bloggers' have wrestled control of information away from media conglomerates. In the academic sphere, wikis (such as Wikipedia) have presented challenges to academics and have raised questions regarding who has the authority to determine the merit of content. In the realm of publishing, the expense of publication is no longer a barrier to any individual or organization placing information online for the consumption of the masses. The results of these new media forms are new challenges to traditional sources of authority.

The movement from traditional authorities has extended into religious realms as well, such as Reform Judaism. The rise of non-denominational information providing Jewish web sites and social networking sites has created a challenge to traditional denominational structures in Judaism. As a result, the role of the rabbi, as well as scholars as sources of information and guidance to Jewish way of life is changing in this new environment. The degree of ecological change in society is similar to the changes made by the Gutenberg press. These changes have had an impact on the rabbinic profession. We are at the beginning of this revolution; therefore, we are merely at the

start of understanding the ramifications of this social change and mastering new mediums. In order to best understand the changes the Jewish world is currently undergoing, there must be an understanding of the effects that media has on culture. A particularly useful method of study in this area is Media Ecology. Several scholars and schools have differing opinions about what Media Ecology is and how broad the field should be. However, at its most basic it is a field that builds on much of the work of Marshal McLuhan and his predecessor Harold Innis. Media Ecology is an approach to a field of study that is interdisciplinary, and through their participation, many scholars have added to this field though it is difficult to claim that any one scholar belongs exclusively to it. There are departments at universities that are devoted to some form of Media Ecology, each with its central scholars. While the field of Media Ecology has extended itself to many campuses, the two most predominant centers are in Toronto and New York. Though there have been several attempts to define Media Ecology, for the sake of brevity, Neil Postman, who established the program in Media Ecology at New York University in 1971, defined media ecology in these terms:

> Media ecology looks into the matter of how media of communication
> affect human perception, understanding, feeling, and value; and how our
> interaction with media facilitates or impedes our chances of survival. The
> word ecology implies the study of environments: their structure, content,
> and impact on people. An environment is, after all, a complex message
> system which imposes on human beings certain ways of thinking, feeling,
> and behaving. It structures what we can see and say and, therefore, do. It
> assigns roles to us and insists on our playing them. It specifies what we
> are permitted to do and what we are not. Sometimes, as in the case of a
> courtroom, or classroom, or business office, the specifications are explicit
> and formal. In the case of media environments (e.g., books, radio, film,
> television, etc.), the specifications are more often implicit and informal,
> half concealed by our assumption that what we are dealing with is not an
> environment but merely a machine. Media ecology tries to make these
> specifications explicit. It tries to find out what roles media force us to

play, how media structure what we are seeing, why media make us feel and act as we do. Media ecology is the study of media as environments (Media Ecology Association 2007).

When theories of Media Ecology are applied to the Jewish world, one can study the impact of new media forms on the roles in Jewish society. The theories allow an examination of the implicit role of the rabbi in an environment defined by the use of a blog or the role of the teacher in an environment where instantaneous information access is possible. The field of Media Ecology allows one to understand that with new mediums come new roles. In order to better understand Media Ecology it may be helpful to examine some of the central themes in the theses of its founding scholars.

Harold Innis

Harold Innis is considered to be the first scholar of the school of Media Ecology. Innis was born in 1894 near Hamilton, Ontario and graduated from McMaster University just before World War I, where he fought in France. Upon his return, Innis studied political economy at the University of Chicago where he did his PhD (Soules 1996). The key concepts that Harold Innis contributed in the early 20th century stem from his early doctoral work, 'A History of the Canadian Pacific Railway' (1923). In this work, Innis claimed that, "The construction of the railroad was both a cause and an effect of that civilization's ability and proclivity to conquer geographical barriers. Innis began to develop ideas about technological nationalism and the economic relationship between urban and rural Canada that were key to his staples theory" (Gabriele and Stober 2007). Innis' staples theory suggests that, "the Canadian economy tended to rely on the production of single commodities: fur, lumber, mining, agriculture, energy. As a result, Canada found itself in a dependent and vulnerable relationship to the major

manufacturing nations, first Britain, then the U.S" (Soules 1996). Pertinent to this study is that his earlier work on resources and power informed his later work on communications and power structures. The study of Canada's response to the problem of the vastness of the country and the difficulties in solidifying its political, cultural, and economic character by establishing a national railroad across Canada's territory, naturally disposed itself to Innis' later theories regarding communications technology and the Nation States' ability to extend its influence into space and time (Gabriele and Stober 2007).

Harold Innis applied the dimensions of space and time to the study of various media. Innis believed that, "A medium of communication has an important influence on the dissemination of knowledge over space and over time and it becomes necessary to study its characteristics in order to appraise its influence in its cultural setting" (Innis 1999, 33). He then divided various forms of media into time-binding and space-binding types. Time-binding media were those forms of media that transcended generations and time. These mediums tended to be heavier or more durable and include clay or stone tablets, hand-copied manuscripts on parchment or vellum, and oral sources. Innis associated these media with the 'customary, the sacred, and the moral.' The cultures that predominantly used these mediums tended to be hierarchical. Oral culture was also a time-binding media as it can be transmitted over generations (Gabriele and Stober 2007). Oral communication is pre-eminently time-binding since it emphasizes continuity and community. Oral communication builds social organization locally, tends to foster cooperation as opposed to competition, and directs activity in the interests of the community (Babe 2000, 74). It is the community enterprise of engaging in education and

sharing values through discourse that makes the medium time-binding. Innis associated the space-binding media as more ephemeral (Contributors, Harold Innis's communications theories 2008). Their purpose is to obliterate space. The forms of these media are radio, television, and mass circulation newspapers. Innis associates these forms of media with "secular and territorial societies and facilitate the expansion of empire over space" (Gabriele and Stober 2007).

Additionally, Innis believed that there was a tension between these two types of media. For example, "The innovation of writing... led to the first attempts to record oral culture: the tradition of writing considered oral culture preserved once it was recorded or written down. However, in the culture of writing, while the past is preserved for future generations, the effort to record tradition does not necessarily mean that society is learning from past knowledge" (Gabriele and Stober 2007). Innis believed that the purpose of writing was innitially to preserve content in a time- binding way; he called this 'transpersonal memory', but writing cannot remain as a time-binding medium for long. The reason for that fact is that writing "enables and requires readers to go 'beyond the world of conceptual relationship.' Writing, in other words, enlarges the time-and-space universe beyond things remembered and places known, making the written world ultimately, subversive of time binding authority" (Babe 2000, 75). Reading written text, for example, is engagement with what could be considered a space binding medium, however, in Barry W. Holtz's book, Back to the Sources, Holtz, identified that particularly in the Jewish tradition, reading written space-binding mediums, and learning are separate concepts: "We sit *alone* with a book as we read. Learning or studying can imply something very different. It is important to remember that most traditional Jewish

'reading' occurs in a social context – the class, or the study session" (Holtz 1984, 18). Through the process of reading in a social, oral environment, written text maintained its oral time-binding quality in the Jewish world.

An example in Judaism of time-binding media is the system of laws and traditions expounded in the Talmud. Though eventually written down, the content was mainly a recording of an oral tradition. Innis taught that a society based on such media can often be hierarchical, and certainly this is descriptive of the world of the early Rabbis. As Judaism spread out there was a need to establish a system of authority and media that would transcend larger distance. Therefore there was a need for Judaism to utilize space-binding media, ranging from rabbinic responsa written on paper, to printed prayer books, bound law codes, books and today- the use of the internet. These forms of media are brought about in a Jewish society that values rational linear thinking. This is consistent with Innis' views of a society based on space-binding media. As Judaism moves into the media of the internet, this dynamic is once again shifting.

Influenced by his early studies in economics, Innis also spoke of a notion of monopoly of knowledge. According to Menahem Blondheim of Hebrew University:

> When certain media or their knowledge products dominate society's communication environment, the peculiar dynamics of oligopoly amplify and perpetuate the dominance of those media and the bodies of knowledge associated with them. Such a monopoly blocks the emergence of alternatives and ultimately enhances the effects of the privileged medium and knowledge skills on society and on its political, social, and cultural profile (Blondheim 2004).

Examples of those who thrive in such a system are professors, rabbis, and professionals who have all attempted at some points in history to monopolize certain kinds of information. As Innis suggests, the oligopoly will often move to reject new media due to

being threatened. This is evident among professor who refuses to allow a student to use Wikipedia (which studies have shown can be as accurate as encyclopedias (Chesney 2006)). or the rabbis who may feel threatened by 'My Jewish Learning.' Additionally, Jewish WebPages on the internet and Jewish social commentary are predominantly written by 'non professional Jews.' By the virtue of new media forms and the success rate of such commentators, this group has in fact become a new form of layperson challenging the authority of 'professional Jews'.

Marshal McLuhan

Where Innis saw communication technology for the most part affecting social organization and culture, the next important thesis of the school of media ecology, was developed by Marshal McLuhan. He saw its principal effect on sensory organization and thought (Carey 1969). Marshal McLuhan was a communication theorist and considered to be the most central figure in the school of Media Ecology, as well as a professor of English at the University of Toronto. McLuhan became famous internationally for his books and studies on the mass media's effects on thoughts and behaviors (Zingrone, The Canadian Encyclopedia 2007).

McLuhan's thesis stated that the media affected sensory organization and thought. This is the meaning of, 'The medium is the message.' This well known phrase is probably McLuhan's most misunderstood statements. McLuhan did not believe that 'message' referred to content as so many others have stated; rather the message is the change in culture and sensory organization that a new medium brings about. Mark Federman of the McLuhan Program in Culture and Technology explains it this way:

> We can know the nature and characteristics of anything we conceive or
> create (medium) by virtue of the changes - often unnoticed and non-
> obvious changes - that they effect (message.) McLuhan warns us that we
> are often distracted by the content of a medium (which, in almost all cases,
> is another distinct medium in itself.) He writes, "it is only too typical that
> the "content" of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium."
> (McLuhan 9) And it is the character of the medium that is its potency or
> effect - its message. In other words, "This is merely to say that the
> personal and social consequences of any medium - that is, of any
> extension of ourselves - result from the new scale that is introduced into
> our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology."
> (Federman n.d.)

An example of the type of study that McLuhan was interested in using this theory, were

the changes in perception created by new media, such as the electronic media, competing

with the print media. However, from a Jewish perspective it serves to discuss this

principal from the context of Jewish history. Following the invention of Gutenberg's

printing press in the 15th century, the world began undergoing significant socio-political

changes. Perhaps one the most famous political changes that has been attributed to the

advent of the printing press has been the Protestant Reformation of the 16th Century.

This theory was most recently put forward by Elizabeth Eisenstein, a media ecology

scholar.[1]

  At the same time as the technologically driven Protestant Reformation took place,

Joseph Karo wrote and published the *Shulchan Aruch*. The *Shulchan Aruch* "follows the

'Tur,' the plan and arrangement of which were adopted in the Shul an Aruk.

Caro…generally reduces the Halakah to rules without giving every difference of opinion.

In making rules his authorities were the three codifiers Alfasi, Maimonides, and Asher b.

Jehiel. An opinion held by any two of them is adopted by Caro, unless the majority of

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[1] The scholarly, interdisciplinary exploration of the sociocultural impact of print and publishing from its inception to the present day. Specifically its impact, as perceived by Eisenstein, on the advancement of science and on the evolution of .the thought of Renaissance humanists and Reformation theologians.

later authors follow the opinion of the third. in which case his opinion is accepted"
(Schechter and Ginzberg 2002).

The *Shulchan Aruch* became so popular among the Jews of its time and beyond,
that it delineated an epoch in Jewish scholarship and legal practice. Those composers of
Responsa that preceded the *Shulchan Aruch* are called the *Rishonim*, whereas those who
came after are called the *Achronim* . Rabbi Berel Wein. in examining the cultural effects
of the printing press on Jewish culture writes in his book Triumph of Survival:

> As a result (of the publication of the Shulchan Aruch) knowledge of the
> complexities of the Jewish law and a definitive opinion regarding the
> practical behavior of a Jew became accessible to the masses. Many felt
> that having a Shulchan Aruch in one's house was to a great extent, like
> having one's own private rabbi available for consultation. The advent of
> the printing press made the book a mass seller and it took immediate root
> in the soil of Jewish life. However, every action begets a reaction. Many
> Talmudic scholars opposed the authority of the Shulchan Aruch and
> claimed that it would interfere with true scholarship and research, since
> scholars would not investigate the sources as rigorously as before. They
> also objected to its easy availability to the masses who they felt, would
> defeat the intent of the book due to their ignorance. Finally they were
> concerned that the effect of the Shulchan Aruch would be to undermine
> the authority and position of the local rabbi, who could either be ignored
> because of the accessibility of the rabbinic decision through the use of the
> Shulchan Aruch or be refuted if his opinion did not appear to conform
> directly with the word of the Shulchan Aruch. (Berel 1990, 18)

By ignoring the content of the medium one can examine how the medium itself
transformed cultural notions around authority. In this case, the printed content changed
the ecology around learning. The Shulchan Aruch raised the possibility that every
layperson could become an authority on Jewish issues because of the increased
availability of the content. They could engage with the information but, would they be
able to gain knowledge? The popular content became the space-binding content of the
printed word while the *Achronim*, the rabbinic authorities following the development of

the *Shulchan Aruch*, granted more weight and decisive authority to the time-binding oral medium of the Talmud. (Schechter and Ginzberg 2002)

By Applying Innis' theories, we can see that more authority was given to the Talmud because it was the preferred medium of the oligopoly at the time, and by the nature of the learning environment that surrounded it, the time-binding activity of communal education guaranteed its use as a trans-generational vehicle of knowledge, whereas the *Shulchan Aruch* could be accessed for information on one's own. Applying McLuhan's theories, the printing press allowed for more copies of texts such as the *Shulchan Aruch* to be accessible to a greater number of people, therefore the culture of learning changed. When those who possessed the content could access it without the rabbi or teacher, the relationship not only changed between the individual and the content, but between the individual and the community.

McLuhan felt that it was important to study mediums because he perceived media to be the extension of the body, and media permits us to experience the world with a scope and depth otherwise impossible. In McLuhan's conception, the result of the extension of man by use of the electronic media is the global village. According to the Library and Archives Canada website, the theory of the Global village is that electronic communication will have the affect of shrinking distances, "while increasing opportunities for talk and cross-cultural sharing. This idea is closely linked to the notion that electronic technologies produce audile-tactile environments that have the potential to return to a mode of perceiving, thinking and interacting that is more characteristic of oral cultures than print cultures" (D. S. Gabriele 2007). The result of the Global Village

would be that communication technology will eventually permit people to become increasingly involved in each others' lives and therefore eventually become one family.

With the advent of the Internet, McLuhan has become increasingly relevant as a foundational scholar in the school of Media Ecology. Some have said that, "Marshall McLuhan's lasting contribution is his vision of the ways in which history and culture and individuals are modified and, to some extent, determined by technology" (Andrews 1995). As McLuhan said, "We shape our tools, and they in turn shape us." This view is consistent with Technological determinism. Technological determinism is a theory that technology follows a traceable and predictable course that is not ultimately deterred by cultural or political influence, and that technology effects society (Contributors, Technological determinism 2008).

The rabbinate has survived countless changes over two millennia because of its ability to respond to shifting societal pressures surrounding them. Technological innovation has in no small part contributed to the pressures that the Jewish people have confronted. Judaism has continuously responded to the pressures by adaptation. Like the social changes ushered in by the printing press, the internet is transforming our culture today in ways we might not be able to fully understand at the moment. In *Pirkei Avot* 4:27 Rabbi Meir said: "do not look at the flask but what is in it." If the flask is the medium and what is inside is the content, then in this paper I suggest the opposite. We must take note of the flask. Judaism will be shaped for better or worse by the mediums in which it communicates values. By better understanding the mediums being used, one can better understand the shape of Judaism to come.

Chapter 2

People of the Medium

The Internet is a marvelous result of technological innovation. It has enabled the development of various forms of media to be communicated instantaneously to anyone connected through a computer. Like the development of all the communication technologies of the past there will be profound cultural changes due to the new technology felt in society at large. Digital media will undoubtedly have a significant effect on Jewish culture. The scholars of the field of media ecology have provided the tools to examine current and probable ramifications of these new mediums. This chapter will focus on digital multimedia, its affect on global culture, and its influence on Jewish culture. In the past, one might have watched a television show on a subject, or read a book, or formed an interest group through community postings in a non-digital environment, but each form of these mediums were separate, and each medium had a different cultural impact. However, unlike the media of the past where a particular medium was found in a singular device, digital media presents a variety of forms of media at once through a single processing device. For example, the computer can provide information about a subject through text, video, and social networking software, all from the same device. Due to the differing nature of mediums available, the social ramifications become altogether mixed. Therefore, multiple-mediums lead to multiple but overarching social ramifications.

People of the Book

There are few mediums that have captured the imagination of man as much as books. Books have been the medium of choice for Jewish people for centuries. One

need only look at the volumes upon volumes of books in Jewish libraries to understand the value placed on this medium by the Jewish people. However, the book in its traditional form is under threat. The National Endowment for the Arts conducted a poll and released a report in 2004 entitled, "Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America". The report found that reading proficiency had declined across the board and that nearly half of Americans ages 18 to 24 read no books for pleasure (Bradshaw 2004). Some have suggested that the reason for such a staggering decline is the growing competition from digital mediums (Cole 2006). but according to a recent survey by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, "More than half of Americans visited a library in the past year with many of them drawn in by the computers rather than the books" (Vorman 2007). Additionally, "Of the 53 percent of U.S. adults who said they visited a library in 2007, the biggest users were young adults aged 18 to 30 in the tech-loving group known as Generation Y" (Vorman 2007). Though reading for pleasure is on the wane, there still appears to be a desire for information. Information is no longer only found between bound pages evidenced by world libraries and volumes upon volumes of book become digitized and placed on Google at the rate of about one million books per year (Kelly 2006).

With new technological developments such as E-Readers, digital books are becoming more appealing to read. They are a far cry from the glaring computer monitors from which most digital content is currently read. So what is to become of the book? It has been suggested by Priscilla Coit Murphy, that "History has thus far shown that no new medium has ever completely replaced an earlier medium, although some have been profoundly altered from their original form" (Priscilla 1999). Judaism is a culture that

obsessively preserves mediums. Long after the scroll is used in daily study, Judaism

finds a place for it as a ritual role in religious services. Long after the need for the oral

recitation of Torah (a practice conducted due to a limited number of Torah scrolls and no

books to read for one's self), the Jewish people have preserved the ritual role in religious

services. Jews have long understood ritual as a vehicle for passing values from one

generation to the next; their performance can be considered a time-binding form of

media. Murphy's comment applies especially well to Judaism where one new medium

has never fully replaced another medium, and ritual often extends to preservation of

archaic forms. There is an implicit understanding among Jews that these preserved

mediums are thought of as possessing an abiding nature through which any change would

distance the receiver from the accurate or 'authentic' content.

In a similar vein, National Journal Media critic, William Powers, argued that

paper becomes part of the content, based on the way it interacts with the brain. Paper,

according to Powers, is understood to be a technology. Additionally he points to the

inability of paper to be 'refreshed' like a website and paper's inability to be connected as

a reason for its appeal (Powers, Long Live Paper! 2007). Furthermore, when analyzing

the book as a medium compared to the various digital mediums to determine their

advantages, researchers Sellen and Harper found that paper has four affordances that

specifically assist reading:

> (1) Tangibility. This refers to the way that we navigate a paper document
> or book using our eyes and hands together. "When a document is on
> paper, we can see how long it is, we can flick through the pages . . . we
> can bend over a corner while searching for a section elsewhere. In other
> words, paper helps us work our way through documents."
> (2) Spatial Flexibility. When working with multiple paper texts, they can
> be spread out around a large area or reduced to fit a smaller space,
> depending on our needs.

(3) Tailorability. With paper it's easy to underline, scribble in the margins and otherwise annotate a text we are reading.
(4) Manipulability. Because paper can be moved around, one can shuffle effectively among different paper sources, for example putting one page aside in order to concentrate on another. (Powers, Hamlet's Blackberry:Why Paper Is Eternal 2006)

Another important quality that books have is that the "printed book is by far the most durable and reliable backup technology we have. Printed books require no mediating device to read and thus are immune to technological obsolescence" (Kelly 2006). However, if statistics are accurate, the use of books is dropping while information read on the internet and other digital mediums is exploding. Where is the book lacking? There is a school of thought that says that paper is a container for information or merely a technology of convenience.[2] An argument such as this is in opposition to the theory of Marshal McLuhan that explained, "The medium is the message." He went on to explain that, "the personal and social consequences of any medium-that is, of any extension of ourselves-result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology" (McLuhan 2005, 9). Applying the same rationale to the transfer of information from a book to a web site, the information one might read in the book and the computer is irrelevant. What is relevant is the altered relationship between the societal roles that come as a result of that transition.

This should not deter one from acknowledging the unique strengths of digital mediums as a standalone innovation. For example the web link has changed the way we seek out information dramatically. Further, "When books are digitized, reading becomes

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[2] If we replace the old container with a new one, nothing will be lost, as long as the contents are the same. Whether milk is delivered in a plastic bottle or a waxed cardboard carton, it's still milk. So, too, with information, says this argument, which in the business world is known as the "platform-agnostic" view because it is indifferent to the vehicle or "platform" used to deliver content. (Powers, Hamlet's Blackberry:Why Paper Is Eternal)

a community activity. Bookmarks can be shared with fellow readers. Marginalia can be broadcast. Bibliographies swapped. You might get an alert that your friend Carl has annotated a favorite book of yours. A moment later, his links are yours. In a curious way, the universal library becomes one very, very, very large single text: the world's only book" (Kelly 2006). This may be a utopian ideal but never before have human beings been able to have as much access to information as they do in a digital world.

The future form or vessel for the written word has long been debated by theorists. There are several emerging concepts. It appears that while books may provide a back up for digital content, the same might be true of the reverse scenario. More frequently the source of information is found online. and then printed for reading. For example when most people wish to have directions available to them, they look up the information. print it and then throw the directions out when finished with them (Powers, Hamlet's Blackberry:Why Paper Is Eternal 2006). The result of this change is a sense that the digital information is the real information and in its digital forms the information is in its natural depository. Certainly this will have ramifications for a generation who will be approaching sacred text and their formation. With the millions of books being scanned into digital form. temporary usage of text will only increase. This concept will be explored in my section. People of the Press.

People of the E-reader

There are two forms at the moment that are attempting to capitalize on the trend of digitization. The first is the E-reader which uses E Ink™, and the second is print on demand. In the case of E-readers, "instead of rows of glowing cells, E Ink™ microcapsules actually appear as either black or white depending on a positive or

negative charge determined by the content. The result is a reading experience that's similar to paper - high contrast, high resolution, viewable in direct sunlight and at a nearly 180-degree angle, and requiring no power to maintain the image" (Sony Electronics Inc 2005). At the moment there are two popular e-readers on the market. Both are handheld and a little larger but lighter than an average paperback book. The Sony Reader and the Amazon Kindle both have an extensive library at their disposal and the capacity to store hundreds of titles at one time. It is literally like having a whole library in one small package. The E-book solution rectifies the problem of eye-strain created by the backlit monitor but it does not fix the lack of a satisfying tactile experience. It is hard to underestimate the importance of knowing by the feel of a book what page you're on and the ability to write notes in the margin. Another problem that might be resolved in time is the exorbitant price tag which makes it a product unavailable to most. At this point there has not been a significant attempt to move Jewish text, liturgical or otherwise to the e-reader. There is great potential here for liturgy used in or outside of the synagogue and a potentially enormous Jewish library in the palm of one's hand.

One traditional custom in Judaism is to recite an appropriate blessing or fixed liturgy at significant moments. One example from popular culture is a scene in the movie "Fiddler on the Roof" in which a young man goes to his shtetl's rabbi and asks him: 'Rabbi, is there a proper blessing for the Tsar? The rabbi answers: 'Of course, my son, there is a blessing for everything and everyone. May God bless and keep the Tsar...far away from us.' (Scooler 1971). In a world where everyone could have access to an e-reader it raises the question, will that scenario ever occur again? Will the congregant

contact the rabbi for sacred (or profane) moments to learn what is appropriate? In a world where a congregant may carry the whole liturgical corpus of Judaism in their hands, or the legal corpus, for that matter, with a searchable index, what will be the role and authority of the rabbi? E-reader technology could be the most space-binding media to date. Information reception is instantaneous, more portable than laptop computers and from what one can see at this point it does not raise a great deal of opportunity for two-way communication. The factor that will determine its place in Judaism will be how this tool is used. If it is only used as an independent reading tool then it could lead to what Innis believed would be a separation of knowledge from the content. The owner of an E-reader may be reading- but they might not be learning.

People of the Press

Another process that is capitalizing on the digitization of texts is a system of printing on demand. This system is now feasible with the invention of the espresso book machine. "Using digital files, the machine will be able to immediately print any book in the World Bank catalog. The chief benefit of the machine, says Epstein (the espresso machine creator), is that a requested book would never be out of stock or out of print" (Cole 2006). A prospective customer would be able to print a book from a library of digital material or material that they have produced themselves in a very short time. There are services popping up to meet niche demand such as Public Domain Books Reprints Service, which draws on about 1.7 million books in the public domain (Shafranovich 2008).

What these innovations have created is a phenomenon called, 'the long tail.' A marketing term coined by Chris Anderson, a media critic. His theory is that:

> Our culture and economy is increasingly shifting away from a focus on a
> relatively small number of "hits" (mainstream products and markets) at the
> head of the demand curve and toward a huge number of niches in the tail.
> As the costs of production and distribution fall, especially online, there is
> now less need to lump products and consumers into one-size-fits-all
> containers. In an era without the constraints of physical shelf space and
> other bottlenecks of distribution, narrowly-targeted goods and services can
> be as economically attractive as mainstream fare. (Anderson n.d.)

Books that have long been unused may find new light under this system and books that

would not have been published otherwise may find new readership. A further advantage

of this system is that it produces a classically defined book. The only differences

between books produced by this method than from a book that is typically sold in a book

store are the steps the book took to be produced.

Ramifications for this type of printing may have already been felt in the Jewish

world. With better personal publishing and printing tools such as those put out by Davka

Corporation, one can edit and personalize Jewish texts, to suit the taste or need of

congregations and individuals. For example, the *Haggadah*, has increasingly been

personalized and services have even been created to professionally print personalized

Haggadot for families and communities for use over Passover. Companies such as

Modern Haggadah offer a service where, "if you have a Personal Haggadah that you

would like published for friends and family, (the company) offers a complete package of

editing, layout, proofreading, artwork and printing services for any number of hardback

or paperback copies" (Modern Haggadah Distribution Company 2006). Synagogue

prayer books are also being published and printed for small groups. For example if one

were to type into a search engine the key words "our own siddur" the resulting number of

web publications containing that search phrase is 230. Those are only the synagogues,

camps and other institutions that have advertised online that they have created their own

prayer books. The reason this trend is so important to this study is that movements tend to establish their authority as well as a consistent theological outlook based on the prayer book. According to Elyse D. Frishman, the editor of *Mishkan T'filah*, the new prayer book published by the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the effects of micro-published synagogue *siddurim* was a motivating factor in the publication of the prayer book:

> Classical Reform's rational, decorous worship style encountered new age, American spiritualism. The gulf between formal sanctuary worship and informal, relaxed worship was widening. Desktop publishing enabled congregations to produce their own prayer books—a wonderful exercise in teaching liturgy and investing congregants in their own *siddur*, but devastating for the Movement in terms of a unifying Reform *minhag*. And while creative services elevated *kavanahh*, the *keva* of worship radically diminished. Personal expression mattered more than fixed liturgy. It used to be argued that such a *siddur* served two primary purposes: It unified Reform congregations in worship ("one can attend any Reform synagogue and feel at home") and articulated a clear Reform theology. (Frishman 2004)

In order to allow for diversification, *Mishkan T'filah* provides a worshipper with a variety of creative, interpretive and formal texts. The result is a big tent-style *siddur* in which the goal is to envelop as much diversity as possible. However, what remains to be seen is whether the novelty of the new *siddur* wanes if rabbis or congregants will begin to publish their own creative *siddurim* once again, even using texts from *Mishkan T'filah* despite copyright restrictions. They may do this simply because print on demand is becoming easily accomplished and because the changes surrounding the medium have become engrained in the behavior of the culture.

Once again, by applying Innis' theory we see that there is a tension between the role of time-binding and space-binding media. The educational merit of creating a *siddur*

for a congregation is attested to by Frishman. The educational aspect of composing a

siddur, most likely through the thoughtful discussion of congregants and hopefully

rabbis, reflects an oral exercise, and through creating personal and creative connections to

a tradition of liturgical composition, this activity falls along the lines of a time-binding

media. It seems that Frishman is not reacting to the oral educational model of thoughtful

authorities composing *siddurim,* but those with less experience composing *siddurim.*

Frishman places more importance on maintaining a space-binding media extending

institutional authority over a distance. She alludes to this when she says: "Personal

expression mattered more than fixed liturgy. It used to be argued that such a *siddur*

served two primary purposes: It unified Reform congregations in worship...and

articulated a clear Reform theology." The production of a space-binding media, the

siddur, reflects emphasis on written culture over oral culture by the very process of

writing. The theological reflections in the *siddur* may be formalized by the writing across

space unifying temporarily the Reform movement around a text, but by removing the

active discourse around the content of liturgy, *knowledge* of theology and liturgy may not

be transferred over generations as a time-binding medium. Ultimately the composition

and printing of an institutional prayer book, for the purpose of unifying the theology of

Reform Jews might be the source of a separation of the reader from the content, and the

Reform Jew from their theology.

The transformation of the book into a digital medium will have a profound effect

on Jewish culture. Once the medium of the book is not predominantly used, or if the

financial barriers to short run publication are dropped, it will be interesting to see how

synagogues will respond. Will liberal congregations project prayers onto screens during

services? Will synagogue libraries be replaced by computer labs? Even more drastic, will synagogues cease to be the vehicle for continuing Jewish education? All of these cultural possibilities will manifest themselves as digitization replaces the book as the repository of knowledge.

Digital People

The digital medium that has done the most to transform our current society is the internet. The internet is the product of the innovations that preceded it. For example, the invention of the telegraph, telephone, radio, and computer, set the stage for digital forms of communication. This evolution has created a mass transformation in how communication and knowledge are organized. A particularly unique characteristic of this digital transformation is that it occurs in various forms. The corporate web page, the blog, the wiki, etc... all function in different ways, and each of these forms become new types of mediums with their own set of characteristics. Ultimately each of these mediums will combine to change the nature of communication between rabbis and laypeople. In order to better understand this transformation I will look at some digital media, assess some of the societal ramifications, and then examine a Jewish expression in the medium.

If one were to ask why the internet is so important, they need only look at the statistics. "From 1992 to 2002, the number of users on the Internet has grown from practically nothing to over six hundred million in the world" (Peslak 2004). More recent studies in America, according to the Pew Internet and American life Project determine:

> ...internet penetration among adults in the U.S. has hit an all-time high.
> While the percentage of Americans who say they use the internet has
> continued to fluctuate slightly, our latest survey, fielded February 15 –

April 6. 2006 shows that fully 73% of respondents (about 147 million adults) are internet users. up from 66% (about 133 million adults) in our January 2005 survey. And the share of Americans who have broadband connections at home has now reached 42% (about 84 million). up from 29% (about 59 million) in January 2005. (Madden 2006)

These are tremendous numbers of people engaged in internet surfing. and statistics show that younger members of society are even more likely to be online than their seniors, indicating that the penetration will only keep growing in the future (Hitlin. Madden and Lenhart 2005). This is further evidence that it is incredibly important to study digital media and their impact on society.

Web 1.0

Corporate Websites

The early Internet became popularized with the advent of the World Wide Web (a layer of hypertext documents layered and connected to each other by the Internet itself). The most significant expansion of the internet took place during the 1990s. Initially the early adopters used the internet as a medium to communicate raw information, but with the release of Mosaic (a web browser) in 1993, interest in the web expanded to include corporations. By 1996. graphic designers who had previously been working in desktop publishing became interested in the web. With the ability to produce graphically interesting pages and a new audience actively searching for information on the web, corporate interest grew (MacManus 2004). The result was the development of basic websites used to advertise on behalf of corporations. Contributors to the World Wide Web were from major industry giants such as Coca-Cola, Pepsi and McDonald's. The web pages at this time could for the most part be characterized as, 'corporate sites.' Corporate sites are web sites that provide information to the public about the company or

organization (Contributors. Corporate website 2007). For the most part information flows from the corporation to the individual looking at these pages. With interest in the internet growing and users skyrocketing in the late 1990s. 'electronic commerce' websites were created to sell merchandise or services online. According to leading media critic, Douglass Rushkoff:

> The communications age was rebranded as the information age. even though the internet had never really been about downloading files or data. but about communicating with other people. The difference was that information, or content. unlike real human interaction. could be bought and sold. It was a commodity…The ecommerce boom was ignited. Soon the internet became the World Wide Web. Its opaque and image-heavy interfaces made it increasingly one-way and read-only, more conducive to commerce than communication. The internet was reduced to a direct marketing platform (Rushkoff 2003).

Direct marketing is a characteristic of the corporate website in which the information flows in one direction, from the corporation to the individual. Traditional authority structure is preserved in this model. Like the publication of books, in order to publish on the web one needed both expertise and financial backing. Even the content functioned the same way as it did with the prior forms of communication. During this period one would read a web page but not be able to contribute to it.

The larger trend of the corporate website gave rise to the synagogue website. A typical synagogue website is a location in which basic information about a congregation can be delivered to the congregant. According to a survey by the Union for Reform Judaism, of the 253 respondents in the survey, 97% of congregations use a website. Among the important goals for their synagogue websites were the following: 88% wanted the website to provide information for members about events, 71% wanted it to attract new members,25% wanted to use it to engage members more frequently with the

synagogue, 24% to market activities, 20% to promote the congregation in the general community, and 20% to build community. What these statistics reveal is that the priority with corporate model websites is to inform the community but not to engage the community in two way discussion online. Other statistics from the study are revealing; for example, the dynamism of these websites is not especially high. If the most important aspect of a corporate website is to provide general information, then updating the website is not especially important. A clear majority of the respondents stated that less than 50% of the content on their site is time sensitive, and 60% of respondents update their websites monthly or less frequently (UAHC 2003). These statistics are consistent with the concept that the goal of corporate websites has been to provide information. The corporate model for a website is not intended to create community rather it is designed to inform *about* the community.

Email

As websites were becoming more popular, there was parallel growth in another form of communication over the internet known as Email. Email, short for 'electronic mail' is defined as, "the sending and receiving of information over computer networks and commonly involves sending a message from one person to another, or from one person to many, and includes bulletin boards and live chat" (Morrisett 1997). The message is sent almost instantaneously, greatly speeding up the movement of information.

Early commentary on email predicted the use of the medium would be a tool that "could be seen as analogous to an era in centuries past when diaries and letters were a critical means of sustaining social and family relationships" (Treitler 1996). This is

certainly true today as the use of Email is the most popular use of the internet. In a Pew Internet Poll measuring internet usage from February-March 2007, of the 71% of American adults using the internet. 91% report sending or receiving email. This is tied in popularity with using search engines (Internet Activities 2007).

According to the study, `Wired churches, wired temples: *Taking congregations and missions into cyberspace*, ' email has significantly changed the social-cultural landscape of religious communities:

> When it comes to the impact of email on the life of the faith community, one surprising finding is that congregations with increasing *or* decreasing membership are equally impressed with what email does for their faith communities...An example of how email improves spiritual life came from a Conservative synagogue whose Webmaster noted that email is used at times to inform members of a death in the congregation. and to ask for volunteers to sit with the body and pray with the family (Larsen 2006).

The advantage of email. at least in how it is used by average people, is that one can communicate in short bursts of information. . Email should be to the point. Unlike paper letters, there is a short turnaround time allowing for clarification of points; therefore it is not necessary to place all of the important information in one email. The use of reply buttons has allowed for new forms of conversation to occur through the medium itself. However, email is not the most effective means of conversation for every situation. The lack of physical and emotional social cues over a purely text based medium can limit one's ability to extrapolate implied or subtle meaning.

Statistics say that Email is widely used by clergy: "89% of the respondents (to the Pew pole) said that the minister or rabbi uses email to communicate with members of the congregation and 45% said that was done a great deal" (Larsen 2006). However, email may also be a dangerous trap for the rabbi. A rabbi may receive dozens of messages a

day and this may lead to social and information overload. Social and information

overload is defined as follows:

> People can be overwhelmed by the fast pace and heavy bombardment of
> incoming messages, often from many different types of people with many
> different agendas, and saturated with all sorts of information, some
> valuable, some useless, all needing to be evaluated as important or not.
> This social and work multitasking can overload a person's ability to cope.
> (Suler 1998)

It takes little effort for a congregant to send an email but the rabbi then needs the

judgment to respond in such a way that it matches the perceived weight of the email. The

rabbi should ask the following questions: What from the content of the message do I

believe is the degree of importance this person places on the email? Does the email

deserve a long or short response? Is email the best medium for a reply? What degree of

formality do I need to place in my response over email (spelling and grammar)? Lack of

education in how to handle the volume of email may create an unreasonable burden if

one does not have a strategy in place. Though popular, and most likely remaining

popular, email is not the most effective form of communication in all cases.

The use of email by rabbis regarding less mundane issues might be viewed

as somewhat similar to the responsa literature of the *Rishonim*, however with a shorter

expected turnaround time. Historically, the person asking the question would understand

that there would be a long wait, with Email there is an expectation of immediacy. As

discussed in Chapter One, the development of the printing press and the subsequent

creation of the *Shulchan Aruch* changed the nature of rabbinic authority, and thus

changed the content of responsa. Responsa as a medium continued after the advent of the

printing press, but the nature of the questions and answers were different- they were

restricted almost entirely to legal regulations, and critics believe the responsa lacked

originality. The responsa of this period found its merit in depth of learning and accuracy of reproduction (Bacher and Lauterbach 2002). Changes of this type are occurring today as Jewish legal texts are being published on the internet in electronic form. Bar Ilan University has started a web site called the Online Responsa Project, which it heralds as, 'the Wisdom of the Ages - The Technology of the 21st Century' (Bar Ilan University 2008). They go on to present some of the unique features of the program: "This internet version of the Responsa Project includes a variety of tools and capabilities in its various features of search, navigation of texts, and hypertext links between books in different databases" (Bar Ilan University 2008). Additionally, the Reform movement's responsa is for the most part online and contains the statement on their front page, "individual rabbis and communities retain responsibility, however, to make their own determinations as to the stance they will take on individual issues" (CCAR 2008). It should be noted that here there is an indication that a community might access that CCAR Responsa without a rabbi; additionally, it is notable that a certain degree of autonomy is given to the reader. Another example is the spread of "Ask the Rabbi" web sites that have spread throughout the online Jewish world. Anyone can write in anonymously and ask the rabbi a question, and the rabbi subsequently will publish their answers. Anyone can read the questions and answers. It is notable that these people asking anonymous questions to an anonymous rabbi are not asking their *own* rabbi if they belong to a community. With greater amounts of information available online, there is the possibility of a more informed group of laypeople, and with 'cut and paste', an increasingly used digital function, there is implicit accuracy of reproduction. Authority is also diminishing, because with increasing access to information, more people are able to 'cut and paste.' Additionally, as more

information is becoming available to everyone in public online forums, the question and answer nature of communications over email is becoming increasingly more mundane in nature. According to the theories of Innis, the responsa form of communication, when it occurred in the medium of a hand written letter, could be considered 'heavier' than the email form. The hand written form falls more along the line of time-binding medium than the lighter, faster, and more ephemeral media of email which can be considered space-binding. Because public responsa or "ask the rabbi" web sites have more 'permanence', they could be considered heavier or longer lasting. However, space-binding media online will become even more time-binding with the development of Web 2.0.

Web 2.0

Though prior use of the internet transforms the way we operate around content, particularly in regard to the ability of laypeople to access text, recently changes in the use of the internet have evolved new forms of media allowing laypeople to create content. The nature of this change is referred to as Web 2.0. Web 2.0 is a term used to categorize the current trend in digital media. The observation was originally made by media critic Tim O'Reilly who noticed that Web 2.0 style WebPages exhibited several new qualities.[3] On Wikipedia, Web 2.0 is defined as "a perceived second generation of web-based communities and hosted services (such as social-networking sites, wikis, blogs, and

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[3] Services, not packaged software, with cost-effective scalability. Control over unique, hard-to-recreate data sources that get richer as more people use them. Trusting users as co-developers. Harnessing collective intelligence. Leveraging the long tail through customer self-service. Software above the level of a single device. Lightweight user interfaces, development models, AND business models. (O'Reilly 2005)

folksonomies) which aim to facilitate creativity. collaboration. and sharing between

users" (Contributors. Web 2.0 2008). Whereas the corporate website was characterized

by information flowing from the corporation to the individual. Web 2.0 is characterized

by an information exchange over accessible digital platforms. enabling information

communities. Blogs. video blogs. podcasting. social networking. and wikis are all forms

of Web 2.0.

Cybershtetl

Blogs. short for Weblogs. are pages on the World Wide Web that contain articles

similar to newsgroup articles. They appear in chronological order from the most to least

recent. The blog is generally created by one or a few authors. but is open to the public

for consumption (De Rossi 2006). Blogs can both address niche content or can appeal to

a larger audience. One of the underlying principles of the blog is that it creates a

platform for the general public to share their ideas and respond (Technorati n.d.). Blogs

may resemble a hybrid of "diaries. newsgroups, newspaper editorials, and hotlists where

owners write down information important to them on a regular basis" (De Rossi 2006).

The type and style of bloggers vary widely among individuals. According to Technorati.

a reputable blogging company, "The...Web is incredibly active, and...there are over

175,000 new blogs (that's just blogs) every day. Bloggers update their blogs regularly to

the tune of over 1.6 million posts per day, or over 18 updates a second" (Technorati n.d.).

With the increase in websites and web tools providing easy publishing techniques, blogs

may be created with ease and with little technical knowledge. Blogs are interconnected

through permalinks, trackback, and RSS feeds.[4] This interconnection forms the Blogosphere. The blogosphere is a term that denotes the loosely interconnected nature of weblogs through linkages and collaboration of knowledge sharing in a fast public and convenient manner (Brady 2005).

Beyond the text form of blogs, video blogs, or vlogs have become increasingly popular. The most well known of these vlogs is Youtube. Rather than written text, a video is published to the internet. Then the video is either responded to by another video or by a typed message, much like a traditional blog. While most popular vlog entries on Youtube tend to be sophomoric, the most commented video is a clip from Al Jazeera with Wafa Sultan, a Syrian-born American psychiatrist discussing her views on Islam. Examples such as this one show that the vlog can be a medium for both the ridiculous as well as important issues to be discussed in a public forum.

Among the blogs' most potent qualities that is changing our culture is the ability for anyone to have an opinion and publish. A blog can constantly be current and updated, but the very same principles that make a blog easily and quickly publishable by anyone lead to its most serious ramifications-that there is no publishing process like traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, journals and even television. Therefore the information on these blogs must be carefully examined for quality.

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[4] **RSS** (Really Simple Syndication) is a family of Web feed formats used to publish frequently updated content such as blog entries, news headlines or podcasts. An RSS document, which is called a "feed," "web feed," or "channel," contains either a summary of content from an associated web site or the full text. RSS makes it possible for people to keep up with their favorite web sites in an automated manner that's easier than checking them manually. A **permalink** is a URL that points to a specific blog or forum entry after it has passed from the front page to the archives. A **Trackback** is one of three types of Linkbacks, methods for Web authors to request notification when somebody links to one of their documents. (Contributors, Wikipedia Various 2008)

The phenomenon of blogging is part of a greater phenomenon in Web 2.0 that some have dubbed the mass 'amateurisation' of publishing.[5] It is characterized by amateurs now being able to express their opinions on any given subject regardless of the credibility of those opinions. This will have significant ramifications for traditional holders of authority and authenticity beyond the print media, such as educational institutions and in our case, Jewish institutions. In an article for B'nai B'rith International, authors Richard Greenberg and Menachem Wecker take the pulse of Jewish blog culture becoming known as the Cybershtetl:

> The cybershtetl...has become the ultimate forum for individuals to hold forth on any Jewish subject imaginable. On one hand, the Internet has amplified the chorus of yentas, self-anointed prophets, and other narcissistic keyboard jockeys who are eager to bloviate in public at the click of a mouse. On the other hand, it has also given voice to many well-intentioned and well-informed individuals who have worthwhile things to say. Some are promoting rigorous discussion of important Jewish topics that the mainstream media or communal leaders might have neglected or consciously avoided, such as the problem of sexual abuse among rabbis. Others are reaching out to marginalized Jews in hopes of creating virtual communities where none could have existed before. Still others are hoping to spread Jewish scholarship. The cybershtetl, as a result, may not only be the most outspoken Jewish community in history; it may also be the most knowledgeable-and the most thoroughly democratized. (Greenberg and Wecker 2006)

The culture around blogs has empowered a new type of Jew, one who feels free to comment on Jewish issues in a way previously unheard of. The new digital Jew in the cybershtetl is not seeking the approval of the rabbi, and their lack of expertise is not a

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[5] Before the age of the internet it was theoretically possible for everyone to publish material that was accessible to anyone who could read and afford a newspaper. However, the decision to publish was at the discretion of an editor and it largely depended on literacy skills, social class and luck whether your contribution was selected from the thousands of others sent to the newspaper or magazine. With the advent of the internet, publishing 'one-to-many' became infinitely easier. (Brady 2005)

barrier to publication. The result is a mix between good and bad quality material being debated and discussed on blogs. Bloggers such as Rachel Barenblat. introduce her blog by stating. "Well. first off. just to make sure we're clear on this: I'm not a rabbi...though as of September 2005. I am a rabbinic student. in the ALEPH rabbinic ordination program." On her sight one can find various tailored liturgy that reflects a strong Jewish Renewal perspective. One can also find a good use of a synagogue blog at the New Shul blog, where the musings of the rabbi. congregants. and the staff members are posted and responded to. However. there are countless other examples of poor quality information being shared over the 'cybershtetl.' It is fair to say that a majority of rabbis, professors, and other professionals wish this change was not occurring. The monopoly over information which was bound in books. libraries. and institutions is being extended into new mediums, therefore changing the environment. The question which remains is what this will do to the concept of authority and if it will force us into a new Jewish epoch, much like the printing press did.

Social Networks

Another phenomenon of Web 2.0 is social networking, a form of user generated content. Social networking sites are designed to create or maintain social or professional connections. Users share personal information and identify friends or contacts that are also using the website. The numbers of people using social networks is remarkable. As of 2006, MySpace had 56 million members with 35 billion monthly page views, while the second most used social networking website is Facebook with 13 million members and 7 billion monthly page views (Kolbitsch and Maurer 2006). Specialized social networking sites have also popped up to cater to special needs or, "to create a web of trusted experts

and business partners" (Kolbitsch and Maurer 2006). Particularly important is that users have integrated these sites into their daily practices (Boyd and Ellison n.d.). It is important to pause and note the people that are using social networks and for what purpose. While most social networks support what can be considered as pre-existing relationships, others allow strangers to meet over shared interests (Boyd and Ellison n.d.). Some social networking sites attempt to expand as much as possible while others try to cater to smaller niche interests. The internet and more specifically various types of social networking sites serve as an important technological vehicle for harvesting personal experiences and relationships.

While there are a number of Jewish social networking sites, they have not enjoyed a large success rate. Public social networks such as Facebook, have subgroups that allow for people to declare affiliation and communicate within groups. The most popular Jewish group that exists on Facebook, has the title, 'How Many Jewish People are on facebook???' and it has over 40,000 members. The fact that Jewish social networks are not especially popular, while universal social networks are, reveal an already held belief in the Jewish world that more people are choosing to maintain universal social networks through which they can express individual identifications (among them Judaism). This is done instead of choosing to maintain exclusively Jewish social networks. It seems that the cybershtetl does not have walls preventing universal interaction. This however is not entirely the case when it comes to dating. Though there are no clear statistics on how many Jews participate in universal dating sites, Jdate, the online Jewish dating service supports 650,000 active members worldwide and 400,000 members in the United States (Jdate 2007). This is certainly an example of technology changing the nature of

traditional roles. There are no *shadchan's* with a base of potential suitors as large as Jdate. The result of social networking sites used for dating is that Jews can extend their romantic possibilities beyond what may be a limited field. Just as McLuhan states that media is the extension of man into the global village, Jdate in McLuhan-esque terms is the extension of the Jewish Single into the cybershtetl.

Wiki-Judaism

Another form of Web 2.0 media is the Wiki. Wiki is a Hawaiian word that means, 'fast' (W. Contributors, Wiki 2008). A wiki is web based software that lets users collaboratively create and edit webpage content using any browser. Editing is generally thought of as an open access activity where anyone has the ability to contribute and shape the content (Contributors, What is Wiki? 2002). The most famous wiki is Wikipedia which describes itself as "a multilingual, web-based, free content encyclopedia project...Wikipedia is written collaboratively by volunteers from all around the world. Since its creation in 2001, Wikipedia has grown rapidly into one of the largest reference Web sites" (W. Contributors, About 2008). Wikipedia defines itself by five pillars: Wikipedia is an encyclopedia, it has a neutral point of view, it is free content, it has a code of conduct, but it does not have firm rules (Contributors, Wikipedia 5 Pillars 2008).

According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project in a 2007 study they found that "36% of online American adults consult Wikipedia" (Rainie and Tancer 2007). Additionally, "Wikipedia is far more popular among the well-educated than it is among those with lower levels of education. For instance, 50% of those with at least a college degree consult the site, compared with 22% of those with a high school diploma" (Rainie and Tancer 2007). Wikipedia owes a great deal of its success to search engines

such as Google. "It was shown that 87 percent of the popular *Wikipedia* pages are in the top three result positions for Google" (Spoerri 2007). Therefore the average user is guided to Wikipedia on a variety of search terms popularizing Wikipedia's results.

The democratic nature of the Wiki web platform is supposed to be anti-hierarchical. It should be noted that Wikipedia has factual errors and omissions; however, analysis has deemed that Wikipedia can be a factual source of information compared to other encyclopedias (Chesney 2006). This may be due to the fact that there has developed a slight hierarchy within the culture that has developed around Wikipedia (Dee 2007). Ultimately some sort of hierarchy is necessary to correct problems with Wikipedia such as those that come from a form of web vandalism. According to *Time Magazine*, "the entire staff of Congress was barred from Wikipedia for sabotaging one another's profiles. In a way it's as much a litmus test of human nature as it is a reference tool" (Grossman 2006). However, with all of its imperfections, the idea of Wiki can be a useful tool for collective editing and production.

When searching for the key word Judaism in a Google search engine, the resulting list places Wikipedia third among the results indicating that it is highly referred to and read. It is imperative that those concerned with accurate information about Judaism take an active role in helping to shape Wikipedia's entries regarding Judaism. Though this may not be the site rabbis use to find information, laypeople are surely using it.

Beyond using Wikipedia to discover information, the model of group participation in creating viable web pages extends itself into experimental new avenues such as liturgical creation. For example, the Open Source *Haggadah* is a concept influenced by collaboration in Web 2.0 (Open Source Haggadah Project n.d.). The result

of this project is a *Haggadah* information site with a large amount of commentary, a variety of translation options. and a system through which one can design their own *Haggadah*. This is part of an emerging form of do-it-yourself Judaism. Web 2.0 has given rise to cultural changes surrounding information and those who hold keys to the production and use of that information.

This chapter examined several of the digital forms of media. their advantages and disadvantages, and their cultural ramifications. In each case I examined a few examples of corresponding Jewish content in the media and then examined present and possible future ramifications to Jewish culture. Specifically, in this chapter I examined the move from books to digitization. the historical growth of online content and participation, Web1.0, its distinctive media and their characteristics, and the move to Web 2.0. its media and their characteristics. The new media is challenging traditional authorities, among them rabbis. In the following chapter I will look at the ramifications of these challenges and skills that are necessary to determine credibility in the future.

Chapter 3

In the previous chapter it became clear that the developing internet has moved to exhibit the characteristics of Web 2.0. The internet now exudes a social element where users generate and distribute content. Increased access, participation. and ability to create media by individuals, are changing the nature of authority in regard to content. This phenomenon is manifesting itself not only in digital content but also in non- digital realms. As society and technology are moving to become more participatory, the ramifications we currently see are the breakdown of traditional forms of authority. These

may include newspapers, encyclopedias, academia and even religious movements. As the individual has greater access to web publishing, the barriers that previously may have existed, such as peer review and editorial staff, are no longer a stop gap to publication. The result is that there is a tremendous amount of un-vetted information on the web and this information must be viewed critically. How then does one determine what is good and bad information or how does one teach a consumer to be a critical thinker? More specifically to the nature of the rabbi/layperson relationship, what is the role of the rabbi in a world where information is plentiful, and accessible, but questionable? This chapter will examine online trends that are resulting from the current move to greater democratic access on the web, and examine various methods of determining the quality and credibility of material that one might find on the internet.

Democracy

The internet and particularly Web 2.0 applications have helped spur the revolution to more democratic access to internet publishing, thereby shaping the Jewish environment. The Jewish environment is now one in which individuals demand access and leadership in the development of Jewish tradition. The move to Web 2.0 mirrors this revolution in society. As Douglass Rushkoff articulates in his paper "Open Source Democracy":

> Finally, our renaissance's answer to the printing press is the computer and its ability to network. Just as the printing press gave everyone access to readership, the computer and internet give everyone access to authorship. The first Renaissance took us from the position of passive recipient to active interpreter. Our current renaissance brings us from the role of interpreter to the role of author. We are the creators (Rushkoff 2003).

As a result those who were the traditional sources of interpretation and authorship are confronted by the challenge of having to compete in a marketplace of ideas. The rabbi (what some might say represent the role of 'expert' in Judaism) has traditionally been understood to be the source of authority on Jewish matters; however, this may be a quickly changing role. As technology has allowed for laypeople in other fields to move from a passive to active role in the shaping of subject matter, we must assume that the same will happen, and is happening in Judaism. One can already see trends taking shape that are similar to trends outlined in Chapter Two in the new Web 2.0 technology. The do- it- yourself attitude or lay-lead movement is extending itself to Judaism.

Recently a study by sociologist Steven M. Cohen studied Emergent Jewish Communities and their participants; the findings were revealing. Cohen stated that "'these are communities that are responding to the aesthetics of the [20-something and 30-something] generation. They are creating a different form of spiritual community.' Usually it's a community that has no building of its own and no rabbi serving as full-time spiritual leader" (Lipman 2007). Why the sudden boom in communities of this type? The introduction to the study suggests the following:

> The last decade has witnessed an explosive growth of NGOs – thousands of voluntary, public sector non-governmental organizations that operate on behalf of a wide variety of cultural, educational, political, and social causes all over the world. The reasons for this sharp growth are not entirely clear, but many observers credit the Internet and other technological advances for reducing the cost of organizing and helping people of particular inclinations to find each other and to remain connected. They also credit commensurate shifts in the wider culture for making the idea of self-organizing among like-minded individuals more acceptable, expected, and feasible. (Cohen, et al. 2007)

One founder of an emerging community pointed to a direct link between the use of the internet and his motivation to create a community:"My generation, we do things ourselves a lot...no one I know goes to a travel agent to book a trip. We book it online. That's true in every aspect of our lives...In terms of our spirituality and religious expression, why should we go someplace where other people tell us how to be spiritual? Why not do it ourselves?" (Fishkoff 2007) Of course not all of the emergent communities are without a rabbi, but the number of emergent communities functioning without one is impressive enough to note (Cohen, et al. 2007). Another significant piece of information from the report is that new prayer groups have spread through social networking rather than institutional structures.

Jewish organizations must harness social networks to promote collective action through organizations that understand and thrive on collective un-hierarchical group action. For example, Reboot is an organization for a 20-30 something generation that helps them "grapple with the questions of Jewish identity, community and meaning on its own terms" (Corporate f). Their methodology is to create open platforms for self organization. Certainly this is in keeping with current media trends. However, in an open system, Judaism, like academia and the media, run the risk of exhibiting some of the more negative elements of amateurization. This raises new questions about where authority and how credibility in the Jewish world should be determined.

Credibility

As the phenomenon of amateurization becomes more prevalent online, the public perception of credibility appears to be changing. With the development of Web 2.0

anyone can publish their work instantly, transcending what previously had been a hierarchy of authority necessary due to the high cost of publishing and information scarcity. In the current or pre-digital model, the scholar would select and interpret the limited information found in primary and secondary sources, and then a system of peer review would be necessary to determine the academic quality of the information. Finally, there was a need due to the high monetary cost of publishing to determine the probable market of the work (Jensen 2007). One could say with a sense of certainty that books found in the library had a degree of credibility due to the nature of the medium itself, though not always the best way of judging. While this can be considered a positive side effect of the prior system, there are also negative aspects to this degree of control. For example, Dana Boyd, a media commentator, believes that, "in an era of capitalism, this equation often gets tainted by questions of profitability. Books are not published simply because they contain valued and valid information; they are published if and when the publisher can profit off of the sale of those books" (D. Boyd 2007). This dynamic is transformed in an era of Web 2.0. Now anyone with access to the internet can publish on the internet instantly and depending on the desire of the publisher, information can be viewed by anyone with access to the internet. Therefore the information on this medium is no longer created in a hierarchical system, and the information found on the internet is for the most part not bound to a system of review. Making this process even more dynamic, anyone with access to the information can engage it with various media, such as blogs or wikis, and then become active participants in the publication of the information.

Recently the difference has been explained as the difference between taxonomy and folksonomy. Taxonomy is, "the work of an expert scientifically cataloging the world

around him. Taxonomies grew out of the natural history tradition in the sciences, and as such are imposed from above, as a top-down means of categorization" (Pick 2006). Taxonomies exhibit all the traditional elements of a hierarchical system of scholarship. On the other hand folksonomy, "is user-generated, social, subjective and powered by the very people involved in the act of tagging...folksonomies supply information from the bottom up" (Pick 2006). When it comes to credibility folksonomys have a considerable challenge before them. Researchers from Dublin City University, Eppler, Helfert and Gasser, explain the challenge this way:

> As ever more information is competing for our attention, we as information consumers want to be sure that our time is well invested and that the information at hand is worthwhile and reliable. While the quality of communication does not solely depend on the quality of information, information as the core message is a major part of any communicative action. If information is incorrect, outdated, inconsistent, or unclear, the communication as such will most likely not be satisfactory. (Eppler, Helfert and Gasser 2004)

The problem incumbent upon rabbis and laypeople to resolve is how one determines the credibility of the information before them. To that end, organizations such as the Stanford University Persuasive Technology Lab, conducted significant research to determine how online consumers of information judge the credibility of web sites. The study compared experts and average consumers. Their key findings were that average "consumers tended to rely heavily on overall visual design when assessing Web sites, including layout, typography and color schemes" (Web Credibility Reports n.d.). Whereas, experts such as those in the health and financial field, relied on the quality of a site's information based on reputable sources cited, unbiased educational information and research (Web Credibility Reports n.d.). In short, the experts did not judge a website by

its cover.   Simply because a website is attractive does not make it a good source of information.

Studying the ways one judges and interprets the quality of information is not new. It falls within the philosophic field of Epistemology, the study of the theory of knowledge. One of the first recorded debates on the subject began with the dialogue *Charmides*.[6] "Plato posed the question of how a layperson can determine whether someone who purports to be an expert in an area really is one" (The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2006). As we can see from the text, Plato suggests that, "If, indeed, as we were supposing at first, the wise man had been able to distinguish what he knew and did not know, and that he knew the one and did not know the other, and to recognize a similar faculty of discernment in others, there would certainly have been a great advantage in being wise" (Plato 2000). By stating there is indeed an expert capable of discerning, he suggests that others should ultimately hand the business over to them and trust in them (Plato 2000).   Therefore letting experts be *the* experts. More recently,

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[6] But then what profit, Critias, I said, is there any longer in wisdom or temperance which yet remains, if this is wisdom? If, indeed, as we were supposing at first, the wise man had been able to distinguish what he knew and did not know, and that he knew the one and did not know the other, and to recognize a similar faculty of discernment in others, there would certainly have been a great advantage in being wise; for then we should never have made a mistake, but have passed through life the unerring guides of ourselves and of those who are under us; and we should not have attempted to do what we did not know, but we should have found out those who knew, and have handed the business over to them and trusted in them; nor should we have allowed those who were under us to do anything which they were not likely to do well and they would be likely to do well just that of which they had knowledge; and the house or state which was ordered or administered under the guidance of wisdom, and everything else of which wisdom was the lord, would have been well ordered; for truth guiding, and error having been eliminated, in all their doings, men would have done well, and would have been happy. Was not this, Critias, what we spoke of as the great advantage of wisdom to know what is known and what is unknown to us? (Plato 2000)

philosophers such as John Locke, and David Hume, devoted sections of their work to epistemology, specifically the debate regarding "when...cognitive agents (should) rely on the opinions and reports of others" (The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2006)? Locke believed that what one set's their minds to determines their reception of truth, and ultimately truth comes from "God having fitted men with faculties and means to discover, receive, and retain truths, according as they are employed" (Locke n.d.). Therefore Locke believes that ultimately truth comes from within. Hume for the most part agrees by stating: "But allowing you to make experience (as indeed I think you ought) the only standard of our judgment concerning this, and all other questions of fact; I doubt not..." (Hume n.d.). Hume believes that experience should shape someone's knowledge as the primary aspect of expertise. It is not possible to know in any absolute way what is *true*, but the philosophers reject the notion of Truth from a divinity rather, begin with themselves. "Know thyself" is their starting point and then they move to the cultivation of experience as a criterion for the ability to judge, and therefore be *wise*; in other words to become an expert.

In the 17th century the Royal Society contributed to the cause of establishing principals pertaining to information quality in academia by publishing research journals. They did this in order to make experimental evidence more transparent and open. This led to the publishing of papers which would only be considered valid after undergoing a process of peer review (Contributors, Academia 2008). However, the system of peer review has been scrutinized as early as the 1980s due to its cost and process. Polls of scholars have revealed that, "three out of four respondents considered the procedure biased in favor of certain groups" (Hechinger 1986). Just like what can be found on the

internet, good and bad information can come from academic peer reviewed articles. This does not mean that one should throw out the concept of peer review claiming it to be archaic and unable to meet the needs of a digital generation. rather. we must also explore other methods of determining authority and credibility. particularly those that the majority of Web 2.0 users are currently using.

Experiments in Credibility: Jews and Kabbalah

When trying to determine if information on a website is good or bad. I use an amalgam of university guides on how to evaluate the information quality of a website. First, Google is the most popular search engine and one can search almost any topic on it. It is important to note how Google receives their results. Google follows a formula in order to receive their results. This formula results in what Google calls Page Rank. In order to determine the degree of 'importance' of a web page or its Page Rank, Google first searches pages that contain the words entered and then measures the amount of links to that page from other pages. Each time there is a link from another page it functions like a vote. This is not especially different from someone determining the importance of a book by noting the amount of times other experts cite it though in this case it is notable that the votes are not placed by experts. Next, Google determines the importance of the pages that are linking to the page in question (Craven n.d.). Beyond this basic measurement, Google has a range of methods to determine the rank of the results. These are all automated. The results will indicate if the site has many people reading it and many websites linking to it. If the website is popular in the Web 2.0 world this grants it a certain authority regardless of the quality of information. Page Rank's top results lead one to believe that websites are popular. While that fact might add to the credibility of

the site, it does not make the site completely credible. The website of the Lesley

University library suggests a second method of assessment. One of the first things one

should do when assessing credibility and quality is to determine the following: "What

does the URL (Web address) say about the producer of the web site, and its purpose?

Look at the final syllable in the domain name" (Lesley University 2007). The third

method, according to the UCLA library website is to look at the design of the website.

(Grassian 2006). For example good web design, though ultimately an inadequate form of

determining the overall credibility of a website according to the Stanford Credibility Test,

can be an initial indicator of the quality of the information on the page. The University of

Guelph library website adds the following criteria to determine the quality and credibility

of work online. They encourage their students to ask the following questions: What is the

author's world view and is there documentation or a bibliography? (University of Guelph

1998)

I have conducted searches on two key words to examine the merit of the results. I

have searched both 'Jew,' and 'Kabbalah.' By typing "Jew" into Google, looking at the

first five results is revealing. The result of entering the word "Jew" into the search

engine, are that the first two results are Wikipedia pages. The first is a page on the word,

'Jew' while the second is a Wikipedia page on 'Judaism.' At the time of writing,

Wikipedia's articles on 'Jew' and 'Judaism' are complete and reliable. Sources are

annotated well, information lacking support from external sources are noted, external

links are informative, and perhaps the most impressive aspect of the web page is that one

can observe the debate that has gone on around the information on the page by Wikipedia

contributors. Once can do this by clicking on the tab, "discussion." There, one can review discussions around the shaping of the page.

The third and fourth results that appear from the Google search are both from the same website- Judaism 101. Judaism 101's article has no annotations and it is unclear if the information on the page is just opinion. For example the author of the page writes:

> According to Orthodoxy, the Torah is the heart of Judaism. All of what our people are revolves around the unchanging, eternal, mutually binding covenant between G-d and our people. That is the definition of Jewish belief, according to Orthodoxy, and all Jewish belief is measured against that yardstick. You may dispute the validity of the yardstick, but you can't deny that Conservative and Reform Judaism don't measure up on that yardstick. Reform Judaism does not believe in the binding nature of Torah, and Conservative Judaism believes that the law can change. (Rich, Who Is a Jew? 2001)

On the welcome page she writes, "The information in this site is written predominantly from the Orthodox viewpoint, because I believe that is the starting point for any inquiry into Judaism. As recently as 200 years ago, this was the only Judaism, and it still is the only Judaism in many parts of the world" (Rich, Welcome 2007). Obviously, the author of this work is entitled to her opinion; however, it is certainly problematic for liberal Jews or those seeking unbiased information about Judaism that this webpage places so highly on Google's page rank. To be fair to the author she writes, "This site is created, written and maintained by Tracey Rich. I do not claim to be a rabbi or an expert on Judaism" (Rich, Welcome 2007). The problem is that as of the writing of this paper, Judaism 101 claimed to have 8,402,503 visitors (Rich, Welcome 2007). Certainly, this is an example of amateurization.

The fifth ranked site on Google is a website called Jew watch. The site is run by a man named Frank Weltner who claims that his web page has "The Internet's Largest

Scholarly Collection of Articles on Jewish History". However, the website is a

categorized grouping of links pointing to what he believes is a Zionist conspiracy. Sadly,

as his website shows, Jew watch ranks ten times higher in page views than the US

Holocaust Memorial Museum which he refers to as part of a hate industry (Weltner

2008). Clearly this is problematic. Google, understanding the problem explains it this

way:

> If you use Google to search for "Judaism," "Jewish" or "Jewish people,"
> the results are informative and relevant. So why is a search for "Jew"
> different? One reason is that the word "Jew" is often used in an anti-
> Semitic context. Jewish organizations are more likely to use the word
> "Jewish" when talking about members of their faith. The word has become
> somewhat charged linguistically, as noted on websites devoted to Jewish
> topics such as these... The beliefs and preferences of those who work at
> Google, as well as the opinions of the general public, do not determine or
> impact our search results. Individual citizens and public interest groups do
> periodically urge us to remove particular links or otherwise adjust search
> results. Although Google reserves the right to address such requests
> individually, Google views the comprehensiveness of our search results as
> an extremely important priority. Accordingly, we do not remove a page
> from our search results simply because its content is unpopular or because
> we receive complaints concerning it (Google 2008).

The Anti-Defamation League has supported Google in their practice by stating, "The

ranking of Jewwatch and other hate sites is in no way due to a conscious choice by

Google, but solely is a result of this automated system of ranking" (Anti Defemation

League 2004). This is an unfortunate and extreme case of poor results in the Google

Page Rank system. As discussed, one of the significant ways that authority is measured

in Web 2.0 is based on the popularity of websites.

When searching the term *Kabbalah*, the first result on Google is the website for

The Kabbalah Center. First, from the very fact that Google produced The Kabbalah

Center as the top result, leads one to believe that it is a popular website. In the Web 2.0

world one should be cognizant that the measure of popularity alone grants this website a certain authority regardless of the quality of information. While that fact might add to the credibility of the site, it does not make the site completely credible. Next, it is important to check the URL. The URL is a dotcom, and this immediately tells the reader that The Kabbalah Center is a commercial site, possibly with commercial motives. The third method, according to the UCLA library website is to look at the design of the website. The website for the Kabbalah center follows good graphic design principles. The graphics and art do serve a function and represent what is intended. While the spelling is fine, the grammar and literary composition are not of a high quality. A problematic aspect in determining if the text on this particular website is credible is that the website contains a decent translation of the primary Hebrew texts of the *Zohar*; however, the information that surrounds the texts which comment on and contextualizes the information, is poor from an academic standpoint. Applying the Stanford Credibility Criterion (originally tested by health professionals and financial experts) to this website, there are several determining factors that one should examine. As an expert or rabbi, it is important to disregard both the popularity and the appearance of the website and examine the accuracy of the information. The University of Cornell library website also states that one must determine the accuracy, authority, objectivity, currency, and coverage of the website (McMillin 1998)[7]. In order to assess these categories. The By using the

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[7] In order to determine the accuracy of the page, determine who wrote the page and if you can contact him or her; determine the purpose of the document and why it was created, determine if the he or she can be contacted. Determine the purpose of the document and why it was produced and determine if the person composing the page is qualified to write the document. Pertaining to authority they suggest that one check who published the document and if it is separate from the "webmaster; implying that the information might be un-vetted by an institution and check the creator of the contents

University of Cornell method in determining the accuracy of pages on the web, one can see that the website contains vague information around *Kabbalah* and little to do with the content of *Kabbalah* itself. The website has a lot to say about separating Judaism from *Kabbalah* and a fair amount of information regarding *Kabbalah* merchandising. It appears that the purpose of the website is to offer information about The Kabbalah Center as an organization and the benefits one can gain from participating. Therefore, notions that one might have about the qualifications of those who designed the webpage can be split into two sets of results. First, if the assessment of the website's credibility pertains to qualifications in the area of The Kabbalah Center as subject, then one can assume the information to be credible, although biased. If the assessment of the website's credibility pertains to qualifications in the area of *Kabbalah* as subject matter, coming to a conclusion is more difficult. In an interview in the *Village Voice*, Professor Shaul Magid assesses the information quality of The Kabbalah Center, he says:

> The question is, really, is the Kabbalah Centre transmitting kabbalistic teachings responsibly? The fact that they interpret it psychologically is not problematic by definition, but are they transmitting the tradition and then making a distinction between what the text says and their own reading? Or are they unconsciously, or perhaps consciously, transmitting their interpretation as the tradition? (Ellin 2004)

This assessment provides further evidence that the information on this site should be considered of poor academic quality.

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list of qualifications. As far as objectivity is concerned they recommend that one should determine the goals/objective that the page meets, how detailed the information is, and what opinions are expressed by the author. Pertaining to currency they recommend checking when the website was produced, how often it is updated and how up-to-date the links are. As for coverage, the suggested areas of examination are to evaluate the links to see if they complement the theme of the document, check to see if images make up the majority of the page and check to see if the information is cited correctly. (McMillin 1998)

Furthermore, when searching their WebPages for information about the founders of the Center their only reference to authority is that, "Before his passing, Rav Brandwein designated Rav Berg to continue the lineage of *Kabbalah* as Director of The Kabbalah Centre" (Kabbalah Center 2007). There have been various allegations against the founder of this organization: some have uncovered evidence of plagiarism (including the translation of the *Zohar* published on their website), other far more numerous concerns have alleged cult like behavior. Phillip Berg has been accused several times of using 'Doctor' as a title and self reporting to have a PhD but will not acknowledge where he received it. However, credible information pertaining to the organization's leadership is hard to come by. The investigations into the past of the leadership have not all been conducted by organizations or publications that are particularly reputable. Regardless, these allegations should be seriously reviewed by anyone choosing to read the materials of this organization.

Pertinent to the study of the information quality on the website of The Kabbalah Center is the fact that the Center makes no claims to objectivity. On their website, in the section that provides information on who they are, they wrote the following: "Although there are many scholarly studies of *Kabbalah*. The Centre understands this wisdom not as an academic discipline but as a way of creating a better life" (Kabbalah Center 2007). The Kabbalah Center's website is not an "objective", that is to say, academic source of information and the written material on the site about *Kabbalah* is primarily based on opinions.

This website does not have adequate documentation for sourcing material; there is no real bibliography beyond the material that they have published themselves. Any

overall determination of the quality of The Kabbalah Center's material on their websites might be considered subjective if not placed within the spectrum of a worldview. Reform rabbis in particular have grounding in *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. which means that their approach to Judaism should be to assess material before them within the spectrum of the academic study of Judaism. Therefore. the rabbi with this worldview has a framework to assess this material in an academically reliable manner. The work of The Kabbalah Center is not grounded in a rational or reasonable understanding of text because they do not share a reasonable world view with those who answer to academic criteria and academic methods. Therefore. the attractive nature of the website is not enough for rabbis or experts to believe the information it provides is quality information. A Reform rabbi should not value or trust the information or provide links to sites such as these even if certain elements of the site are acceptable. Additionally the role of the rabbi in a Web 2.0 world should be to provide the skills to a layperson to help them be able to distinguish between good and bad information online. The results of the searches on the keywords "Jew" and "*Kabbalah*" indicate that there are problems with page rank and folksonomies in general.

When the book was the primary vessel for information. the medium was generally considered authoritative due to the difficult nature of its production. As more information is being placed on the internet. the layperson will increasingly turn to it for general information. Due to the ease of publication and the primarily space-binding nature of digital mediums, assessment of credibility will become more of an important task than ever before. It is into this environment that the rabbi must be considered an authoritative judge of the merit of all types of information.

Authority

Establishing a professional role for the rabbi, has in the past been a method of establishing authority, and to that end, over the last several hundred years, among the central movements of Judaism, the rabbinate has become increasingly professionalized. After the European emancipation, particularly in the Reform Movement, "rabbinic authority was no longer backed by the sanction of divine origin" (Saperstein 1982, 24). Therefore, scholarly qualifications became the basis for the authority of the rabbi. According to Rabbi Harold Saperstein one of the ways a rabbi had authority was through acquired experience. "(The rabbi) is the expert in Judaism. His understanding of Jewish history, literature, philosophy – his involvement in Jewish liturgy, observance and life – must all be brought to bear in his guidance of synagogue activities, in his interpretation of Judaism and in his views of society" (Saperstein 1982, 25). In order to meet challenging social conditions, Judaism underwent a process of institutionalization and professionalization to ensure the dependable development of their spiritual leaders (Greenstein n.d.). Particularly following the Enlightenment and with the establishment of seminaries in Europe, ordained rabbis in an emancipated and increasingly democratic form of Jewry, valued the Western intellectual tradition. Therefore, "the rabbinical seminary sought to maintain its dignity by becoming an academic institution in the Western university model" (Greenstein n.d.). The rabbi became thought of as a professional to the degree that today's layperson expects that "the title (rabbi) indicates…certain requirements, both intellectual and spiritual, have been met; there are distinctions in the education of Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Reconstructionist

colleagues, but all have met the requirements of their group" (Jacob 1997). However, the place and role of the professional in today's society is changing, and due to the rabbi being considered a professional, one must assume this change extends to the role of the rabbi as well. In order to understand this change one can apply the political theory of Beth Simone Noveck[8] to the rabbinate. Like democratic societies, in the past, the Jewish community believed that administrative governance by the rabbi was the best way to organize religious decision-making in the Jewish communities' interest; however, now new technology may be changing the relationship between laypeople and expertise, affording an opportunity to improve competence by making good information available for better governance by the laypeople (Noveck 2008). This also extends itself to religious matters. Rabbi Harold Saperstein, when assessing the layperson-rabbi relationship in the mid twentieth century stated: "While laymen maintained their leadership and authority in temple administration, in religious matters the rabbi took over not so much by qualification as by default" (Saperstein 1982, 23). As Noveck points out in her assessment of the political situation, the layperson, newly armed with a sea of information is willing to take on any and every available role, including those that were traditionally the exclusive domain of the rabbi. The question now becomes- how can the rabbi exert influence within a system where anyone believes they can do it themselves?

The reason the laypersons' competence is changing in a digital world is due to greater access to information than has ever been available to non-professionals. So what does this mean for the professional or rabbi? Michael Jensen suggests changes that affect authority due to the transition from a society functioning with information scarcity, to one

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with abundance, can be compared to food preparation in a prehistoric hunter gatherer tribe to today's society:

> Food is available, but it requires active pursuit...The shaman knows the medicinal plants, and where they grow. That is part of how shamanic authority is retained: specialized knowledge of available resources, and the skill to pursue those resources and use them. Hunting and gathering are expensive in terms of the energy they take, and require both skill and knowledge. The members of the tribe who are admired, and have authority, are those who are best at gathering, returning, and providing for the benefit of the tribe. That is an authority model based on scarcity. Contrast that with the world now: For most of us, *acquiring* food is hardly the issue. We use food as fuel, mostly finding whatever is least objectionable to have for lunch, and coming home and making a quick dinner. Some of us take the time to creatively combine flavors, textures, and colors to make food more than just raw materials. They are the cooks, and if a cook suggests a spice to me, or a way to cook a chicken, I take his or her word as gospel. Among cooks, the best are chefs, the most admired authorities on food around. Chefs simply couldn't exist in a world of universal scarcity. (Jensen 2007)

Applying this illustration to the rabbinate, the rabbi functioned in a world of information scarcity where some of their skills and knowledge were directed to pursue and provide knowledge to their community. However, today the layperson has more information at their fingertips than ever before, Jewish or otherwise. Laypeople can access liturgy, legal Jewish texts, sermons and other creative works, and the role of the rabbi should be to help the layperson identify, select, and contextualize the best quality information possible. In non-Hebrew speaking countries there may still be a language barrier, but as the amount of translations of Hebrew works are growing, laypeople will find themselves increasingly able to access text. There are some that will be able to sustain their need for Jewish content by being mostly passive participants in the Jewish environment. They may add a few comments to a blog or two, but there will be others that will be able to create a sustaining environment. They will be able to shape and mold the information into

something that might inspire others or help them to learn. While this may be the role of the new rabbi, in some cases this role might be filled by knowledgeable laypeople. Among these there will be the true greats-the chefs, the Rambams or the Heschels. These will be the masters of the mediums, and masters of the content. These are the ones that will transform the environment and by the nature of their abilities they will be given authority. In the next chapter I will examine the role of the rabbi directly, and Jewish education in a digital world.

Chapter 4

Digital Rabbi

The changing role of the rabbi is becoming increasingly defined by access and competency at creating learning environments from various forms of media. Rabbis must continue to be cognizant that the change in media technology is bringing about increased changes in the environment around Jewish education. The new rabbi must understand these changes and appropriately adjust to them. As previously outlined, authority models are changing and this is affecting the culture of learning. At best, a layperson empowered by Web 2.0 may expect that much like online, individual expressions of their identity and their opinion will be as valued in a religious environment. At worst, the environment containing hierarchical structure may be one that a layperson will feel stifled and unable to participate. How the rabbi takes advantage of the laypersons' new felt freedoms and skills in order to establish participatory cultures will determine their success.

The next generation of laypeople is one that will be growing up in a digital environment. This environment will contain all the tools of Web 2.0 media that encourages the active participation of the user to create content. In a study by the Pew Internet & American Life project, they discovered that "more than one-half of all teens have created media content, and roughly one third of teens who use the Internet have shared content they produced" (Jenkins n.d.). The result has been to create what a MacArthur Foundation study refers to as a participatory culture, "a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices" (Jenkins n.d.) A learning environment that capitalizes on participatory culture may lead to a more informed, active, competent and empowered Jew.

It is into this new culture that the new rabbi must arrive, handed the daunting task of creating a Jewish environment of learning. Into this environment the rabbi must decide the roles and the rules. Especially important to define are the roles of the content, the rabbi, and the layperson in a participatory culture. The way these roles interrelate will define the rules and ultimately the social dynamic of the synagogue environment.

The debate over the form and role of content in education is not new. Neil Postman in his book, Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology, raised the issue by invoking Thamus (Postman 1992). Thamus appears as brief illustrative legend in Plato's Phaedrus, as part of a dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus pertaining to the value of the technology of writing.

But Thamus replied, "Most ingenious Theuth, one man has the ability to beget arts, but the ability to judge of their usefulness or harmfulness to their users belongs to another; [275a] and now you, who are the father of letters, have been led by your affection to ascribe to them a power the opposite of that which they really possess. For this invention will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it, because they will not practice their memory. Their trust in writing, produced by external characters which are no part of themselves, will discourage the use of their own memory within them. You have invented a drug (pharmakon) not of memory, but of reminding; and you offer your pupils the appearance of wisdom, not true wisdom, for they will read many things without instruction and will therefore seem [275b] to know many things, when they are for the most part ignorant and hard to get along with, since they are not wise, but only appear wise (Plat. Phaedr. 274e-275a).

Postman uses this text to articulate the danger of context-free information. He believed that the danger is that information and human purpose can be severed. Like the critique expressed by Thamus in Plato's dialogue <u>Phaedrus,</u> technology can have both positive and negative results, and there is a danger that one can disconnect from the theory, meaning and purpose of content. This is not a new concept in Judaism where there's an old adage that 'God's intention in creating two hands for humankind was so one finger can be on the text of Torah and the other on the commentaries.' Within this adage, there is an understanding that Oral teaching is necessary in making sense of the text, thereby providing the context. In the Talmud, the teaching of masters is remembered and written down in order to preserve them for later generations. The rabbinic commentaries are even referred to as Oral Torah, though they appear to us in the form of written text. Culturally, in traditional Judaism, Oral Torah is granted a status so important that it too is considered to have issued forth from Sinai. As the Oral Tradition was written down it fell under what Walter Ong, a leading media ecologist and student of McLuhan, referred to as the alphabet effect:

> Linear logic. cumulative science. individualism. and even discursive consciousness itself have been attributed to the shift from oral to literate knowledge. In this shift. knowledge changes from being an invisible and inseparable aspect of human activity. It becomes a separate. reified entity that can be copied and recopied. stored in libraries. contemplated objectively. and of course. bought and sold.   As Ong put it. with literacy the knower becomes separated from the known (Brent 2005).

Due to the cultural changes brought on by Web 2.0 technology there has been a revitalization of engagement. Here. a participatory culture might take the fixed text and allow for it to be re-shaped. re-evaluated. and re-contextualized. In a participatory culture the knower can once again engage with the known. provided that the rabbi creates an environment where this is possible. This necessitates the information once again becoming Oral. not necessarily in a spoken sense but through connecting text with context. The rabbi must assume the role of rhetoric-titian. engaging the layperson with the content through what can be understood as a type of performance. giving the information meaning.   Teachers must take an active role in organizing technology-learning rather than letting technology simply entertain the learners (Marshall 2002).   In order to teach Judaism in a Web 2.0 world. rabbis must develop skills around media platforms. The implication for rabbis is that they become more like learning coaches open to collaborative learning (Marshall 2002). To that end Brian Amkraut in his article, "Jewish Education in the World of Web 2.0", suggests some valuable practices for teachers of Judaism- among them becoming familiar with popular genres of technological and communal activity. Jewish educators must assess how students use technology as an information source, they need to update their own literacy, and learn to take advantage of resources on the subject (Amkraut 2007).

The Literate Jew

A goal of the rabbi should be to create literate Jews in all aspects of society including media literacy. According to Richard Lanham. Professor Emeritus at the University of California. "To be deeply literate in the digital world means being *well seen* and *well heard* as well as *well read.* skilled at deciphering complex images and sounds as well as the syntactical complexity of words. Above all. it means being at home in a shifting *mixture* of words, images. and sounds" (Lanham 1995). Deciphering and contextualizing in order to engage in an emerging culture should be a central focus of the rabbi in order to provide our laypeople with the judgment referred to in the illustration of Thamus. This means laypeople must be instructed by rabbis in how to find. decode. evaluate. and organize Jewish information. Then laypeople should be given the freedom to extend the knowledge into the field of community participation.

Another way of understanding the role of the new rabbi is that they must become an aggregator of Jewish content. The rabbi will create. store and distribute content through multimedia. digital. or traditional modes in such a way that creates community. The rabbi will be the fulcrum point. filtering appropriate content to a network of individuals who will also respond to and create content. Creativity and fluency in Jewish content will determine the masters of information in the digital environment and by extension, the Jewish community. Rabbinic training must prepare the rabbi in those skills. The rabbi must become as experienced and knowledgeable in the media that communicates content as they are in the content itself.

Reflective Practitioner Journal

Over the past year I have conducted a few media experiments. Not all have been especially successful and in many cases it is still early in their development. My goal was to create a media environment in which laypeople can engage in educational activities. The following are some of the experiments I have engaged in.

The congregation that I am working for is somewhat new. It has only existed for a few years and it has not yet developed extensive policies, cultural standards, and narratives around lifecycle events or synagogue management. At the outset of my participation with the congregation I was determined to create a corporate model website. As discussed in Chapter Two, the corporate website model is one in which the information flows in one direction, from the synagogue to the individual. However, in attempting to develop the format for the website, it became apparent that there was not enough content to place on the site. Though it would have been relatively easy to compose a policy or narrative about *B'nai Mitzvah* or other lifecycle events, I believed it would be better to use the website as an excuse to launch discussion with the community about what the Congregation wants to project to those who would read the website. The medium forced us to discuss content. Though progressing slowly, the website is developing.

In order to facilitate the discussion about policy, I created a Wiki page for the policies to take shape. The Wiki allows users to edit and comment on the content. Unfortunately, an issue preventing full engagement has been the generation gap apparent in the use of web tools, like a wiki. Understanding how to best make use of the wiki necessitates two things: understanding the rules of the medium, in this case the wiki, and the willingness to tinker. A young generation that is growing up with digital media tends

to have less fear that their participation will create unfixable problems. It takes a great deal of effort to teach people that are not used to digital mediums that digital records prevent significant loss of information. The willingness to experiment in this area is essential to its success, and will either take more time in teaching an older generation the tools of this medium or wait for a younger digitally literate generation to take the reins of leadership. A more successful web experiment was the creation of a social network, not unlike My Space, or Facebook, but specifically for the congregation. The majority of active congregants have signed on. The motive was to reinforce congregational affiliation as well as establishing connections with prospective and new members. Information about the individual can be exchanged in the secure environment and the inclusion of pictures with individual profiles facilitates a visual sense of community and familiarity. It might also be a way of extending the sense of community to those no longer physically located within the proximity of the synagogue. Discussion takes place in the social network through a Blog where community members can publish web articles, videos, and facilitate discussions. Another use of social networks relevant to the pastoral role of the rabbi (one that I have not yet personally tried) is the use of technology to link what have traditionally been isolated members of the community, like hospital patients. Internet sites such as http://www.carepages.com/ are an emerging use of social networking:

> CarePages help families stay connected, informed, and supported. When a loved one is hospitalized or receiving care it can be difficult to communicate. With CarePages, updates are shared via email automatically and visitors can leave messages for the patient and family on the Web page. CarePages give families an emotional lift that is hard to deliver in any other way. (Care Pages n.d.)

Connecting congregants who are single, in need of care, or who are just in need of maintaining community, is a historical role of the rabbi. Use of social networking sites such as CarePages extends the rabbis' presence and is a practical use of an emerging Web 2.0 medium.

I had the opportunity to teach an online distance learning course for the Adult Interfaith Academy at HUC-JIR. The format that I chose to teach it in was through a Blog. Every week I composed and published an article on the development of the concept of soul and self in Judaism. By using this medium, I was able to post pictures and links to other sites for further research. While I was able to provide overviews, the links provided greater depth than I could provide independently. Due to the course being taught as a blog, it provided the students with the ability to ask questions after each article or 'discuss' the content amongst themselves. I held 'classes,' weekly in a chat room which facilitated questions and discussions. However once again I was confronted with the generation gap in knowledge of media forms. Those who participated in the class were for the most part of an older generation, and it took considerable effort to teach them how to use the blog and the chat room. Additionally, the chat room-class also raised challenges in that complex questions could not fully be addressed in a succinct or timely enough way in the chat room. This type of learning would be better with the possibility of voice over internet protocols in the chat room.

Though not always successful, the experimentation was worthwhile. After all, according to Plato you can't become an expert without experience, and to bring the illustration in to the culinary field, one can't become a chef without cracking a few eggs. Experimentation with media allows the experimenter to better understand content and

how content and culture can be shaped by the medium. With a better understanding of the social aspects of Web 2.0, I would encourage the creation of media environments for people to discuss issues and texts of interest in Judaism with the assistance and contribution of the rabbi, not in the model of taxonomy but as a guided folkesonomy. Establishing environments for participation of congregants will ultimately be beneficial to the upcoming generation of laypeople, raised in the Cybershtetl.

Conclusion:

Judaism has survived millennia because it has been able to successfully respond to the challenges of changing media. The rabbi has consistently been at the center of these changes and has taken the role of guide for the community in periods of stability and transition. Our current culture presents tremendous challenges to the future of Judaism. Many of these challenges are a direct result of immense changes in media technology. Media has affected the role of authority, the participation of laypeople, the relationship between learner and content, and the nature of the Jewish ecology. However, Judaism's unique ability to transcend the challenges and changes in society can be a strength, provided that rabbis remain cognizant of all aspects of the changes. The success of the rabbinic profession and Jewish education will be determined by the willingness of our educators to understand, respond to, and adapt to the new ecology of Judaism. The application of Media Ecology provides an important framework for understanding

cultural changes in Judaism that come about as a result of changing media forms. Media

Ecology can be applied to understand cultural changes in Jewish history, and it can

provide a starting point for understanding current trends in Jewish ecology today, and in

the future. Digital technology provides challenges and opportunities as great, or greater

than those provided by the printing press, and thought should be given to how the

rabbinic profession should respond. While obviously theoretical, Media Ecology provides

basic premises for studying the nature of these changes.

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