Abstract

This project contains two sections. The first section is an introduction authored by Jason S. Cook, Libby Fisher, and Deborah Samantha Novak Goldberg. The second section is an essay, "Encountering the Other in Biblical Texts: An Ethics of Reading at Work," authored by Libby Fisher, which uses the theoretical foundation suggested in the introduction to show just one of the many ways an ethics of reading can be put into practice.

In our joint paper, "An Introduction to the Ethics of Reading in Reform Judaism," we advocate for the development of a Reform Jewish reading strategy that is sensitive to the ethical implications inherent in Jewish texts. Our introduction has three parts. We begin by exploring the theoretical foundations of creating an ethic of reading. In order to do so, we examine ethically critical reading strategies that produce a high yield for Reform Jewish readers. Next, we move to a significant challenge that religious communities in general and the Reform Jewish community in particular face: while ethical criticism in theory allows us to question the formation and legitimacy of canon, canon is not questioned in most religious communities. We challenge that assumption and offer an alternative to canon called "textual repertoire." Lastly, we highlight the ways that Reform Judaism has historically embraced reading Jewish texts critically. We believe that because of this historical background, the Reform Jewish community has an opportunity to embrace a Jewish ethic of reading. We offer a critique of the current intellectual environment of Reform Judaism and argue strongly that developing an ethic of reading is necessary to maintain the Reform Movement's commitment to rigorous study and critical engagement of texts.

In "Encountering the Other in Biblical Texts," I walk through the process of how to utilize an ethics of reading. By focusing on one issue in biblical texts, I show how we can use a particular reading strategy to lift up relevant pieces of text (as seen in Appendix A). I focus on the issue of the Other as used by the biblical authors, and elucidate the theories of otherness, essentialism, and functionalism. Through comparing the stories of Joseph and Moses, I show that there is nothing *essential* about otherness. The Other in biblical text is a tool which is used by biblical authors to meet their individual ideologies and goals. Ultimately, using ethically critical reading strategies allows us to engage with our texts in a sophisticated manner.

ENCOUNTERING THE OTHER IN BIBLICAL TEXTS: AN ETHICS OF READING AT WORK

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Reflection & Acknowledgements

When Jason, Deborah, and I embarked on this project together, we knew that such a project was counter-cultural at HUC-JIR. The thesis has traditionally been written individually. We had each met with Dr. Aaron to discuss possible thesis topics, and he saw a common thread in each idea that we could weave together into one valuable project. Working as a team, we were able to create a deep learning community, which was an asset throughout the process. Not only did we write an introductory essay together, but we were also available to talk with one another about our individual capstone projects. We felt responsible for our communal growth and learning. This thought partnership was incredibly meaningful as we worked primarily during the COVID-19 pandemic, and our regular meetings helped me to feel less isolated during this important work. I would certainly recommend this style of work, as I believe strongly in group learning and responsibility.

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An Introduction to Creating an Ethics of Reading in Reform Judaism

Jason S. Cook, Libby Louise Fisher, Deborah Samantha Novak Goldberg

Picture your favorite spot for reading – a spot that is warm and comfortable and accompanied by the sense of excitement and thrill you feel when picking up a new book. You settle in, ready to crack into the book you have just purchased. You are about to be transported. This book may take you on an adventure, worlds away, or push you to reflect deeply on the way you think. Perhaps you will cry when the book highlights a societal ill, or you may laugh as the main character blunders. No matter the type of book you read, your reading can transport and change you. In fact, this is something you likely already know from your myriad reading experiences before this one right now.

Now, go back to that reading spot you are imagining. Picture how you chose your specific book. Was it acquired through your ideal book buying experience? Maybe you received the book from a package at your doorstep after you ordered it two days ago. Perhaps, instead, you purchased it at your favorite used bookstore down the street – the one that smells like old books and coffee. Or maybe you think physical books are an outdated technology and you have streamlined your experience with electronic books. And how long did you search to pick the right book? Was it recommended to you? Did you choose based on a user review or a small blurb on a store bookshelf, written on colorful paper with flowing handwriting? Is it a book for a class or one you picked up because your parent insisted that you *must* read this book in order to understand the world?

Reading is not simply a matter of deciphering words on a page. Many decisions contribute to every aspect of selecting a book to read. From the way we choose a book to read, to how we access that book, to what we do with that book when we have finished reading, our actions are governed by a series of ethical decisions – whether or not we realize it.

Through this introduction to our project, we will show that the decisions we make in almost every facet of life are governed by ethical decisions. In some cases, the ethics behind a choice will be obvious. For example, to whom we donate money is clearly a decision that involves ethical choices. The example given above about our reading choices may be less apparent. After exploring some of the theory that undergirds our work, we will delve into some specific concerns we face in creating an ethics of reading in Reform Judaism.

Goals of Our Project

What are we hoping to accomplish through our project? Our goal is not to make a case for a system of ethics (as you will see cited below, plenty of scholarly work has already been written on this topic), but instead we will develop a reading strategy that is sensitive to ethics. By ethics, we mean a cognitive framework for how we live our lives based on values. Ethics have powerful influence over human behavior despite their intangibility. Ethical sensibility often underpins how and why humans behave in a certain way. For the purposes of our example, ethics contribute to why you might choose to buy a book at a local bookstore rather than on Amazon, or how you engage

with a "great" piece of literature written by an author known to be a virulent antisemite, racist, or misogynist.

Creating an ethic of reading in Reform Judaism is necessary because Judaism relies on texts for worship, for developing beliefs and practices, and creating community. In fact, reading has historically been foundational for the promulgation of Jewish culture since its origins. Jews instituted a weekly reading of Torah and Prophets. Jews have developed study contexts for Talmud learning, commentary, and works of Jewish thought. Jews enter sanctuaries to pray while reading from *siddurim*. It is just as much a Jewish activity to argue over the latest newspaper article about Israel as it is to read bubbe's recipe for matzah ball soup, handed down through the generations. When we teach our children about Jewish history and collective memory, we include modern Jewish voices like Elie Wiesel, Anita Diamant, Debbie Friedman, or Art Spiegelman. Passover, perhaps the holiday through which Jewish culture is most directly built[1], is celebrated by reading the *Haggadah*, a book that recounts Jewish historical narrative and cultural heritage. Simply put, text is everywhere in Judaism. We give our texts voice through reading.

We suggest, and even implore, that an ethic of reading is not only possible, but also necessary for Reform Jews. Jews are often described, by ourselves and others, as "People of the Book." While this phrase sometimes refers to the ongoing connection

[1] Passover is a holiday that explicitly teaches the collective memory of the Jewish people. It ensures that Jewish people understand some of the core beliefs of their historical/mythic narrative through finding ways to empathize with the stories of generations before. Though other holidays have cultural value, observing Passover necessitates an educative experience that results in the promulgation of Jewish cultural representations.

between the Jewish people and the Torah, it also refers to the Jewish connection to the experience of reading. A people inextricably tied to the written word should strive to sensitivity for what they read, how they read, and the way that reading affects them in return if they are to remain "People of the Book." We can meet these goals by adopting a strong ethic of reading. First, an enhanced reading experience takes place when a person is sensitive to the ethical implications of any given text they happen to read. This requires close reading and a critical eye appraising the written word. Second, an ethic of reading influences how an individual will assimilate and then implement what they read in their interactions with the world.

The introduction to our project consists of four major sections. First, we will define ethics in general and the theoretical practice of ethical criticism specifically, which will provide the foundation for our own Jewish ethic of reading. Then, we will continue by exploring the problems presented by the concept of canon. As we have already discussed, choosing what to read is just as important as how we read something once we hold it in our hands. Next, we will narrow our lens to focus specifically on the case of Reform Judaism. As a Jewish religious movement that focuses on personal autonomy and choice in learning, we believe that Reform Jewish practitioners are a prime audience for what we seek to accomplish through our project. Finally, we will acknowledge some of the practical challenges that we may face in this project as well as introduce, briefly, how we will each confront those challenges through individual contributions.

Ethics in Culture – Theoretical Groundwork with Sperber and Iser

Let us return to our opening example. When we sit down in our favorite spot to read a book, we participate in the creation and promulgation of culture. Our act of reading, in this moment and every moment, is a cultural exchange. The text we have in hand is pushing us to expand our cultural horizons while we, in turn, bring our own worldview to any text we read. Our individual worldviews are influenced by a network of meanings we have already encountered in our lives. Even without our conscious understanding, we engage in this cultural exchange every day. When we learn about culture in our high school social studies courses, we are often taught that the definition carries material implications: culture is the sum of arts, religion, institutions and so on of a given group of people. Nuanced definitions may even include references to values or social conventions. The problem with these definitions is that they attempt to describe culture concretely, rather than define the overarching phenomenon of culture.

This definition of culture does not serve us nearly as well as the cognitive model we will explain. Defining culture in terms of its constituent parts conjures images of libraries, philharmonics, and museums. But these artifacts are not, in and of themselves, culture. Neither, strange as it may seem, are the books, symphonies, sculptures, or spaceships found in those buildings. Instead, we understand culture as a social, psychic (mental) system, perpetuated by individuals interacting with each other through a process called communication. We communicate all the time. In fact, the process of reading this introduction is an act of communication from us, the authors, to you, the reader. Communication will also occur when you, hopefully, tell someone else about

this piece of writing and explain (or critique, as the case may be) the ideas and concepts that you learned. Therefore, the process in which we read something and assimilate new ideas based on that reading *is* part of culture, cognitively defined.

So, what of the physical book that we hold in our hands while sitting in our reading nook? Is that book "culture"? The answer is no and yes. No, as we have already elaborated, an object like a book is not, in and of itself, culture. That book is, however, a technology by which culture is communicated. Rather than pointing to a book or statue and saying, "that is culture," we will call those tangible artifacts and technologies "cultural representations." Dan Sperber, in *Explaining Culture: A Naturalistic Approach* points out that the key element of a cultural representation is that it can be interpreted. The "material traces," the cultural artifact like a book or a street sign, *mean* something. Put simply, these traces "represent something for someone."[2]

Our mental process of interpretation is how we derive meaning from any given cultural representation. The book does not contribute to culture by itself, we must interpret the book. In addition, we cannot describe a representation as being "part of the culture" until that representation is shared. In the case of a book, we cannot call it shared until something of it has been transmitted, translated, or communicated to another individual (and eventually groups of individuals). Therefore, culture is not simply the sum of a number of physical artifacts but is instead a complex network of shared representations among a group of people.

[2] Dan Sperber, *Explaining Culture: A Naturalistic Approach* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 24.

Sperber uses the metaphor of epidemiology to describe how culture is formed. In the same way that a virus spreads invisibly from host to host, so too does culture. Culture is formed, or to use Sperber's metaphor, spread, through a process of interpreting representations. In *Explaining Culture*, Sperber draws a distinction between public representations, mental representations, and cultural representations. Public representations that are interpreted by many people are representations that "exist in the environment of [their] user."[3] A public representation might take the form of a book, a film, or a speech. Mental representations occur when an individual engages with a public representation through interpretation. When we read something, be it simple like a street sign or complicated like a novel, our minds build an interpretation that allows us to derive meaning. This individual interpretive activity results in a *private* mental representation. Lastly, a cultural representation is, essentially, a widespread public representation—a representation that is shared broadly among a large group of people.

The distinction between a cultural representation and a public representation is a matter of scale. A presentation given in an office about quarterly earnings might be considered a public representation. That presentation will hold meaning to the handful of people in the room but will not necessarily hold meaning for those outside of the small community who hear it. In other words, the presentation will not result in a large series of mental representations. On the other hand, a national event such as a presidential inaugural address would be considered a cultural representation, because

[3] Sperber, 32.

the speech will be interpreted by many individuals and as a result bear greater consequence in a broader cultural context. More people, throughout a wide environment, interpret the inaugural address, which means that it holds more weight as a part of the culture than the quarterly earnings report. The process described here explains the creation, or spread, of culture as a function of increasingly widespread shared representations. Public and cultural representations are interpreted by individuals, forming mental representations, which are then communicated. A community with a high degree of shared representations, that is, mental representations of public representations, would be called a culture.

Not every public representation is transmitted on a large scale. Communities with high degrees of shared representations might be local, like a small school, where the culture is reinforced by shared language, schedule, goals, and even physical proximity. Culture on a larger scale, like when we consider the concept of an "American culture," might rely on fewer broadly shared representations. We live, at any given moment, in multiple cultures, ranging in scale from local to international. Culture is more than a collection of shared representations. We experience and also take part in the constant spread and change of culture. The representations with which we engage affect the way culture is constructed because we take part in *sharing* representations.

Sperber's understanding of cultural formation is vital in the context of reading. Reading is *potentially* a significant act of cultural creation. When we sit down to read a book, we are engaging with a public representation. We will form interpretations (mental representations) of that book. Then, when we tell our friends about that book,

and especially when we encourage those friends to read the book as well, we are attempting to share, or spread, its representations yet further. When this occurs on a broad scale, we are taking part in the creation of culture. Reading is potentially an effective modality for the creation of culture; therefore, being careful of what and how we read impacts how that reading affects us and our culture. When we read, we are responsible for the formation of shared representations—whether we are aware of it or not

A useful concept to pair with the idea of shared representations is what Wolfgang Iser calls the "cultural repertoire." The cultural repertoire is a phrase that represents all of the cultural knowledge that we hold in our heads as individuals. In this way, every single person's "cultural repertoire" is unique, but there can be lots of overlap among individuals—or *shared* representations—among those in the same communities. We engage our cultural repertoire constantly, in order to make sense of the world, including when we read. A straightforward example of this process is our ability to grasp implied references. If you read the phrase "pay no attention to that man behind the curtain," you might understand the meaning of the phrase *literally* based on context alone—that is, there must be a place in which there is a man situated behind a curtain. But if you have read L. Frank Baum's book, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*—or seen its film adaptation, the phrase takes on layers of meaning not even remotely implicit in its literal meaning. Suddenly, this innocuous image conjures, the idea of deceitful power dynamics (and glittery, red shoes).

We cannot communicate without access to a broad cultural repertoire. Of course, not everyone has the same cultural repertoire. Within any given culture, there is generally a high degree of coherence between individual's repertoires, but this is not always the case. For example, traveling in an unfamiliar country with an unfamiliar spoken language may result in a relatively low degree of shared cultural repertoire between tourists and locals. However, imagine two students sitting next to one another in a beginners Hebrew class – one from France and the other from Japan. When the teacher asks about the students' favorite musicals, both answer "The Fiddler on the Roof." During break, the two students try to discuss their mutual love of this musical. Despite their shared representation, they are unable to effectively communicate due to their lack of linguistic competence in a shared language.

In order to see why the concept of cultural repertoire is central to an ethic of reading, we need to complicate things. Just as humans have cultural repertoires, so too do texts. The author of a text works within a specific cultural context, which is defined in no small part by their time and place. For example, we can be certain that the biblical authors, the editors of the Talmud, and modern Jewish philosophers all have vastly different cultural repertoires because they each wrote in vastly different times. In addition, the individual reading a text has a different cultural repertoire than that of the text itself. In *Act of Reading*, Iser focuses on this relationship between text and reader. If a reader does not have a robust enough cultural repertoire to understand a given text (knowledge of context, history, author, language, etc.), then it may be impossible for that reader to interpret that specific text. At best, this results in vague

misunderstanding. At worst, this could lead to developing highly subjective, "false" interpretations of a text, and potentially violating the text.

These false interpretations can have dramatic consequences. In Exodus 34:29, Moses descends Mount Sinai with two tablets in hand, having received revelation from God. The verse specifies "*lo yada ki karan or panav…"* The Jewish Publication Society translates this as "He [Moses] did not know that his face was radiant." A more literal translation would render the verse "He did not know that horns of light were upon his face." Though the text is certainly using the phrase *karan or panav* idiomatically, reflecting a divine light based on Moses' interaction with the deity, the Latin Vulgate translation of the Hebrew Bible retains the literal translation. This translation became the basis for Moses depicted with two horns, like in Michaelangelo's sculpture, *Moses*. In turn, these artistic representations, coupled with the Biblical verse, have helped support the antisemitic trope of Jews having horns. Negligent interpretations carry real consequences. If a reader develops interpretations which violate a text, then that text holds no meaning in a cultural context, and exists only in their own mental representation. If that reader communicates those interpretations and those interpretations find traction with other people, real harm can be done on the basis of text.

Another important idea that Iser brings to this discussion is a "theory of aesthetic response." Aesthetic here refers to the observable behavior that a reader brings to a text and takes away from a text. An aesthetic response, therefore, is how a reader "lives out" a text once it has been communicated. Much of our communication

elicits a straightforward response. Someone can ask us to "stand up" and we can follow directions closely. Wordless communication can elicit an aesthetic response: when driving, if we see a light shining red, we are able to interpret that we should hit the brakes. Our brains can fill in the meaning communicated by a wordless symbol that we have been acculturated to identify and behave accordingly. The key here is that we learn about this symbol through our culture—the stop light is a publicly shared representation. If someone is unfamiliar with a culture that uses a red light to indicate "stop," they should probably not be given the keys to drive. This is why, when you move to a new country, you often have to take a new driving test before being given a license. Iser's theory of aesthetic response is useful in developing an ethic of reading because it gives language to the idea that a text is an active participant in communication. A text affects a reader, or, using Iser's terms, a reader "responds" to the text.

Taken together, Sperber and Iser provide us with the theoretical framework to identify the need for an ethic of reading in Reform Judaism. Sperber shows that culture is not the sum of material or essential elements of a given group of people, but is rather a cognitive system that is constantly in formation based on a person's *engagement* with cultural representations. Iser demonstrates that we cannot properly engage with cultural representations without a robust cultural repertoire - a referential system for the interpretation of cultural representations. The goal of an ethic of reading is two-fold: 1) to bring to our awareness the way in which we spread culture, and 2) to provide a framework through which our lived values are activated in the communication between text and reader.

Defining Ethics

Sperber and Iser's respective approaches to the phenomenon of cultural creation help us understand how we, both as individuals as well as members of a community, play an active role in developing culture. The act of reading, in and of itself, is the activity of cultural creation. However, just knowing that culture is being created when we read is not enough; being aware of the processes in which we engage is only one component of intentionally developing culture. When we are aware of these processes, then we also need to make intentional choices with regards to what and how we are reading. In order to develop a methodology through which we can make these choices, we need to explore the subject of ethics. Ethics, as mental representations, have an important function in the context of cultural creation. They are a framework through which we interpret and communicate our engagement with cultural representations.

There is some scholarly debate over how ethics are developed by individuals. For two examples, Lawrence Kohlberg posits that ethics are primarily developed through cultural and formal education against the backdrop of developmental cognitive stages, while Martin Hoffman sees ethics as being more inherent to human beings. We do not seek to engage deeply with this debate. Both scholars recognize that ethics and morals are not static, and that ethics play a large role in influencing human behavior. Although developing a coherent theory of ethics is a worthy pursuit, through our project we hope to help readers with the first step of becoming more aware of their own ethical sensibilities specific when interpreting texts. We believe that individuals can develop their own sensitivities and ethical proclivities, and hopefully will do so with

awareness and critical analysis. Our project should provide individuals with the tools to discern ethical sensibility and to live by those ethics. However, we also believe that it would be irresponsible to ignore the ethical systems that have influenced our own reading of text. We will therefore present two thinkers on ethics that help inform the way in which we consider ethics when reading, with the knowledge that this is by no means an exhaustive list.

Two Tools for Ethical Evaluation

One of our interests when it comes to developing an ethical sensibility is to find practical or pragmatic approaches, since reading is an active, lived experience. In his *Theory of Justice*, John Rawls lays out a framework for ethical behavior that he calls "justice as fairness." Rawls is particularly focused on thinking about how institutions, like the state, might be able to implement justice and fair societal structures. Though his scope is far broader than our project (and indeed, he does not discuss an ethic of reading), Rawls is useful in our context because his goal is to develop procedures for achieving fairness particularly in societal institutions. Rawls sees fairness as a universal metric for ethical human behavior towards others and wants to enshrine the concept in the fabric of society. Evaluating both institutional and individual needs is a prerequisite for developing an ethic of reading within our communities. Rawls provides a challenge of sorts: in order to get to fairness amongst a group of people deliberating about how to construct their society, they must operate behind a "veil of ignorance," in which ignorance means you know nothing of your status (gender, wealth, age, etc.) in the world. Fairness can be achieved when everyone considers themselves to be on an equal

playing field because each person will argue for a general good that will meet everyone's needs as equally as possible. The assumption here is that human beings can and should construct their own communities in a way that operates at the greatest good for the greatest number of people.[4]

Thinking about fairness on an institutional level gives us tools to think about big picture questions like how a society is built. When we are building our own communities, Rawls gives us insight into how the systems that we implement might function—Rawls helps us discuss ethics on a systemic level. We can evaluate a society based on its representation in a text by asking questions of fairness. Does the text express a fair distribution of wealth among its people? Do representatives of systematic structures (like a prophet or king) express bias in terms of race, religion, or gender? Do we read preferences for one group over another? Rawls helps us identify and evaluate broad systems, especially systems of power that we see and experience.

While Rawls suggests that communities of individuals are capable of constructing a shared good, Marsha Nussbaum offers a rubric for how we might evaluate a shared good in a society, relative to our own experiences. Nussbaum believes that the barometer for a society must be based on what she calls "human capabilities and dignities."[5] Human capabilities and dignities refers to an evaluative model of society and culture, especially in contexts different than our own. We will see why this is useful when it comes to the issue of subjectivism (both cultural and textual), but Nussbaum also provides us a list of ways in which we might "judge" a society to be free

[4] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999), 11–13.
[5] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Sex and Social Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 30.

and open.[6] This list of capabilities reads similar to, but functions differently than, a declaration of rights, like the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. Nussbaum's rubric is "person focused." Rights are state based as they are dictated by a governing body and are not extended to those who are not part of the state. [7] On the other hand the language of human capabilities puts the onus of responsibility on the state to support and maintain the dignity of its citizens.

Nussbaum's approach to an ethical framework is particularly useful in building community. She emphasizes that in her conception of a general good, "many of the obligations to promote the adequate distribution of these goods must rest with individuals rather than with any political institution."[8] Unlike Rawls, who wants to develop procedures to achieve fairness in institutions on a board societal level, Nussbaum is more concerned with what makes someone human—again, her human capabilities rubric is meant to be "person-focused." This allows us to use Nussbaum in terms of local community building. If our communities cannot support the human capabilities of its members, then our practices need to change. If a synagogue strives to be open and inclusive but only has limited access for differently-abled people, even if those accommodations meet the barometer set legally through laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act, the synagogue is not acting on their values because they are infringing on the human capabilities of the differently-abled. The synagogue might be

[6] Nussbaum, 41–42. Under the heading "Central Human Functional Capabilities." Some of these include the capability to expect and enjoy bodily integrity, emotions, and even the ability to play.
[7] Nussbaum, 39.
[8] Nussbaum, 40.

acting "correctly" in line with the expectations of the rights of the individual, but they are not meeting a standard of supporting human capabilities.

No individual's ethics are influenced by singular voices. Rawls and Nussbaum are two perspectives among many, but both are useful voices in our pursuit of creating an ethic of reading. Nussbaum and Rawls give us tools to think about ethics on both a local or individual level as well as on a broader communal or societal level. Their specific engagement of pragmatic philosophy dovetails with our own interest in creating a practical, useful tool. Whatever ethical rubric we opt to leverage in our reading needs to have utility. In fact, as we will see below, Nussbaum herself engages in ethical criticism of text. More than anything, Rawls and Nussbaum provide useful language and conceptual frameworks that aid us in engaging in ethical criticism and developing an ethics of reading.

Ethical Criticism

Ethical criticism is a reading strategy through which a reader seeks to evaluate texts based on the ethics that the text presents. One of the core questions that an ethical critic asks is "what is the sense of life being expressed by the text?" As we have already seen in discussing Iser, a text has a cultural repertoire. The practice of ethical criticism is to evaluate the character of a text's worldview by attempting to reconstruct its repertoire of references while taking into consideration our own contemporary sense of the world. This approach leads to some jarring conclusions, most significantly that a text does not have a static, set number of meanings. Rather, any text can hold multiple meanings depending upon the interpreter. Though she is not the first to propose that a

text can hold multiple meanings, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza argues that approaching a text from this viewpoint can have a dramatic impact on scholarly biblical criticism.

In her 1987 presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature, Fiorenza proposes a shift in the ways that scholarship should approach biblical text. Her suggested paradigm is based on the idea that reading biblical text carries with it social, political, and religious responsibility. One of her core assumptions is that "Biblical interpretation, like all scholarly inquiry, is a communicative practice that involves interests, values, and visions."[9] In the same way we might evaluate a text for its rhetorical structures to understand what that text is saying, so too do we need to evaluate the interpretation of a text. Critical writing in academia, according to Fiorenza, "respects the rights of the text," which means that scholars are dedicated to interpreting the meaning of a given text using rigorous methodology, rather than interpolating texts' meanings based on personal preference. In her position as a leading scholar and biblical critic, Fiorenza attempts to establish a methodology through which biblical scholars take responsibility for their own ethical sensibilities in reading text and become more contemplative of the connection between their own context and the world of the text.

Fiorenza also explains why ethical criticism can be valuable in academia. She criticizes the academic world in its rigid adherence to a scientific approach to text, in which scholars attempt to establish what a text means. Texts, she emphasizes, have a plurality of meanings because "alternative symbolic universes engender competing

[9] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: Decentering Biblical Scholarship," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107, no. 1 (1988): 4.

definitions of the world..." and therefore "cannot be reduced to one meaning."[10] A text and the interpreter of that text will never have a completely shared cultural repertoire, and when reading biblical text, this gap is more pronounced. The meaning derived from a text is just as dependent on the interpreter as it is on the words that are written. If texts can support multiple meanings, then, Fiorenza proposes, we should be asking certain questions of our texts and their interpretations. Specifically, she suggests the following questions: "How is meaning constructed? Whose interests are served? What kind of worlds are envisioned? What roles, duties, and values are advocated? Which social-political practices are legitimated?"[11] When texts are rigorously evaluated using Fiorenza's questions, then the interpretation of texts and their meanings takes on a social character. She states,

> If scriptural texts have served not only noble causes but also to legitimate war, to nurture anti-Judaism and misogyny, to justify the exploitation of slavery, and to promote colonial dehumanization, then biblical scholarship must take the responsibility not only to interpret biblical texts in their historical contexts but also to evaluate the construction of their historical worlds and symbolic universes in terms of a religious scale of values.[12]

In the world of academia, Fiorenza concludes that biblical scholars cannot work in a vacuum and a biblical scholar, for example, must develop their work in conversation with those most invested, such as clergy, theologians, and religious practitioners to name a few.

[10] Fiorenza, 14.
[11] Fiorenza, 14.
[12] Fiorenza, 15.

Fiorenza is not the only voice in academia proposing an ethically critical reading of text. Wayne Booth is a literary critic at the University of Chicago, and his book *The Company We Keep* is an introduction to ethical criticism in fiction. Similar to Fiorenza, Booth establishes sets of questions that ethical critics should ask of texts and their own interpretations. In doing so, Booth also personalizes the importance of this sort of criticism. He writes, "Even the ethics of nuclear warfare, of mortal concern to everyone in our time, cannot rival the daily, hourly impact of the stories human beings have told to one another, and to their own private selves, awake and sleeping."[13] He establishes the metaphor that the books we read are friends telling us stories. The way we hear these friends telling stories (in other words, our interpretation of text) is just as subjective as the stories themselves. In her own ethical critique of Booth's book, Marsha Nussbaum seeks to expand on Booth's approach. For example, while Booth limits his study to fiction, Nussbaum suggests that ethical criticism has much broader potential application. She notes that Booth never asks, "how the friendship one can have with a novel differs from the friendship promised by a philosophical treatise; how it differs, as well, from the relationship one is able to form with a lyric poem."[14] Any form of critique can be made an ethical critique, regardless of the textual medium.

Nussbaum does have some critiques of Booth's approach, particularly based on the fact that he does not deal with the issue of subjectivity. When we read text, particularly text from a distant historical period or from a vastly different cultural

[13] Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 36.
[14] Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1992), 236.

background, we often engage in cultural or ethical relativism. While we may personally evaluate a representation in the text as unethical or problematic, we may assume that the text world allows for such, potentially, disagreeable notions. Nussbaum frames this as the claim that "there are many alternative versions of the world that have value and validity."[15] The problem with subjectivism occurs when our personal values are diametrically opposed to the sense of life of the text.

The problem with subjectivism occurs when our personal values are diametrically opposed to the sense of life expressed by another. Ideally, we want to accept cultural practices other than our own. However, sometimes our values may come into conflict with another's culture. A familiar and timely example of subjectivism is seen in the culturally relative conversation surrounding the hijab, a head scarf worn by practicing Muslim women. Many westerners see the hijab as a sign of degradation and patriarchal power which leads to repression in Muslim society. Liberal countries like France have even gone so far as to ban wearing the hijab in public. Many Muslim women, though, wear the hijab as a point of pride that they are actively engaging in their faith tradition through modesty and privacy. Can both interpretations of the symbol of the hijab be true? How do we reconcile the two positions? Should we? These are the questions that Nussbaum pushes us to ask when we deal with issues of cultural and historical relativism. We encounter the same issues when we deal with texts from different cultural and historical contexts than our own.

[15] Nussbaum, 243.

As we have already seen in her framework of human capabilities, Nussbaum does believe that there are instances in which it may be impossible to square our own sensibilities with the sensibility of the text. Nussbaum asserts that Booth is too willing to allow contradictory interpretations to exist and suggests that there may be times that we can and should make evaluative claims.[16] As western liberals we can almost certainly be accepting of a Muslim woman wearing a hijab, even despite a potential cultural clash; the hijab does not seem to limit the human capabilities of the women who wear them voluntarily. However, when a country like Saudi Arabia creates laws that limit a woman's ability to drive a car or provide for herself, we can dispute their practices on the basis that they are actively limiting the human capabilities of women. The coexistence of contradictory interpretations may be acceptable, but Nussbaum insists on having a set of tools in order to evaluate those differences between contradictions. As a result, Nussbaum's ethical criticism suggests that our ethical sensibilities can, and often should, be held in opposition to a text.

An Ethic of Reading

Though we have explored both the theoretical concepts of ethics as a part of cultural development and ethical criticism as a reading strategy, neither are an "ethic of reading" in and of themselves. An ethic of reading is a tool that utilizes ethical criticism but has a broader focus than the world of a single text. Whereas ethical critics focus on the ethical implications and statements of a text, an ethic of reading requires not only understanding the symbiotic relationship between the text and the reader, but also a

[16] Nussbaum, 243.

critical appraisal of that relationship. The core of an ethic of reading is that the reader must choose to do *something* with their relationship with a text – this is an active relationship. Neither readers nor texts are static; by its interaction with a reader, a text is imbued with new meaning. Similarly, through an encounter with text, a reader is provided with new ways to interact with the world. The purpose of developing and utilizing an ethic of reading is to bring to light those interactions and provide readers with the necessary tools to critically engage in the relationship between reader and text.

An Ethic of Reading in Judaism

One of the peculiarities of dealing with the ethics of reading in a religious context is the relationship between prescribed belief and the personal experience of a text. Booth writes that engaging in ethical criticism means that one must assume that "some experiences with narrative are beneficial and some harmful."[17] At face value, an ethically critical approach to a text might be expected to be objective. The fact is, however, that there is no such thing as an objective reading – all reading is subjective, as discussed above. Instead, the project of ethically critical reading is to guard against potentially dangerous levels of subjectivism. Booth puts it another way. He says, "It springs from the obvious fact that the minds we use in judging stories have been constituted (at least in part) by the stories we judge."[18] Our ability to critically evaluate what we read is necessarily tied up in our thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, as well as our previous encounters with text.

[17] Booth, *The Company We Keep*, 40.
[18] Booth, 40.

In a Reform Jewish context an ethic of reading is particularly vital as a tool for critically reading our texts because it is a religious tradition that emphasizes personal autonomy. The problem is that radical commitment to choose in and of itself has not led to as deep a critical engagement with our texts as one might imagine. One challenge is that a great many people are ignorant of the breadth and depth of the Jewish textual tradition, resulting in an impoverished cultural repertoire. Another challenge is some who do read our text fail to grasp the ethical implications of their act of reading, resulting in a Jewish life which lacks meaning. In part, these challenges are likely due to the complicated and confusing nature of many Jewish texts. However, we know that in order to create culture, critical engagement with text is vital. Our text does not exist to be rolled into a scroll and placed in a closet, only to be seen seven days later. We believe an ethic of reading in Reform Judaism will provide Reform Jews with tools to engage with a broader array of Jewish texts in a more confident manner. Hopefully, that confidence will inspire more reading, which will inspire more confidence, and so on.

Canon and Textual Repertoire

In order to arrive at a usable ethics of reading in Reform Judaism, we must confront the concept of canon. The problem we face as Jewish readers is that our reading choices have ostensibly already been made for us. Judaism is a religion in which the reading list has been handed to us and has been curated over two thousand years of tradition. An ethic of reading is a tool that can help us grapple with the fact that many of our reading choices are derived from an inherited tradition.

Before delving in specific Jewish approaches to canon, we can focus on the secular American high school reading canon. In his article *Reconstructing the Canon* in the Harvard Political Review, Devon Black gives the following examples:

> Traditionally, high schools focus on teaching the books that are known as 'the great works' or 'the canon.' Not every high schooler reads every book in the canon, of course, but at schools across the nation, students are expected to be familiar with works like Romeo and Juliet and The Great Gatsby when they graduate. Regardless of a school's socioeconomic, cultural, or racial demographics, its curriculum is likely to be made up of books like The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, The Scarlet Letter, and Catcher in the Rye.[19]

In just this opening statement, Black highlights a problem inherent within the described system of education. Ultimately, the majority of the "great works" read in high schools across the country do not change according to the demographics of a given school district. Little thought seems to be put into how a poor, racially diverse student body may react to a book like *The Great Gatsby*, which depicts opulent parties and careless money spending, as opposed to an upper-middle class and white student body. This is where canon becomes tricky – in just existing, it can encourage us *not* to make intentional choices about our reading. Being provided a concrete list makes our lives easier, because it leaves fewer decisions to make. Therefore, if a teacher looks over this high school literary canon and creates a syllabus based upon it, without giving thought to the messages of those particular books, then that teacher is not engaging in an ethic of reading. They are simply adhering to the canon. We see here how it is possible for a canon and an ethic of reading to be in conflict.

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[19] Devon Black, "Reconstructing the Canon," *Harvard Political Review* (blog), April 25, 2018, https://harvardpolitics.com/culture/thecanon/.

If a teacher intends to use an ethic of reading, then that teacher must consider the potential ramifications of reading any particular book (what message it sends to its readers, how students will be affected by reading, etc.), and after doing so, make a choice about whether or not to add the book to their syllabus.[20] In *The Company We Keep*, Wayne Booth tells the story of one such debate regarding the inclusion of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in university literature courses. A black professor, Paul Moses, decided that he was not willing to teach the book, despite its being considered a "canonical" work of American literature. Booth recounts Moses' justifications: "The way Mark Twain portrays Jim is so offensive to me that I get angry in class, and I can't get all those liberal white kids to understand why I am angry. What's more, I don't think it's right to subject students, black or white, to the many distorted views of race on which that book is based."[21] Booth points out that Moses was making an ethical critique of *Huckleberry Finn*. Moses was calling into question whether the book should be included in the canon on the basis of the potentially dangerous lessons that students might learn. Moreover, Moses found it personally emotionally frustrating to teach the book, making his job as an educator difficult. Though Booth notes that he disagreed with Moses' assessment, the incident becomes the basis for Booth's own entry into the field of ethical criticism. It takes a strong ethic of reading to make the case for why a book should or should not be considered canonical (and a stronger ethic to make the decision to exclude a book already "canonized"). An ethic of reading does not always lead to the same answer about how to read a text, but rather awakens a

[20] A third alternative is to read a book critically and show why it is ethically problematic. By teaching a text in this way, readers can learn how *not* to be manipulated by a text.
[21] Booth, *The Company We Keep*, 3.

consciousness within us about how every decision we make regarding text has ethical implications.

The concept of a canon does have utility, particularly as a guide for the development of culture. Canon is not a simple book list, nor is it the curriculum that is shared in a school district or in Sunday School's across a religious movement. Rather, using Sperber's terms, canon is an extensive network of public representations. Canon only exists in our minds as a set of shared representations. A high school literature curriculum built around reading "canonical works" does so because these are books that theoretically, taken together, can and should have great influence on how we think about the world and live our lives. The function of canon is to provide a framework for building a cultural repertoire shared among a population.

Of course, one may ask why it is important to have a critical eye toward our reading choices. The answer is straightforward - what we read affects how we think, and therefore who we are. Our identities are formed based in part on what we choose to read, and we will see that identity formation is a large consideration in religious contexts. With that in mind, it is irresponsible to leave our reading choices to chance or to those lists collected by other people. Rather, a responsible reading strategy can help us gain awareness of how we are influenced and take control of our reading choices. We may certainly have trusted parties to guide us (teachers, parents, etc.), but we must each be actively involved in the process of choosing which texts we read.

Now that we have explained the importance of grappling with the idea of canon, we will look at the religious context specifically. When religious communities use the

word canon, there is a lot more baggage attached than it simply being a reading list. According to Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders in *The Canon Debate*,

> Canon, while also referring to a literature that is normative to a religious community and is employed in establishing its identity and mission, is moreover a fixed standard (or collection of writings) that defines the faith and identity of a particular religious community. In this sense, all scripture is canonical, but a biblical canon is more precisely a fixed collection of scriptures that comprise authoritative witness for a religious body.[22]

Since religious identity formation is a major purpose of a religious canon, thinking critically about how canon can emerge allows us to recognize that identity formation is a crucial piece of defining one community as compared to another. The question, "Who are we?" holds particular weight in religious communities that are built with boundaries marking who is inside the community and who is not. Therefore, trusting the process of canon formation is dangerous because we abdicate control of personal identity formation. Conversely, utilizing an ethic of reading allows us to gain more control over our reading experiences. Once we understand how a canon is created, and by whom, we may want to think differently about what we read and why.

As Timothy H. Lim explains in *When Texts Are Canonized*, though the criterion for inclusion in the canon is nominally whether or not a text is divinely inspired, those determinations are ultimately made by human beings. He claims, "The power of constructing the authority lies squarely with the community. Inspiration does not necessarily lead to a place in the canon, since the claim of divine inspiration by someone requires the affirmation by another. Both the claim and validation of divine inspiration

[22] Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders, *The Canon Debate* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 11.

are human constructs. They are subjective and define that which is authoritative and canonical for each community."[23] One issue that Lim does not address here is the more sinister side of power dynamics: oftentimes, power is not distributed equitably, and canon formation is not a democratic process. Canon is leveraged by the powerful (generally, men) to justify their own power and spread their own agenda. Therefore, approaching canon with a hermeneutics of suspicion – a cynical and critical eye toward the text – helps subvert existing problematic power structures.

If the canon were written, edited, and solidified by a divine figure, it would certainly be more difficult to argue against (albeit still possible and advisable). However, the process of canonization is a human enterprise. When we analyze a body of canonical texts, be they "essential" books in a high school curriculum or a religious canon like the Bible, we do not only consider the texts themselves, but also the network of interpretations (for example, a commentary on a religious work) influenced by those texts. The repertoire of interpretations, along with the core texts themselves, result in a constructed narrative about how we should be influenced by a text.

We can be sensitive to how the narrative around a text or canon is constructed. For example, the biblical book *Song of Songs* is considered a canonical Jewish work (by virtue of its place in the Hebrew Bible). In its historical context, the book reads as a series of erotic love poems, mirroring other ancient near eastern poetic paradigms. *Song of Songs* was "fixed" in the canon long before the classical rabbis of the Mishnah

[23] Timothy H. Lim, "The Formation of the Jewish Canon," in *The Formation of the Jewish Canon* (Yale University Press, 2013), 12.

and Talmud began to develop what we call Rabbinic Judaism. These rabbis were uncomfortable with the idea that women might have as much agency as *Song of Songs* depicts as well as the poems' explicitly sexual subject matter. As a result, they reinterpreted it to reflect the sense of desire and longing the original text expresses as a metaphor for the love between God and the Jewish people. This rabbinic interpretive activity has remained highly influential on strategies for reading *Song of Songs*. The rabbis were effectively able to shape an inherited literary tradition, and therefore changed the nature of the canon itself.

With the example of how *Song of Songs*' place in Jewish canon has been influenced by human minds, it is worth examining the phenomenon of the Jewish canon itself. One example of a Jewish definition of canon was outlined by Sid Z. Leiman in *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture.* He claims that "A canonical book is a book accepted by Jews as authoritative for religious practice and/or doctrine, and whose authority is binding upon the Jewish people for all generations. Furthermore, such books are to be studied and expounded in private and in public."[24] Though Leiman goes on to describe the process of canonization in detail, there is a lot to unpack purely in this definition for those of us interested in a critical view of canon.

First, let us examine Leiman's starting point, which includes the phrases "accepted by Jews," "authoritative for religious practice and/or doctrine," and "binding

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[24] Sid Z. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence* (New Haven: Connecticut Academy of Arts, 1976), 14.

upon the Jewish people for all generations." These are difficult statements to prove, since there is not now, nor has there ever been, one designated Jewish leader who speaks for all Jews.[25] Therefore, there is no specific process through which a book can be accepted by "all Jews." Perhaps we could perform a worldwide survey, but even were that possible, it is highly unlikely all Jews (or even a majority of Jews) would agree in their responses. While there are some books that are generally agreed upon (such as the books which make up the Tanakh), others, such as the Shulchan Aruch, are certainly not. Written by Joseph Caro in the 16th century, this is a widely consulted code of Jewish law. This book has been historically crucial to the Jewish people but is not binding for much of the Jewish population. Many orthodox Jewish communities, whose belief systems are structured around fulfilling the mitzvot, still rely upon this book as a foundational text. However, in Reform Jewish communities, which are not structured as such, this book is not an authority for practice or doctrine. While historically-minded Reform Jews may find value in studying the Shulchan Aruch for its relevance to Jewish history and cultural formation, this book would still not meet the criteria to be included in canon according to Leiman's definition.

In fact, in following Leiman's definition closely, only the Tanakh has the potential to be considered canonical in Judaism. However, this too becomes complicated when taking into account Leiman's second sentence, which states that these books "…are to be studied and expounded in public and in private." The emphasis on engagement with canonical books is significant, since Jewish cultural development relies on reading to

[25] This is not to say that there have never been influential Jewish leaders. On the contrary, leaders in the Jewish community have the ability to influence the way we read canon.

spread shared Jewish representations. While it is not possible to make any sweeping statements about whether or not the Tanakh is read in private (we would venture to guess that this is not particularly likely in the majority of modern Reform Jewish homes), most synagogues read aloud from the Tanakh at least once a week. Of course, the public recitation is limited to books of Torah and select readings from the rest of Tanakh, and many synagogues do not actually read the entire Torah aloud. In many Reform Jewish settings, as few as five or ten verses of Torah are selected from the weekly portion to be read aloud, and only read once a week on Shabbat. In an attempt to support Reform values by making services shorter and more accessible, congregants' public exposure to Jewish text becomes limited. This approach to publicly reading text is the antithesis of how canon should function according to Leiman.

After examining Leiman's definition and considering the issues it presents, we have ultimately decided that canon is not an appropriate tool for selecting reading material in Reform Jewish settings. Not only does it conflict with the foundational beliefs of Reform Judaism, but it is too limited for our desired scope of application for an ethic of reading. Instead, we will lean on Iser's idea of "cultural repertoire" to create our own tool. We hope that through engaging in an ethic of reading, our Reform Jewish communities may access a broader Jewish "textual repertoire." By textual repertoire, we mean a collection of texts which is potentially boundless, and could include anything from biblical text to rabbinic text to modern writing. Unlike a canon, there is no expectation that books in the Jewish textual repertoire are divinely inspired, nor that they are necessarily "binding" for any reader. This Jewish textual repertoire removes the complications inherent in canon, while still acknowledging that there are, indeed,

Jewish texts, and that engaged Jews should engage with as many of those texts as possible.

What might a Jewish textual repertoire look like? *The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare is a secular work which is a part of Western canon, and consumers of Western canon are likely to encounter it (or another Shakespeare play) being performed in their communities. Since Shakespeare's work is so prevalent, there is added value to reading *The Merchant of Venice* in a Jewish pedagogic context.

Traditionally, the Jewish character Shylock is portrayed as the villain, excoriated for demanding the infamous "pound of flesh," the literal heart of Antonio, his Christian business associate and rival. *The Merchant of Venice* is often seen as a highly antisemitic work; the depiction of Shylock relies on antisemitic stereotypes such as Jewish desire to control money. These stereotypes lead many to exclude it from a Jewish canon, not to mention that the play is not written by a Jew, nor does it portray the Jewish character in a favorable light, at least at face value. However, through using an ethic of reading which values ethical criticism, we discover that depicting Shylock as the villain is not true to the meaning of the play. In fact, Shakespeare offers a harsh critique of religion in general, rather than criticism of Judaism or Jews specifically. One clear example of this comes in Shylock's famous speech in Act III. He asks,

> If you prick us [Jews], do we not bleed? […] And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge. The villany you teach me, I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.[26]

Shylock's climactic moment reveals Shakespeare's view that all religions are equal vehicles for vengeance. This is not purely a Jewish trait. In fact, Shakespeare is leveraging a particularly powerful critique against his fellow Christian, whose religion teaches forgiveness as a key tenet. However, the Christian characters actively seek vengeance. Readers without experience with ethical criticism see Shylock as the villain of the whole play, but in fact, all of the characters use religion in equally despicable ways. In this way, Shylock is only one of many flawed characters. Since *The Merchant of Venice* is still widely performed today, Jews are often asked to respond to its performance. Therefore, we believe an ethically critical read is imperative for Jewish readers, and this play can be included in a Jewish textual repertoire, even when there may not be room in Jewish canon. Jewish readers will then be able to dispel the simplistic image of Shylock as a vehicle for antisemitism.

Specific examples aside, we wish to be as expansive as possible. We are not trying to create a list of what "must be read" for engaged Jewish learners. In order to be an engaged Jewish learner, however, one must develop a broad grasp of Jewish cultural repertoire, which we believe comes, in part, through a grasp of Jewish textual

[26] William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice In Plain and Simple English: A Modern Translation and the Original Version*, trans. BookCaps (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), Act III, Scene I.

repertoire. We hope to create a tool which will assist learners in grappling with any Jewish text one may encounter.

An Ethic of Reading in Reform Jewish Spaces

As we work to create an ethic of reading in Reform Jewish spaces specifically, an understanding of Reform Jewish history is a crucial component. What follows are what we consider pertinent aspects. The Reform Movement began in Germany and arose out of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment's emphasis on reason, rationalism, and critical learning is mirrored in Reform Jewish history. From its beginnings, Reform Judaism has been anchored by belief in human intellectual capabilities and commitment to the conviction that truth can be found through learning and study. Early reformers believed that truth is not necessarily found through revelation, but rather through commitment to the principles of the Enlightenment.

Abraham Geiger is often considered the founding father of the Reform Movement. He lived in Germany during the 19th century, less than a century after the rise of the Enlightenment. Michael Meyer, in his comprehensive history of Reform Judaism *Response to Modernity*, describes Geiger's role as founding father: "Although Reform ideas and liturgical innovation did not begin with him, it was he, a figure of the second generation, who more than anyone drew together the strands and wove them into an ideology for the movement."[27] Without that ideology, rationale, and sense of

[27] Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 89.

purpose, the Jewish reforms of the 19th century might never have been coalesced into a movement.

Geiger also played a central role in developing the Reform Movement's emphasis on critical reading, especially of biblical texts. Geiger claimed that "The Bible, no less than the Talmud, had to be understood as a product of its time."[28] Though this statement may not seem radical to us, it was an essential reimagining of Jewish texts and Jewish life as dependent on historical context. Geiger changed the way that we understand texts:

> The cumulative effect of Geiger's critical work was thus to historicize and therefore to relativize every sacred text of Judaism, biblical no less than rabbinic. Each reflected its age of origin, none stood above its historical milieu, none could serve as unassailable norm. Whatever history had produced, the ongoing history represented by present and future could alter or even abolish. But recognizing historical relativity did not necessitate rejection. Every element of tradition could claim *relative* validity as a revelation of the religious consciousness within the community of Israel at a particular moment in its development. If it still possessed viability in the present, then it was worthy of reaffirmation.[29]

Geiger never used the words 'developing an ethic of reading,' but his life's work was focused on what it meant to be a critical reader and a critical consumer of culture. Ultimately, in light of our understanding of cultural creation, Geiger was an active participant in that process.

Eventually, the locus of Jewish Reform spread from Germany to the United States. Just as Abraham Geiger was a founding father of intellectual reforms, Isaac

[28] Meyer, 93.
[29] Meyer, 93.

Mayer Wise was a founding father of American Reform. Though today we remember Wise as an important forebear of the Reform Movement, his aim was less about developing a specific stream of Judaism and more about reforming Judaism in an American context. Wise was an enthusiastic supporter of American ideals. He firmly believed that America would provide the foundation for the future of Judaism. In 1873, lay leaders created the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the "fulfillment of one of Wise's most cherished dreams."[30] The Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) was an umbrella organization for "a full spectrum of congregations," including Orthodox.[31] (The formation of the UAHC preceded the creation of the Pittsburgh Platform, a highly ideological document, which we will discuss more in depth.) Jews in America wanted to find ways in which they could be both Jewish and American without either identity compromising the other. Wise's "reformist ideas answered their [American Jews'] question as to if and how Judaism could be related to the American milieu."[32] Wise's reforms to Judaism worked in concert with American Jews feeling able to maintain their religious identity while adopting a new national identity.

Like Geiger, Wise had a theory about how and why to reform Judaism. Jakob J. Petuchowski described some of the similarities between Geiger and Wise: "*Mutatis mutandis*, Geiger's *evolutionary* concept of Reform, of a Reform growing *organically* out of the previous stage of Jewish religious development, was championed in America by

[30] Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 129.
[31] Sarna, 129.
[32] Meyer, 239.

Isaac Mayer Wise […] who came to America in 1846"[33]. At the same time, Geiger and Wise were also very different: Wise was a "greater organizer" but "far less of a scholar" than Geiger.[34] Though they shared a commitment to reforming Judaism, they faced different challenges in their respective locations, Germany and America.

While other reformers spoke about the idea of Prophetic Judaism and what it could mean for a movement dedicated to reform, "Wise continued to anchor his faith in Sinai."[35] However, his commitment to Sinai did not mean that he believed in revelation as the exclusive way to obtain knowledge, or that he believed only biblical and rabbinic texts were valid bases for Jewish life. On the contrary, Wise was inspired by postbiblical history and the medieval philosophical tradition:

> Postbiblical Jewish history, for Wise, was a heroic tale: a glorious struggle for independence waged by the Maccabees, a desperate defiance of Rome, an unparalleled perseverance and a remarkable creativity in the Diaspora. The rabbinic literature, Wise recognized, was the bulk of Israel's productivity in the Diaspora and he paid it full tribute, but he linked modern Judaism especially to the medieval philosophical tradition. Beginning with Saadia in the tenth century, according to Wise, rabbinical hermeneutics ceased to be the sole authority for the exposition of Scripture. Philology and philosophy became "the final arbiters of scriptural teachings." According to Wise, "it may be truly maintained that the school now called Reform had its origin then and there." The trend continued via Maimonides—but not via the uncritical commentaries of Rashi—on to Mendelssohn and *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, wherever reason was the guiding light of exegesis. Wise gave relatively less credit to the German Reformers of the nineteenth century, for the future of the movement by then, he believed, lay in America.[36]

[33] Jakob J. Petuchowski, "Abraham Geiger and Samuel Holdheim: Their Differences in Germany and Repercussions in America," *JPS Scholar of Distinction Series* Studies in Modern Theology and Prayer (1998): 271.
[34] Petuchowski, 271.
[35] Meyer, 241.
[36] Meyer, 241.

For Wise, Jewish history after biblical times and the medieval philosophical tradition were rich foundations on which to build the Reform Movement. The medieval philosophers in particular supported Wise's ideology that reason was central to developing a Reform Movement.

For both Geiger and Wise, reason—the guiding principle of the Enlightenment—was fundamental to the Reform Movement. This commitment to reason, rationalism, and knowledge also led to a commitment to biblical criticism and critical inquiry. As founding fathers of Reform Judaism as we know it today, Geiger and Wise helped establish the centrality of reason, and subsequently of critical scholarship, to the Reform Movement.

The Platforms of Reform Judaism

Reason, science, and critical inquiry, which were so fundamental to Reform Judaism, also became important components of the platforms of the Reform Movement. By tracing these platforms, we see how the movement articulated its commitment to reason. Just as with any formal documents, however, there are problems in relying on the platforms alone as guides to Reform Jewish thought. Namely, it is problematic that Reform Jewish laypeople were not involved in crafting these platforms. But the platforms are useful because they provide a consistent opportunity to explore the ways the Reform Movement named its own values throughout time. Ultimately, the platforms are a combination of reality and aspiration. They reflect both the lived reality of Reform

Jews' experiences throughout different times in history as expressed by the leaders of their movement. The platforms also represent a distillation of the aspirations of the Reform Movement's leaders; the platforms highlighted the ideals of the Reform Jewish community, even if those ideals were not necessarily practiced everywhere.

Over the past one hundred and fifty years, reformers in America have published five major platforms, described by Dr. Gary P. Zola as aspiring "to make their case for a Judaism that acknowledged the necessity and desirability of religious innovation, change in praxis, and ideological reformation."[37] In chronological order, they are as follows: The Philadelphia Principles of 1869, The Pittsburgh Platform in 1885, the Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism (also known as the Columbus Platform) in 1937, a document called Reform Judaism—A Centenary Perspective (also known as the San Francisco Platform) in 1976, and A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism in 1999 (also known as Pittsburgh II). Although The Philadelphia Principles and The Pittsburgh Platform were written prior to the formal founding of the Reform Movement, they are seen as part of its ideological foundation.

Michael Meyer and Gunther Plaut, in their book *The Reform Judaism Reader: North American Documents*, comment on those five times North American Reform rabbis have adopted a document with guiding principles: "The relatively frequent adoption of new platforms is indicative of the movement's dynamic character and its ability to adapt rapidly to the challenges posed by a changing environment."[38] In the

[37] Gary P. Zola, "The Common Places of American Reform Judaism's Conflicting Platforms," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 72 (2001): 160.
[38] Michael A. Meyer and W. Gunther Plaut, *The Reform Judaism Reader: North American Documents* (New York: UAHC Press, 2001), 195.

1885 Pittsburgh Platform, the 1937 Columbus Platform, and the 1976 San Francisco Platform, the role of reason, science, and critical inquiry was lauded and valued. The 1999 Platform marks a deviation from this commitment. We will now briefly explore each of these platforms and examine the ways that the values of science, reason, and critical inquiry are present (or missing) in each.

Though the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885 was preceded by the Philadelphia Principles of 1869, the 1869 document was essentially a series of statements meant to differentiate Reform Judaism from orthodoxy. The Pittsburgh Platform is really the beginning of an American Reform Jewish ethos. Towards the beginning of the relatively concise platform, the authors write:

> We hold that Judaism presents the highest conception of the God-idea as taught in our Holy Scriptures and developed and spiritualized by the Jewish teachers, in accordance with the moral and philosophical progress of their respective ages. We maintain that Judaism preserved and defended, midst continual struggles and trails and under enforced isolation, this God-idea as the central religious truth for the human race.
>
> We recognize in the Bible the record of the consecration of the Jewish people to its mission as priest of the one God, and value it as the most potent instrument of religious and moral instruction. We hold that the modern discoveries of scientific researches in the domains of nature and history are not antagonistic to the doctrines of Judaism, the Bible reflecting the primitive ideas of its own age, and at times clothing its conception of Divine Providence and justice dealing with man in miraculous narratives.[39]

Similar to Isaac Mayer Wise's vision for Reform Judaism, this platform does not see science and religion as being in conflict. This reflects an Enlightenment-inspired

[39] Meyer and Plaut, 198.

perspective about the role of reason and science in society. This platform also clearly states that Jewish teachings throughout the ages must be considered through "their respective ages." Implicit in this formulation is the idea that Judaism might change and progress from its original form, and that is understandable and acceptable. The Columbus Platform of 1937 builds on the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform's commitment. It states:

> *Nature of Judaism.* Judaism is the historical religious experience of the Jewish people. Though growing out of Jewish life, its message is universal, aiming at the true union and perfection of mankind under the sovereignty of God. Reform Judaism recognizes the principle of progressive development in religion and consciously applies this principle to spiritual as well as to cultural and social life.
>
> Judaism welcomes all truth, whether written in the pages of scripture or deciphered from the records of nature. The new discoveries of science, while replacing older scientific views underlying our sacred literature, do not conflict with the essential spirit of religion as manifested in the consecration of man's will, heart, and mind to the service of God and of humanity.[40]

Once again, the authors of this new statement clearly state that science and reason "do not conflict with the essential spirit of religion." This platform also makes a radical statement that Judaism "welcomes all truth," further reflecting Enlightenment ideals and principles. Through their commitment to belief in science and reason, both the 1885 and the 1937 platforms must also believe in the process of critical inquiry (despite the fact that this is not specifically stated).

[40] Meyer and Plaut, 200.

The 1976 San Francisco Platform supports critical inquiry and scholarship even more openly than the other two platforms we have examined so far. In the first section of this document, the authors write:

> We also feel great satisfaction at how much of our pioneering conception of Judaism has been accepted by the Household of Israel. It now seems self-evident to most Jews: that our tradition should interact with modern culture; that its forms ought to reflect a contemporary esthetic; that its scholarship needs to be conducted by modern, critical methods; and that change has been and must continue to be a fundamental reality in Jewish life.[41]

This is perhaps the boldest articulation of a commitment to science and reason. In this document, the authors affirm that not only can scholarship be conducted by modern, critical methods, but that it *must* be conducted as such. Though all three platforms distance themselves from an Orthodox ideology (divinity of texts, adherence to halacha, etc.) none do so as clearly as the 1976 San Francisco Platform.

The San Francisco Platform is the shortest-lived platform of the Reform Movement. It was replaced by A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism, or Pittsburgh II. Pittsburgh II marked a significant shift in the way that the Reform Movement articulated its ideals. Supporters and detractors of the platform alike both agree that Pittsburgh II represents a dramatic change in the way the Reform Movement understood itself; they disagree on whether or not this shift was a positive one. One example of a substantial change in Pittsburgh II is the way it discusses mitzvot and holiness: "Through Torah study we are called to מצות (*mitzvot)*, the means by which we

[41] Meyer and Plaut, 203.

make our lives holy."[42] The platform goes on to state that some mitzvot, translated as sacred obligations, "have long been observed by Reform Jews; others, both ancient and modern, demand renewed attention as the result of the unique context of our own times."[43] Never before had a Reform Movement platform endorsed the idea of mitzvot in this way. Though the authors do not explain exactly what they meant by the "unique context of our own times," the platform clearly articulates a belief that the context of Reform Judaism has shifted so much since its beginnings that the ideals of the Movement must shift in turn.

Pittsburgh II went through a process of vigorous debate by the rabbis of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) before it was adopted. One of its greatest supporters was Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf, who spoke to the assembled members of the CCAR prior to the adoption of Pittsburgh II. In his speech, he focused on why he ardently supported this platform and why he believed others should join him in supporting it as well. Toward the beginning of his speech, Wolf says that he wants "to talk about the specter that hangs over our movement and over our history. The specter is symbolized, if you will, by the Pittsburgh Platform."[44] Wolf saw the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform not only as something that needed to be reformed, but moreover as something that needed to be rejected entirely in order to make way for an entirely different ideology. He described what he viewed as the mistakes of the 1885 Platform:

[42] Meyer and Plaut, 210.
[43] Meyer and Plaut, 210.
[44] Arnold Jacob Wolf, "Introductory Address to the Debate on the 1999 Statement of Principles on Reform Judaism," May 26, 1999, 1.

> Now what were their mistakes? Their mistake was an anthropocentrism instead of a theocentrism, despite their high-flown rhetoric, [that] their God was in the service of human concerns. And they did not understand that the purpose of religion is not to meet human needs but to create human needs; to change the agenda of the Jewish people. They thought that Judaism was a religion and it is not. It is a Torah civilization. It is a people with a belief, a faith, a program and above all, a tone. They thought that the essence of Judaism was prophetic. It was not. It was rabbinic. And although they were enormous scholars of rabbinic Judaism, far deeper than most of us, certainly than I am, they nevertheless missed the point: that Judaism was about the Classical period of rabbinic Judaism. They believed that minhag and not mitzvah was the name of the game.[45]

In repudiating the 1885 Platform, Wolf also articulated his belief that Judaism is a human endeavor to create culture. He does not suggest reforming the old platform, but instead advocates for throwing it out entirely and reimagining what Reform Judaism has the potential to be for its practitioners.

As ardent as the supporters of Pittsburgh II were, the detractors of the newest platform were just as vocal in their critique. Dr. David H. Aaron was one of these critics. In his article "The First Loose Plank: On the Rejection of Reason in the Pittsburgh Principles of 1999," Aaron traces the history of reason throughout the Reform Movement's platforms. He ultimately concludes that Pittsburgh II represents a dramatic shift away from an appreciation of reason and critical inquiry:

> The authors of these Principles, and their commentators, are obviously intent upon putting aside the stand Reform Judaism has assumed for more than a century as to what constitutes "reasonable" and "believable." They describe breaking the "constraints of religion based solely on rationalism" as a *liberation*. If belief in immortality can be called scientific, rational, and believable, then the general position of the liberal Jewish community is being forced to regress to pre-Enlightenment standards of critical inquiry.

[45] Wolf, 1.

> Far from serving as a *liberation*, this attitude constitutes an enslavement, one that entails shackling rational discourse to the superstitions and ignorance of premodern societies. The embrace of rationalism and irrationalism *simultaneously and equally* in the context of historical and empirical truth statements renders the Reform Movement an absurdity.[46]

Aaron is deeply concerned with what he calls a regression to "pre-Enlightenment standards of critical inquiry." Not only is this devastating to any sense of commitment to reason, rationalism, and critical inquiry, but it means that Pittsburgh II completely rejects the premise and purpose of the Reform Movement's original reforms. Aaron is criticizing the fact that there is no discernable ethic of reading in Pittsburgh II. This leads to a serious problem – with no limits on reading strategy, a text can mean anything, and therefore means nothing, because there can be no shared representations. If the Reform Jewish community cannot come to an agreement on methodology for finding shared meanings, then what purpose does participation in Reform Jewish community serve?

Aaron's critiques are severe, but concerningly accurate. Until 1999, the platforms of the Reform Movement demonstrated a commitment to Enlightenment values and ideals, which include a commitment to reason and critical inquiry. The changes in Pittsburgh II leave the Reform Movement in a vulnerable and precarious place in regards to its commitment to reason.[47] In fact, this process has left Reform Jews

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[46] David H Aaron, "The First Loose Plank: On the Rejection of Reason in the Pittsburgh Principles of 1999," *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly*, no. Fall 2001 (January 1, 2001): 95.

[47]When we say "commitment to reason," we mean leveraging reading strategies based on principles of critical inquiry into text. A commitment to reason lead to critical inquiry and reading skills which in turn necessitate an ethic of reading.

in dire straits in relationship to our text. Without critical inquiry, our relationship to our texts is ethically compromised. From its inception, the Reform Movement was committed to values that provide necessary underpinnings to developing an ethic of reading. We worry that the changes in Pittsburgh II constitute an ideological backslide, but we are hopeful that the Reform Movement's long history will be strong enough to support our project.

Reform Judaism as Prophetic Judaism – An Ethic of Reading at Work

Reform Judaism is also often referred to as Prophetic Judaism because the Reform Movement was inspired by and committed to the ideals present in the Prophetic Books. Emil G. Hirsch, an early reformer, said that the Prophetic books were "the basis of Reform Judaism."[48] Hirsch, like other reformers of his age, did not fear biblical criticism because the truth of Reform Judaism "did not depend on the origin of sacred texts."[49] The reformers used an ethic of reading that suggested prophetic texts impart powerful wisdom, which thereby placed them in prominent position in the Reform Movement. Hirsh was known as a "great social justice advocate" and it was at his insistence that the Pittsburgh Platform included its plank about social justice.[50] In the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, the last principle lays out how the Reform Movement understands its commitment to prophetic ideals: "In full accordance with the spirit of Mosaic legislation, which strives to regulate the relation between the rich and poor, we deem it our duty to participate in the great task of modern times, to solve, on the basis

[48] Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 273.
[49] Meyer, 273.
[50] Sarna, 150.

of justice and righteousness, the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society."[51] The call for Jews to be involved in the greater issues of society was much more than a call to a sense of personal ethics; the Pittsburgh Platform clearly laid out an ethic of engagement in modern-day issues of injustice.

In the 20th century, the Reform Movement shifted to adapt a more comprehensive agenda of social justice. This was not an abandonment of the movement's commitment to prophetic ideals, but rather an expansion of it. Where early reformers spoke and wrote about individuals' need to heed prophetic writing, leaders in the 20th century adopted a sense of communal action. Meyer traces this shift from "a prophetic Judaism that spoke only of individual conduct to one that addressed special social issues" to both the American Progressive Movement and the Christian Social Gospel.[52] The prophetic aspect of Reform Judaism has looked different in different times, but it has been a consistent part of the identity of the Reform Movement.

The Movement's commitment to prophetic ideals is a powerful example of one kind of ethic of reading. Founders and leaders of the Reform Movement actively chose to use the texts of the prophetic books as a foundation for their commitment to social justice. Of the entire canon of the Hebrew Bible, our movement has enthusiastically endorsed engagement with the texts from Prophets. This was a choice based on critical reading strategies and community values. The challenge for us going forward is two-fold: 1) to remind or teach people that our reliance on prophetic texts and values is not

[51] Meyer and Plaut, *The Reform Judaism Reader*, 199. We are cognitive that there are some significant differences between calling something Mosaic and more generally prophetic, but that goes beyond the scope of this paper.
[52] Meyer, 287.

an accident; and 2) to use this example to inspire us to *continue* to develop a Reform Jewish ethic of reading.

Reform Jewish Community

We argue that developing an ethic of reading is crucial for the Reform Movement to create more substantive Jewish culture and deeper Jewish experiences. So how does a Reform Jewish ethic of reading work in our communities? How can we help Reform Jews develop an ethic of reading? There are many potential answers to these questions, but we will offer one example with which many Reform Jews will have familiarity. The yearly Torah cycle is an excellent area to begin cultivating an ethic of reading for our communities.

Traditionally, the entire Torah portion is read on Shabbat morning. This means that if you attend Shabbat services weekly for a whole year, you will have heard the Torah read in its entirety. (Let's put aside for a moment the issue of whether or not individuals *understand* what is being read when we read the Torah portion.) In Conservative Judaism, the Torah is read on a triennial cycle, which means you would need to attend Shabbat morning services for three years in order to hear the entirety of the Torah read aloud. Most Reform Jewish communities, in contrast, do not have any particular strategy for reading the weekly Torah portion. The clergy or another leader chooses which five to ten verses will be read at a Shabbat morning service. There is no comprehensive system for, nor commitment to, ensuring that the entirety of the Torah is read.

Since the Torah service is such a familiar part of Jewish life, it provides an accessible example for the types of questions we ask while utilizing an ethic of reading. Such questions include: How do Reform clergy choose which verses to read? Are there criteria for how the verses from one parsha relate to the next week's parsha? Is there a system for keeping track of what verses were read in prior years, or is this information irrelevant? Do we choose the verses we read because they somehow reflect our values? These are just some of the questions that we must be asking as we seek to develop a Reform Jewish ethic of reading.

After asking these initial questions, we are led to an even more radical query. What if, instead of choosing Torah verses willy-nilly, we develop an ethic that informs how we choose the verses we read? What if, in addition to *having* an ethic of reading, we share that ethic broadly, so that our community knows how and why we are choosing to read particular verses over others? What if we go even further, teaching this strategy to b'nei mitzvah students so that they can exercise their own agency choosing Torah verses, thereby developing their own Reform Jewish ethic of reading? Of course, choosing to read certain verses aloud does not mean that we cannot or should not study the plethora of other verses in our text. On the contrary, imagine a synagogue that does not ignore Leviticus 18:22 (the Bible's supposed prohibition against homosexuality), but rather holds an annual study session about the meaning and legacy of this verse. Now imagine a synagogue that takes their ethic of reading one step further, and participates in LGBTQ activism based on their reading of the same verse. The Reform Jewish world overflows with opportunities to develop an ethic of reading. The yearly Torah reading cycle is just the beginning.

As modern Jews, we pride ourselves on a commitment to critical thinking. Emphasis on reason, critical inquiry, and scholarship are legacies of the Reform Movement. We ask: Can we truly be critical thinkers without also having a clear Reform Jewish ethic of reading? We answer resoundingly: No, we cannot.

Challenges, Opportunities, and How Our Projects Will Address Them

Ultimately, we are working through the lens of the Reform Movement because this is our community as students of HUC-JIR. In addition, we have clearly shown that the Reform Movement's legacy of critical inquiry provides fertile ground for creating an ethic of reading. However, we have disagreed over some potential challenges we may face in our endeavor. On the one hand, we all agree that theoretically, Reform Jewish communities are prepared to engage in the kind of work that we are proposing specifically because of the movement's underpinnings of critical inquiry and Reform Jews' rich engagement with the secular world. On the other hand, our own experience in Reform spaces as well as our own educational experiences in Reform institutions lead us to question whether Reform Jews *will* engage in an ethic of reading.

Of course, it is not only up to individual Reform Jews to develop an ethic of reading. We know that we will also need commitment from educators and teachers. Educators in Jewish communities face many challenges in regard to incorporating an ethic of reading. The two biggest problems are: 1) time constraints, which both limit the amount of time that educators can spend developing curriculum and limit the amount of time spent studying biblical texts in any curriculum; and 2) educators' limited Jewish cultural and textual repertoire. We also believe that any change within Reform Jewish

communities will require significant investment in cultural change. In other words, professionals and laypeople alike must commit themselves to actually making changes in the way we read. We have varying levels of confidence in communities' interest and desire to do this.

In addition to these issues, there is also the question of whether instituting an ethic of reading is something that happens best on a systemic level or an individual level. Deborah tends to believe in and prioritize systemic and systematic changes within the Reform Movement because of the movement's potential for wider impact and her belief in the institution of the Reform Movement as a whole. In its ideal form, Deborah would want the institutions of the Reform Movement to commit not only to teaching about an ethic of reading, but also training its leaders (lay and professional alike) in how and why to develop an ethic of reading.

Jason finds himself on the other end of the spectrum; he is concerned that the Reform Movement's commitment to a "big tent" and broad appeal will make it difficult for systemic changes to occur. Instead, he believes in the efficacy of focusing on individual and local solutions. Cultural change does not only need to be located in the leadership hierarchy but can be grassroots as well. Libby's beliefs lay in the middle of this argument. She hopes this project will reach rabbis and other educators within the Reform Movement. As leaders in individual communities, they have a finger on the pulse of the needs, concerns, and desires of their community members. With that knowledge, these leaders will be able to influence culture within their community and push their congregants toward an ethic of reading. We recognize that our views and

expectations will likely change over time throughout our rabbinates but want to be open and forthcoming as we embark on this project.

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Encountering the Other in Biblical Texts: An Ethics of Reading at Work

Libby Louise Fisher

In writing *An Introduction to an Ethics of Reading in Reform Judaism*, I hoped to create a tool which would emphasize the necessity of reading Jewish texts through an ethical lens. Reading our texts ethically allows us to engage deeply and authentically with tradition rather than being passive participants. As argued in the introduction, reading is a two-way activity – any text has an impact on the reader, and the reader has an impact on the text. In the Reform Movement, too often we have ignored what we deem "problematic" texts – texts which do not align with our ethical sensibilities – and therefore forfeit the opportunity to form any sort of relationship with our fundamental texts. Creating an honest and open relationship with our texts, even if we emphatically disagree with them, is far preferrable to ignoring them all together because this relationship allows us to interact more intelligently both with the traditions of our ancestors and with Jews of all sects today.

When I thought about all the possible applications of reading through an ethical lens (there are many), one issue rose to the surface for me – the way we Jews relate to those who are different from us. After all, the commandment not to oppress a stranger is repeated no fewer than thirty-six times in our texts, more than any other commandment. Much has been accomplished in the Reform Movement thus far regarding differences *within* the Jewish community (such as working toward accepting people of all races and sexual orientations), and though there is much progress still to be made in this realm, I am particularly thinking about the way we treat those *outside*

the boundaries of the Jewish community. Throughout much of Jewish history, we Jews have seen ourselves as the Other. As we have attempted to form a coherent sense of Jewish identity over time, we have "othered" anyone who does not fit within our self-understood boundaries.[1] This questioning of our own narrative is a relatively recent scholarly endeavor. Laurence J. Silberstein asserts in the opening chapter of *The Other in Jewish Thought and History*:

> Studies in Jewish culture and history regularly emphasize the ways in which Jews have been marginalized, excluded, and oppressed as the Other. Only recently, however, have scholars begun to pay attention to the ways in which Jews, in the process of constructing their cultural identity, construct and define Others.[2]

Though Silberstein frames his point in an academic context, I believe this type of exploration has extremely practical value for those of us living our day-to-day lives as Reform Jews, deeply engaged with our surrounding culture. In our regular, daily lives, how does our self-understood cultural identity create boundaries between "us" and "them"? How might we become more aware of these boundaries, and how might we attempt to adjust them once we are aware? These are the types of questions Silberstein's model will allow us to ask.

Before delving in to why I believe questioning our narrative about otherness is not just our opportunity, but our responsibility as Reform Jews, I will clarify what I mean by "Other." First, we have to start with the concept of identity. The essentialist view of identity argues that there is something essential at the core of all Jewish identity

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[1] Of course, we know that the boundaries of the Jewish community have rarely been entirely self-created. In many cases, these boundaries have been imposed upon Jews by the outside world, such as in times when Jews were only allowed to live within a certain section of a city. While this is important to keep in mind, this paper will focus on Jewish *self*-understanding.

[2] Laurence J. Silberstein and Robert L. Cohn, eds., *The Other in Jewish Thought and History* (New York University Press, 1994), 12.

across time, space, and denomination, and if you do not have that essential something, you are Other. But I am not inclined to agree with this notion. Rather, I am inclined to agree with Stuart Hall, who presents a competing understanding of identity as follows:

> Cultural identity…is a matter of "becoming" as well as of "being" …It is not something which already exists transcending place, time, history, and culture. Cultural identities come from someplace, have histories. But, like everything else which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous play of history, culture, and power… Far from being grounded in a "mere" recovery of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past.[3]

Like Hall, I believe that cultural identity is fluid, because it is subject to change depending on context. With this understanding of identity, it becomes clear that identity is *created*. If identity is created, then so too is otherness, and there can be inherent danger in this process. Jacques Derrida, a post-structuralist philosopher, explains this danger as follows: "The rapport of self-identity is itself always a rapport of violence with the other; so that the notions of property, appropriation and self-presence, so central to logocentric metaphysics, are essentially dependent on an oppositional relation with otherness. In this sense, identity presupposes alterity."[4] The "rapport of violence" Derrida mentions is not specifically physical violence but is rather a type of symbolic violence. This is a type of coercion which involves the *threat* of physical violence and retribution, but also includes either overt or covert shaming, isolation, and other methods of "othering" a group of people outside of the group. This sort of

[3] Silberstein and Cohn, 4.
[4] Jacques Derrida, "Deconstruction and the Other," in *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*, ed. Richard Kearney (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1984), 116.

potential violence is why I believe it is our ethical responsibility to become more aware of the ongoing process of identity formation and its consequences. When we define ourselves, a consequence of this process is that we create boundaries, and therefore, Others. We Reform Jews in America do not live in a bubble. We live beside people of all religions and no religion, and if we are lucky, we do not just live next to them, but we work together, we play together, and we live our lives in community together. As we set about attempting to understand Jewish identity and the Other in our world, it behooves us to look to our textual tradition to see how this has been handled in the past. It is entirely likely that we will vehemently dislike what we find, but that, in and of itself, will be an educational experience in using an ethical lens to read our texts, and can guide how we approach otherness today.

When reading Torah, we encounter numerous stories in which otherness functions. Whenever otherness appears, it has a function. By "function," I mean it is not arbitrary, but rather is a choice made on the part of the communicator – in this case, an author. Each time an author sits down to write a text, every element of the text is a choice made by that author. The content of a story, each and every element, serves the purpose of carrying out the author's goals. Therefore, authors utilize the concept of otherness in order to accomplish a goal (for example, some goals include defining internal identity or villainizing a cultural practice). Throughout the Torah, the biblical authors are concerned about the way God's chosen people interact with those around them, but the particular goal of emphasizing otherness in various stories differs. For example, in Genesis, otherness often functions in order to emphasize the need for endogamy. In creating a new people, the patriarchs were only supposed to marry

within their own tribe, and not mix with outsiders. As we transition into Exodus and beyond, stricter rules are put in place about proper and improper relationships with outsiders. In Deuteronomy, for example, laws are enacted which require the Israelites to destroy the cultic items of foreign peoples. The goal here is to outline appropriate and inappropriate cultic practices, and to make it clear that the Israelite practice is correct. (For more information about reading our text with an ethical lens, please read our introductory essay. For more information about otherness in the Torah, please view my annotated findings in Appendix A.)

As we can see, there is no single function for the use of otherness in the Torah. We can therefore conclude that just like identity formation and otherness in postmodern terms, the function of the Other in Torah is dependent on context. In this case, the context is the viewpoint and ideological goals of the author (or the redactor). In order to show how these viewpoints affects the treatment of the Other, I will compare and contrast the stories of Joseph and Moses. Not only are Joseph and Moses two prominent figures in the Torah, but their stories appear one right after the other – Joseph's taking up the last thirteen chapters of Genesis and Moses' starting right at the beginning of Exodus. In fact, as a result of the Torah's redaction, the Moses narrative grows directly out of the existing dynamics in the Joseph narrative. In juxtaposing these two narratives, we discover a number of thematic inversions which are especially highlighted by the stories' proximity to one another. Specifically, I will focus on the differences between the authors' goals with respect to relationship with the Other - for both Joseph and Moses, the "Other" is the Egyptians.

Before starting this exploration in depth, it is important to start with the understanding that the Torah is not historical. If we were to understand the Torah as history, we would not be able to dissect the function of the story, since the function would simply be to record history. Rather, understanding Torah as a collection of narratives written by a number of authors which have been redacted into the form we have today allows us more ways to interpret the text. In the introduction to his book *Genesis Ideology*, Dr. David H. Aaron confronts the historicity of the Torah:

> Whether Abraham or Moses, Aaron or Joshua were the actual people the Torah stories are based upon, cannot be established. What can be said with certainty is that our stories about the biblical characters have very little to do with what modern students of history would call "history" and everything to do with the ideological agenda of the authors. Thus, even if these *were* all real historical figures, we are left with the literary representations of the Torah's authors, who readily fabricated personal conversations, reflections on motivations, and the discourse of intimate moments, none of which would have been invented by a "historian." The import of Torah lies in its ideological teachings and not in its historicity, of which it probably has very little.[5]

By utilizing Aaron's framework to focus on the "ideological agenda of the authors," searching for function within the Torah gives us the opportunity to see things we might otherwise miss. For example, if we were only reading Torah for its plot, we may never notice particular depictions of the Other, because we would not be focused on that pursuit. Therefore, rather than having to say that the entire story of Torah functions as an historical record of the travels and trials of the Israelites,[6] such a focus on the ideology of the author allows us to investigate the ideology of the Other present in a

[5] David H. Aaron, *Genesis Ideology: Essays on the Use and Meanings of Stories* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2017), 4–5.

[6] Of course, there is really no such thing as a completely objective or neutral historical writing. All history is subjective, and historical records are subject to the perspective and ideological goals of an author. But I hope to convey the difference between the genres of history and ideological narrative.

variety of different stories. We can ask questions about the literary goals an author may have had, and then seek to understand how the Other was *used* by that author to accomplish their goals.

When reading the Joseph story, overt ideology such as we find in the rest of the Genesis story (like the importance of acquiring land, progeny, and wealth) might be difficult for the casual reader to find. However, using our new reading strategy, we discover these themes are quite apparent. One of the reasons for this difficulty is the cohesive nature of the story as a whole – it is the longest cohesive narrative in Genesis, spanning chapters 37-50 (with the exception of chapter 38, which tells the Judah and Tamar story), and taking up the entire end of the book. Unlike much of the rest of Genesis, where we read interludes written by the text's redactors which highlight ideological concerns in each story, the Joseph narrative has little obvious interruption. In fact, the length of this story suggests that there may not be one singular ideological purpose, but as an interpreter of the story, I am able to recognize certain individual ideological purposes based on those purposes with which I am already familiar as those central to the Genesis narrative more broadly. Beginning with Abraham's story, we see the acquisition of wealth, progeny, and land which are promised by God. If Genesis were the entirety of our text, then we would expect the people to end up in the Promised Land by the end of the story. Instead, though Jacob and his sons live in Canaan, they move all of the Israelites to Egypt to live out the famine under the care of their brother, Joseph. Why would the authors end Genesis with the people *leaving* the land that was promised? As Aaron argues, there is evidence which suggests that there were versions of the Genesis story which did end in the Promised Land. However, the positioning of

Genesis and Exodus one after the other meant that the redactors needed to adapt the end of the Genesis story to leave the Israelites in Egypt, ready for the beginning of Exodus.[7] So literarily speaking, Joseph's relationship with the Other functions as a means to an end – getting all of the Israelites into the land of Egypt to effectively start the Exodus narrative.

However, it is not enough to see Egypt's function on the literary scale. We can also use an ethical lens to explore the role of the Egyptians within the Joseph narrative specifically. Joseph begins his life as the favorite son of his father, Jacob, but certainly not as the favorite of his brothers. Through his position as favorite and his dream interpretations (which left no doubt that Joseph would rise in status), Joseph develops a tense relationship with his brothers, which ultimately ends up with the brothers casting Joseph into a pit and selling him as a slave to some Ishmaelites who were passing by at that moment. Joseph is cast out of his home and carried into Egypt – into the diaspora.

When we think about the Israelites' life outside of the Promised Land, many of us focus on negative experiences. After all, the Egyptians' most prominent place in the Torah is at the beginning of Exodus, when the Israelites are enslaved. But though Joseph's life in Egypt begins as a slave, he is successful in his life there, and his success ultimately allows for his family's survival. Joseph was a favored slave of Potiphar, an Egyptian nobleman, but is imprisoned after Potiphar's wife falsely accuses him of sexual advances. But even in prison, Joseph is awarded special favor by the chief jailer, and forms a relationship with the pharaoh's cupbearer and baker, who were in jail for angering the king. Joseph interprets their dreams to mean that the baker will be killed,

[7] Aaron, *Genesis Ideology*, 80.

but the cupbearer will return to the pharaoh's favor. These predictions come to pass, and when the pharaoh wanted his dreams interpreted, the cupbearer told him of Joseph, whom he had met in prison. In this way, Joseph enters the household of the pharaoh, and after he interprets the dreams as meaning there will be seven years of abundance followed by seven years of famine, Joseph suggests that the pharaoh should appoint someone to take charge of reserving food during the time of plenty to ration out during the famine. The pharaoh gives this job to Joseph, and Joseph becomes pharaoh's second-in-command. Though he started as a slave cast out from his family and from Canaan, Joseph becomes the second most powerful man in Egypt, and is entrusted with carrying the Egyptian people through years of famine.

In reading this story through an ethical lens, I was left wondering *why* Joseph is so successful. After all, up until now, Genesis authors have regularly emphasized the importance and relative safety of remaining with one's own tribe. Joseph's experience turns that logic on its head. He was more in danger with his own family, in which his brothers plotted to kill him. Only once he was sold into slavery did he attain safety, even when he was imprisoned. The author of the Joseph narrative ascribes this success to God's presence. While God is absent from the first chapter (Genesis 37), once Joseph arrives at Potiphar's household, God's presence is reiterated over and over again. Genesis 39:2-5 states:

> God was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that God was with him [Joseph] and that God caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. So Joseph found favor in his [master's] sight and attended him, and he [Joseph's master] made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, God blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of God was on all that he had, in house and field.

Not only is it clear that God's presence protects Joseph from harm and brings him success, but also God blesses those who lift Joseph up. Similar description of God's presence is used when Joseph is in jail, and again when Joseph enters the pharaoh's house, seemingly written to explain Joseph's success as divinely intended. However, Joseph's success is also facilitated by Egyptians. As we read in other passages of Torah, there is no reason that the Other has to follow God's intentions. The God of Torah is not omnipotent, and therefore does not control the actions of all peoples. Therefore, we could easily imagine a version of this story in which the Egyptians do *not* favor Joseph. But due to their favor, Joseph builds a successful life in the diaspora. In this story, in which the ultimate goal is to create a scenario in which the Israelites can live successfully in the diaspora, the Other functions as partner and neighbor, facilitator of success.

Another issue raised in other passages of Torah is keeping the Israelites distinct from the Other. In the Joseph story, this is obviously not the goal. Joseph is not just an oddball Israelite working in the pharaoh's house – he dresses in the fine linens and gold jewelry of the Egyptian elite, receives an Egyptian name (Zaphenath-paenah), marries an Egyptian woman and has Egyptian children. Despite Joseph's assimilation, he does not forget his people. Though Joseph does not immediately forgive his family for his exile, when Jacob and his sons come to Egypt for food rations, the pharaoh ultimately allows them to live on the best of Egyptian land and settle there to survive the famine. Joseph's assimilation does not cut him off from his people, nor does it cause destruction for the Israelite people. In fact, it is his assimilation which saves them. And when Jacob dies at the end of Genesis, he gives his blessing to Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Menasseh.

Two children born to an Egyptian mother are brought back into the Israelite people through receiving Jacob's blessing. By using an ethical reading strategy to explore uses of the Other in our text, we discover that in the Joseph narrative, the Other serves as partner, lifting Joseph up into a strong enough position to not only care for the Egyptians, but to sustain his own family as well.

Before moving on to look at Moses' story, it is important to note that using an ethical lens to look specifically at the function of the Other does not allow us to ignore or gloss over other difficulties we encounter. Focusing on the Other is only one of many reading strategies and using a different reading strategy will bring different insights to the forefront of our study. For example, though Joseph is the hero of his own narrative, reading with a focus on economics highlights the fact that he actually exploits the very people he is tasked with keeping safe. While not the topic of this essay, it is necessary to note that other interpretive possibilities and understandings are also valuable.

By the end of Genesis, the Israelite people are living successfully and safely in the diaspora thanks to Joseph's rise to power in the Egyptian government. The beginning of Exodus takes this narrative and turns it on its head. In first seven verses of Exodus, we learn that though Joseph's whole generation had died out, the people of Israel were fruitful and multiplied in the land of Egypt. They were, in fact, fulfilling God's command from Genesis to be fruitful and multiply, though they were still living in diaspora. Verse eight creates a sharp break in the narrative, and creates a situational shift, saying, "Now there arose a new king over Egypt who did not know Joseph."[8] This verse is often understood in the simple sense that time has passed and the new king either literally

[8] Exodus 1:8

had no knowledge of Joseph's existence (which seems unlikely, since Joseph was seemingly integral to surviving the famine) or chose to ignore Joseph's past importance in service of ridding the country of the Israelites. Nahum Sarna, in *The JPS Torah Commentary* on Exodus, writes about the underlying meaning of the verb *yada*, to know:

> This is the first appearance in Exodus of the verb *y-d-'.* It is a key term used in the Exodus narratives, occurring over twenty times in the first fourteen chapters. The usual rendering, "to know," hardly does justice to the richness of its semantic range. In the biblical conception, knowledge is not essentially or even primarily rooted in the intellect and mental activity. Rather, it is more experiential and is embedded in the emotions, so that it may encompass such qualities as contact, intimacy, concern, relatedness, and mutuality. Conversely, not to know is synonymous with dissociation, indifference, alienation, and estrangement; it culminates in callous disregard for another's humanity.[9]

Though he does not use the word "other," Sarna's definition of "not knowing" includes all the language of creating the Other. The new king distances himself from Joseph – at the least he is indifferent, at the most hateful, but regardless, his actions result in disregarding not just Joseph's humanity, but the humanity of the entire Israelite people. The Israelites, who seemed to have been welcome members of society up until this point, have a sharp turn in fortunes, with the pharaoh calling for their destruction through the murder of their baby boys.

This shift signals a change not just in the way the Egyptians regard the Israelites, and vice versa, within the story, but it also signals a new perspective on the Egyptians on the part of the biblical authors. Throughout Genesis, the Egyptians are certainly seen as Other, but they are not necessarily dangerous (except for their inherent danger

[9] Nahum M. Sarna, ed., *Exodus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 5.

because of their Otherness). Notably, in Genesis 12, Abram and Sarai go to Egypt to flee a famine, but Abram worries that he will be killed if the Egyptians know Sarai is his wife. Therefore, Sarai masquerades as Abram's sister. When Pharaoh takes Sarai into his household, God sends plagues against him, and Pharaoh releases Sarai and sends them both out of Egypt. Though Abram and Sarai do not dwell in Egypt for a prolonged period of time, their encounter with the Egyptians leaves them better off than they started, since the Egyptians had gifted Abram wealth in the form of livestock and servants. Once a new king arises over Egypt in the beginning of Exodus, the Egyptians' status as Other becomes much more sinister. The authors of the Exodus narrative use the Egyptians as a cautionary tale of why living in diaspora is dangerous – the Other cannot be trusted, and the Israelites got too comfortable in their diasporic lives. They expected their good fortune, achieved by Joseph, to continue, but once that connection was lost, the Israelites are demonized by the Egyptians, enslaved, and eventually must flee.

The Israelite flight from Egypt is led by Moses, who is born into this conflict, and in whom we can discern many similarities with Joseph. Just like Joseph, Moses is forced out of his own family and finds favor with the Egyptians. When the Egyptians are commanded to kill any Israelite baby boys, Moses' mother sends him down the Nile River in a basket. Pharaoh's daughter, finding the basket and realizing the child inside must be a Hebrew child, decides to take him in as her own anyway. Also, like Joseph, Moses receives an Egyptian name. His biological mother does not name him, but rather his adoptive mother does. In Exodus 2:10, Pharaoh's daughter names him Moses

because "I drew him out."[10] Though etymology is often used in biblical texts, especially related to place names, the etymology of Moses' name is special. As Sarna notes, "The Hebrew name is of Egyptian origin. Its basic verbal stem *msy* means "to be born," and the noun *ms* means "a child, son." It is a frequent element in Egyptian personal names, usually but not always with the addition of a divine element, as illustrated by Ahmose, Ptahmose, Ramose, and Thotmose."[11]

Moses' experience growing up in the royal household is not explained in the text, and the next time he appears, he is already grown, but the authors of the text tell us that Moses has retained a connection with the Israelite people. It is that connection that leads to Moses' flight out of Egypt, since he kills an Egyptian for beating one of the Hebrew slaves. This is where Moses' story diverges with that of Joseph. Joseph's relationship with the Other saves him, his family, and all of the Israelite people from famine. In Moses' story, the Other is dangerous, and Moses' relationship with God helps him deliver the people out of danger, and *away* from the Other.

By comparing and contrasting the lives of Joseph and Moses and their relationships with the Egyptians, it becomes clear that there has been a major change in authorial perspective and ideology in relation to the Other between Genesis and Exodus. For the authors of Genesis, the Other represents a clear danger only if they present a challenge to acquiring land, wealth, or progeny. But for the authors of Exodus, the Other and diaspora life are dangerous and intolerable, and this perspective will continue throughout the rest of Torah. As we can see through this analysis, the Other is

[10] Exodus 2:10
[11] Sarna, *JPS Exodus*, 10.

a tool in biblical writing, used by a particular author to achieve a particular goal. In the Joseph story, the Egyptians (and Egypt) are a refuge for the Israelites in the midst of a famine – it is through Joseph's connection to the Egyptians that the Israelites survive. However, the authors of the Exodus narrative view diaspora life as a dangerous impossibility for the Israelites. The Egyptians forget the positive relationship they had previously formed with the Israelites, and the Israelites are enslaved and oppressed until God, through Moses, sets them free. To the Exodus authors, only living in the Promised Land offered safety and security.

As discussed in the introduction to this work, the act of reading is a two-way street. Whenever we read a text, we affect the text, and the text has an effect on us in turn. Too often, I have heard the claim that our Jewish texts tell us that the Other is dangerous, and this type of thinking too often leads to a continued fear of the Other today. Those who believe this are certainly engaging with our biblical texts, but I believe they are missing a key part of our story. The biblical authors do not engage with the Other in a monolithic fashion, as we have seen through this study, and therefore it is incorrect to claim that the biblical texts say any *one* thing. For Jews who continue to see diasporic living as dangerous for the Jewish people, the Other as utilized by the authors of the Exodus narrative is a useful paradigm. However, for those of us who currently live in diaspora and consider ourselves to be successful, perhaps the Other utilized in the Joseph story is a better model, rather than seeing ourselves as living lives which conflict with our biblical text. Texts, like the lives we lead, are infinitely complex, and contain multiple perspectives and ideologies. Since multiple views have been included in our canon, to choose one over the other is an irresponsible way to read our text.

Throughout this essay, I have used ethical criticism as a reading strategy to focus on the function of the Other in biblical text by looking specifically at two short sections. This has allowed us to discover that rather than there being some essential quality to otherness, there is only authorial perspective which forces the Other to function in one way or another. As is clear from looking at Appendix A, this type of ethically critical strategy can be used in many other sections of the Torah to evaluate the function of otherness. This could also be expanded to include all biblical text (for example, the Book of Ruth comes to mind as a study in otherness). However, if we only use this reading strategy to look at otherness, we miss a plethora of other valuable themes which can be elucidated along similar lines. Ethical criticism can allow us to lift up ethical concerns related to economic justice, gender dynamics, or abuses of power – to name a few. It is my hope that with the tool of ethically critical reading, we can approach our foundational texts not only with reverence, but also with a deep commitment to engaging our texts in a sophisticated manner.

Appendix A: Encountering "The Other" in Biblical Text: Annotated List

Genesis

Gen. 12:3 – God will curse anyone who is against Abram

Gen. 12:17 – God afflicts the Egyptians on behalf of Abram and Sarai

Gen. 13:13 – Sodomites and their wickedness

Gen. 15:16 – Mention of the iniquity of the Amorites

Gen. 16 – Hagar is a female Egyptian servant, and Sarah deals harshly with her after she conceives Ishmael. Hagar meets an angel of God who promises her Ishmael and many subsequent generations (but the prophecy about Ishmael isn't nice)

Gen. 17:10 – Circumcision covenant

Gen. 19 – Sodom and Gomorrah – the Other is wicked, and God destroys them

Gen. 19:30-38 – Lot's Progeny (Moabites and Ammonites) come about through incest

Gen. 21:9-21 – Hagar and Lot banished by Sarah and God, but God provides a well for survival

Gen. 23 – Sarah's death leads to successful negotiations with Hittites for burial land

Gen 24: 1-9 – Isaac must marry within the tribe, not a Canaanite (endogamy)

Gen 25:1 – Who are Abraham's other wives? Does it matter?

Gen. 26:34-35 – Esau marries a Hittite woman

Gen. 27:46-28:9 – Endogamy

Gen. 29:31-30:24 – Who are Bilhah and Zilpah?

Gen. 31:24 – Laban distinguished as an Aramean (but still Jacob's family)

Gen. 34 – Rape of Dinah – danger of encounters with the Other outside of camp

Gen. 36 – Esau's genealogy – ancestors of Edomites

Gen 37 – Joseph narrative

Gen. 41 – Joseph becomes right-hand to Pharaoh, Egyptians are a palatable (perhaps helpful) Other

Notable: v. 45 – Joseph gets Egyptian name and Egyptian wife, and two sons

Exodus

Ex. 1 – A reversal – Egyptians become a dangerous Other

Notable: Shifra and Puah – are they Other? The text is not clear.

Ex 2 – Moses adopted by an Other but nursed by his own mother

Notable: Moses marries an Other – Zipporah, and gains father-in-law Reuel/Jethro

Ex 17:8-16 – First mention of Amalek and proclamation of eternal war

Numbers

Num. 11:35 – Moses marries a Cushite woman, so Aaron and Miriam complain – God takes Moses' side

Num. 21-1:3 – Israelites defeat King Arad of the Canaanites

- Vs. 21 – Israelites defeat Amorites (Sihon and Og)

Num. 25 – Israelites profane themselves by sleeping with Moabite women, and Onchas is a hero for stopping it, warning against foreign women

Num. 31 – War with Midian over foreign women

Deuteronomy

Deut. 1:39-3:11 – Israel Encounters the Other

- Amorites win a battle
- Safe passage through Seir (Esau), Moab (Lot), Ammonites (Lot)
- Conflict with Amorites (2 battles)

Deut. 7:1-5 – How Israelites should treat "native people" – no mercy, no intermarriage, destroy their cultic items

Deut. 10:19 – Befriend the stranger for you were strangers.

Deut. 25:17-19 – Amalek returns

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