Abstract

This project contains two sections. The first section is an introduction authored by Jason S. Cook, Libby Louise Fisher, and Deborah Samantha Novak Goldberg. The second section is a curriculum for Jewish teenagers authored by Deborah Samantha Novak Goldberg which uses the theoretical foundation suggested in the introduction to teach about emotional expression in the Bible and its ethical implications.

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 my project, I seek to develop a curriculum meant for Jewish teens to grapple with our sacred texts and develop their skills as critical, engaged readers of our texts. My project includes an introduction to the curriculum, which builds on the work done in our joint introduction and introduces some theoretical frameworks for Jewish education. The curriculum includes an introductory lesson plan, as well as a unit on the emotion of love (Unit 1) and a unit on the emotion of anger (Unit 2). Each lesson includes Enduring Understandings, Essential Questions, a list of required materials, notes to the teacher, an introductory essay to teach the teacher the material, and all associated handouts. This curriculum has several goals: 1) to help students develop their own Jewish ethic of reading through analyzing and interpreting texts; 2) to introduce students to the complexity and nuance of emotions present in our sacred texts; and 3) to respect the educational and spiritual needs of teenagers, who deserve meaningful, sophisticated, high-level Jewish education.

EXPLORING EMOTIONS IN THE BIBLE: A CURRICULUM FOR JEWISH TEENAGERS

DEBORAH SAMANTHA NOVAK GOLDBERG

with "An Introduction to Creating an Ethics of Reading in Reform Judaism"
by Jason S. Cook, Libby Louise Fisher,
and Deborah Samantha Novak Goldberg

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination

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Advisor: Dr. David H. Aaron

Reflections & Acknowledgements

I never imagined writing a rabbinic thesis during a global pandemic. When Libby, Jason, and I began working on this project, we pictured weekly meetings with our advisor and long work sessions in the library. By mid-march 2020, it became clear that this would not be possible.

Working on a joint capstone project is counter-cultural at HUC. Each of us approached Dr. Aaron with an idea for a rabbinic thesis. Dr. Aaron subsequently connected the three of us because he saw how our individual ideas could be combined into a unique, original project. Because of our work together, we not only produced a project that we are proud of, but also created our own learning community. This learning community has been a source of strength and pride for me while living in a COVID-19 world. For us, the process of learning together was as important as the product we produced. We learned about writing a joint paper and supported each other's work. Academia does not have to be a lonely endeavor.

Thank you to Dr. Aaron for your guidance and support of this project, but also for all of your guidance and support throughout rabbinical school. You have showed me what it looks like to engage deeply and critically with our texts. You have passionately demonstrated that our texts and our study of them matter. I am a better teacher and will be a better rabbi because I studied with you.

Thank you to Dr. Jason Kalman and Dr. Gary P. Zola for their help and consultation on our joint introduction. Thank you for sharing your time and expertise on issues of Jewish canon and Reform Jewish history and for being our teachers throughout rabbinical school.

Thank you to all my professors at HUC-JIR in Cincinnati and Jerusalem. I am grateful for the opportunity to learn from you. I promise to use my education to be the best rabbi, teacher, and leader I can be.

Thank you to my capstone partners, Jason and Libby. I feel lucky to have you as colleagues and friends, and I know that this project is only the beginning of a lifetime of working together.

Thank you to my friends and family. You have supported me throughout my time in rabbinical school and I am grateful that I can always count on you for your support. To my dad and sister—it is hard to put into words what your love and encouragement means to me, but know that I am thankful for you every day. My mom (z"l) taught me that Jewish texts and Jewish community are our inheritance, but that we must engage with our texts critically and that we must work hard to build our communities. I hope my work on this capstone project would have made her proud.

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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 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

[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.

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.

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

[2] Dan Sperber, *Explaining Culture: A Naturalistic Approach* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 24.
[3] Sperber, 32.

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 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.

[4] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999), 11–13.

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 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

[5] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Sex and Social Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 30.
[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.

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 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

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

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 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]

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

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.

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

[13] Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 36. 6

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 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

[14] Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1992), 236.
[15] Nussbaum, 243.

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.

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

[16] Nussbaum, 243.

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 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

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

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.

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

[18] Booth, 40.

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

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

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.

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

[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.

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 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

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

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 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.

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

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 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

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

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 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.

[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.

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 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

[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, which we believe comes, in part, through a grasp of Jewish textual 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 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

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

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 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"

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

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]

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.

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[34] Petuchowski, 271.
[35] Meyer, 241.
[36] Meyer, 241.

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 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

[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.

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 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.

[39] Meyer and Plaut, 198.

> 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).

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.

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[40] Meyer and Plaut, 200.
[41] Meyer and Plaut, 203.

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 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

[42] Meyer and Plaut, 210.
[43] Meyer and Plaut, 210.

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:

> 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

[44] Arnold Jacob Wolf, "Introductory Address to the Debate on the 1999 Statement of Principles on Reform Judaism," May 26, 1999, 1.
[45] Ibid.

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. 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

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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.

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 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

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

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 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

[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.

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 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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Exploring Emotional Expression in the Bible: A Curriculum for Jewish Teens

Introduction to the Curriculum

Background

In "An Introduction to Creating an Ethics of Reading in Reform Judaism," Jason Cook, Libby Fisher, and I argue that all reading has ethical implications and therefore, that developing a Jewish ethic of reading is a strategy that is worthy of our attention. We further argue that developing an ethics of reading enhances the experience of reading and interacting with a text. In our paper, we seek to articulate the theoretical groundwork for how we understanding culture and reading. We relied heavily on Daniel Sperber's writing on culture as epidemiology and Wolfgang Iser's idea of a 'cultural repertoire.' We explored the issue of canon, especially as it pertains to what we consider 'Jewish texts.' We also summarized the long history of the Reform Movement's embrace of reading the Bible critically and explored how the platforms of the Reform Movement lay a solid foundation for individuals to develop a Jewish ethic of reading.

This curriculum project arose out of early conversations with my classmates Libby and Jason about how we might explore the question of teaching students about the ethics of reading. As a rabbinical student, I have prioritized my role as an educator. I believe that a rabbi's job is to be a stellar teacher. I also believe that teenagers deserve sophisticated, mature educational materials. As Libby, Jason, and I studied Sperber, Iser, John Rawls, and Martha Nussbaum, I was continually drawn to the question of how to engage teenagers in the work of being critical readers of our sacred texts. So often, we teach young children according to their developmental stage. We present simple

ideas and try to achieve the goal of having our children feel positively connected to their Judaism. When adult learners walk in the synagogue door for Torah study, we are prepared to present more complex and complicated ideas: how our texts were formed, what conflicting messages our texts convey, etc. What happens in Jewish education between being a young learner and being an adult learner?

Jewish organizations and foundations have spent countless time and energy studying teens and their interests and habits. As a Jewish community, we know that teenagers deserve great Jewish education. This curriculum is a response to that need: students and teachers alike can use this curriculum to have high-level, serious conversations about Jewish texts, Judaism, and our world. Using this curriculum, students and teachers will have more skills to critically examine our biblical texts and will have concretely explored what it means to develop a Jewish ethic of reading. The medium through which students and teachers will do this is by exploring emotional expression in our biblical texts. Not only does this curriculum offer sophisticated, age-appropriate, and respectful material to students, it also seeks to engage them on a topic that has meaning and relevance for their lives.

What would the Jewish landscape look like if we prioritized teaching teenagers how to critically engage with our texts and how to develop a Jewish ethic of reading? How would they personally be changed by a high-level of engagement with Jewish material? In turn, how would their engagement fuel a revolution in the Jewish cultural repertoire writ large?

Educational Philosophy

Two educational philosophers in particular have influenced the way I think about teaching teenagers about a Jewish ethic of reading: John Dewey and Paulo Freire. Neither are 'traditional' Jewish thinkers, but their work can and should influence the way we view education as a Jewish community.

John Dewey's *Experience and Education*, his most concise work on his theories of progressive education, was published in 1938. He wrote this short work partly in response to criticism about the rise in "progressive education" (which was itself an attempt to reform traditional education). Dewey believed that progressive education was not inherently better than traditional education. On the contrary, progressive education was only a better alternative if it addressed "the organic connection between education and personal experience."[1] This was the crux of Dewey's educational philosophy: that there is no such thing as great education without also considering the personal life experiences of the students. This assertion has several implications for educators. First and foremost, educators are responsible for both shaping the experience of their students and for being aware of the experience their students bring into the classroom. Dewey writes:

> A primary responsibility of educators is that they not only be aware of the general principle of the shaping of actual experience by environing conditions, but that they also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth. Above all, they should know how to utilize the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from them all they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worthwhile.[2]

[1] John Dewey, *Experience & Education* (New York: Free Press, 1938), 25.
[2] Dewey, 40.

This charge should inspire educators. Educators can both shape the experience of the students in their classroom and must respect the experiences their students bring to their education.

This curriculum seeks to do both things: first, to respect teenagers as capable of serious, high-level learning and accordingly asking them to grapple with biblical and rabbinic texts related to emotional expression; and second, to honor the experience of being a teenager in America in the 21st century with all its challenges and stressors. In this curriculum, teenagers are not asked to 'leave their emotions or baggage at the door.' This curriculum expressly asks teenagers to bring their experience to bear on the texts that they are exploring. By considering the ethical implications of our texts on their own lives, teenagers will begin to develop their own Jewish ethic of reading.

Dewey also succinctly describes what he sees as the purpose of education. He writes that "every experience should do something to prepare a person for later experiences of a deeper and more expansive quality. That is the very meaning of growth, continuity, reconstruction of experience."[3] Dewey's philosophy is founded on the idea that education is not something that simply happens in a classroom, but rather is a lifelong endeavor. As educators, our goal should always be to prepare our students to continue their study more deeply and more expansively. What a student learns in ninth grade may impact their study in twelfth grade, as well as their first and fourth jobs and so on. Developing critical thinking skills is not something that can be done and then checked off a list of achievements for our students. We can always improve our

[3] Dewey, 47.

critical thinking skills, and there are always new texts and new situations that will require us to apply our skill in a new or different way.

Dewey also writes about what he sees as "the most important attitude" in education, which is the "desire to go on learning."[4] He writes: "If impetus in this direction is weakened instead of being intensified, something much more than mere lack of preparation takes place. The pupil is actually robbed of native capacities which otherwise would enable him to cope with the circumstances that he meets in the course of his life."[5] In other words, our goal must be to inculcate and cultivate within our students a yearning to continue learning. This curriculum seeks to craft a meaningful experience for students while also respecting the experiences of emotional expression they bring to their study. Ultimately, this curriculum also seeks to instill a Deweyian "desire to go on learning." In "An Introduction to Creating an Ethics of Reading in Reform Judaism," we argue that reading and engagement with texts has been a foundational part of Judaism. John Dewey's philosophy of education strengthens how we as Jewish educators can think about our work as teachers of text.

In addition to John Dewey's work, I have been deeply influenced by the work of Paulo Freire. In 1968, Freire published his most famous work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire's work on defining and explaining *conscientizacao*, the Portuguese word for "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality," has inspired generations of educators and activists. There is a lot of material on Freirean classrooms and education, but

[4] Dewey, 47.
[5] Dewey, 48.

practically none of this material connects Freire's work with Jewish education. Freire's most significant contribution to the formation of this curriculum is his writing on the banking model of education. In the banking model, students are turned "into "containers," into "receptacles" to be "filled" by the teacher."[6] Freire goes on to explain:

> Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the banking concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store. But in the last analysis, it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.[7]

Freire's educational philosophy abolishes the banking model of education as a viable model for education rooted in *conscientizacao*. Students are not containers or receptacles, but rather co-creators and inventors of a process that it is educative for all involved. While Freire writes primarily about teaching in activist settings, his philosophy can and should be applied to Jewish education. All too often, Jewish education focuses on 'filling' students with knowledge.

This curriculum actively seeks to undermine the notion of the banking model of education in Jewish settings. When we treat our students as containers to be filled, we do them *and* Judaism a great disservice. This curriculum is designed to help students engage in "restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry." At the end of their study,

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[6] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 50th Anniversary Edition (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 72.
[7] Freire, 72.

the measure of success is not whether or not students can regurgitate facts about biblical texts or Judaism. Success will be evaluated based on students' critical engagement with the texts, with their ability to apply their skills to new situations, and whether or not they have a desire to learn more.

Freire also writes about the implications of his philosophy on educators. He writes that the "teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow."[8] This curriculum sees the teacher as instrumental in teaching the material, but not as the sole arbiter of what is true or what is important. Teachers and students together will embark on a process of delving into biblical texts that deal with the expression of emotions. With this in mind, this curriculum provides specific materials to help prepare teachers to feel confident in their teaching, but does not expect teachers to be the sole experts on interpreting biblical texts. It is my hope that educators will read "An Introduction to Creating an Ethics of Reading in Reform Judaism" so that they have the theoretical grounding and underpinnings of what a Jewish ethic of reading is. However, teachers and students will engage in the study of this curriculum as partners in the work of critical engagement with biblical texts. As a teacher, engaging deeply with the material as a learner as well as a facilitator demonstrates the Deweyian concept of being a lifelong learner.

[8] Freire, 80.

Current Landscape

The Freirean concept of treating students as receptacles to be filled directly relates to current research on Jewish teen identity and engagement. In April 2016, the Jewish Education Project released its report called "Generation Now: Understanding and Engaging Jewish Teens Today," authored by David Bryfman. This report offered thirteen insights to the experience of American Jewish teenagers today. The eighth insight of the report, "From Knowledge to Wisdom," connects to Freire's concepts of liberating education. The report concluded that one of the most challenging findings of the "research, particularly for traditional institutions of Jewish education, was the frequency at which teenagers referred to the complete irrelevancy of much of their Jewish learning."[9] Freire always emphasized the education must relate to the lives of students. This report confirms that Freire's concepts apply to Jewish education as well: teenagers want education that feels relevant and meaningful to their lives.

The report also focuses on the issue of "applied wisdom" which is "the ability of learners to take their Jewish learning and use it to enhance their lives and improve the world."[10] "Applied wisdom" is about more than knowing facts and figures—teenagers want the material they learn to be related to their current stage of life. The report continues:

> This notion of applied wisdom is certainly challenging for Jewish educators who believe that a certain corpus of Jewish knowledge should be learned, for the primary purpose of creating a generation of literate Jews. While this is a noble, indeed admirable, goal, the concept of Torah Lishma (learning

[9] David Bryfman, "Generation Now: Understanding and Engaging Jewish Teens Today" (The Jewish Education Project, 2016), 14, https://www.jewishedproject.org/sites/default/files/2017-01/Generation+Now%E2%80%94Understanding+and+Engaging+Jewish+Teens+Today+April+2016%20.pdf.
[10] Bryfman, 14.

> Torah for learning's sake) is completely foreign to a generation of Jewish youth (and their parents) who demand, if not expect, instant gratification, meaning, relevance, and value in almost everything in which they choose to participate.[11]

This finding is in complete harmony with Freire's ideas about the banking model of education. As an educator interested in freedom and liberation, Freire writes from the perspective of someone who is always thinking about how to design educative experiences. What the Jewish Education Project report confirms is that teenagers, in their role as the participants in Jewish teen education, also do not want to engage in the banking model of education. Teenagers do not see themselves as receptacles to be filled, but rather as human beings looking for meaning and applied wisdom. We can fulfill both Freire's vision for education in a Jewish context and meet the stated needs and desires of teenagers at the same time. This curriculum hopes to do just that.

In the second insight of the report, "Value Added," Bryfman highlights how Jewish teens think about which programs to attend. He writes that teens will "come once for pizza, they will come twice for pizza, but the third time and beyond, Jewish teens will only return to a program if they sense real value."[12] Value obviously means different things to different teenagers, but the key idea reflected here is that teenagers are looking for programs and opportunities that add value to their lives. In some ways, a curriculum for religious school settings may be able to skirt around the issue of adding value because teenagers might be required to be there by their parents or their community. At the same time, teenagers who are in the post-b'nai mitzvah phase of life rarely continue their formal Jewish education unless they find it engaging and

[11] Bryfman, 14.
[12] Bryfman, 7.

meaningful. Though teens may not outright say, "I find this education engaging and meaningful," the research on Jewish teens today confirms that teens will stop showing up if Jewish education does not add value to their lives. This curriculum hopes to respond to this finding by not only bringing a complex and interesting approach to Jewish texts (helping students develop a Jewish ethic of reading), but also by exploring a topic that has an impact on teenagers' lives, the issue of emotional expression.

Enduring Understandings

This curriculum uses three Enduring Understandings (EU) to frame each unit and every lesson. Those Enduring Understandings are:

1. Biblical and rabbinic texts offer us a way to grapple with significant, deep emotional concerns.
2. The TaNaKh is a dynamic text and we as readers are obligated to interpret it with special consideration for its ethical implications.
3. Emotions are a critically important part of Judaism and of the human experience.

These Enduring Understandings are never explicitly shared with the teens participating in the classroom, but they should help educators frame each of the sessions with the students.

The first EU, biblical and rabbinic texts offer us a way to grapple with significant, deep emotional concerns, should help this material feel immediately relevant to teenagers. Each text that they study will open up questions about how we read our texts and what the ethical implications of those texts are. Hopefully, teenagers will see that all of our texts have ethical implications (this is related to the second EU). This curriculum in particular focuses on how our study of biblical texts can lead to thoughtful and purposeful conversations about emotions.

The second EU, the TaNaKh is a dynamic text and we as readers are obligated to interpret it with special consideration for its ethical implications, may feel like a radical EU to some educators and students. Let's break down two important pieces of this EU: first, teaching that our text requires interpretation may be a scary endeavor. How can sacred, canonized texts require interpretation? And if they do require interpretation, how are teens qualified to engage in that work? We must teach teens the skills to be comfortable critically engaging with our texts. Second, it can be daunting to consider the ethical implications of our texts. However, as we lay out in "An Introduction to Creating an Ethics of Reading in Reform Judaism," considering the ethical implications of our text should be a crucial and important part of our identity as Reform Jews. As Iser teaches us, we affect the text *and* the text affects us. This curriculum addresses the ethical implications of texts that deal with emotional expression, but the skills gained from this study should be able to be applied broadly.

The third EU, emotions are a critically important part of Judaism and of the human experience, is perhaps the most universal of all the EUs. This EU seeks to instill a sense that emotional expression is a significant part of living a healthy life *and* that biblical texts have something to say and teach us about emotional expression.

<u>How to Use This Curriculum & Future Plans</u>

This is a relatively short curriculum. It is meant to be one area of study in the broader project of educating Jewish teenagers. I hope it will be used by educators of high school students to offer meaningful, sophisticated Jewish education. I imagine this curriculum could be used as one part of a confirmation class curriculum since it deepens students' engagement with biblical texts and applies to their lives. I also imagine this curriculum

could be used as an elective offering in a religious school setting for students who self-select that they are interested in this topic.

As it stands right now, this curriculum has two units: one on love and one on anger. These two emotions are easily accessible to teenagers and allow us to explore familiar and unfamiliar biblical texts. Love and anger are also two emotions that play a large role in the lives of teenagers. This will hopefully allow teens to feel connected to the material quickly.

In the future, I hope to expand this curriculum to include more units. Each unit should build on previous units, though educators can also rearrange the order according to their own needs as long as they are sensitive to building skills throughout the learning process. Future units could include units on grief, gratitude, and joy. I am also open to the ways that putting this curriculum into action will inspire future units based on the needs and interests of students.

Introductory Lesson: What is an Ethic of Reading?

Enduring Understandings:

1. Biblical and rabbinic texts offer us a way to grapple with significant, deep emotional concerns.
2. The Bible is a dynamic text and we as readers are obligated to interpret it.
3. Emotions are a critically important part of Judaism and of the human experience.

Essential Questions:

1. What does it mean to interact with our sacred texts as an adult?
2. What is an ethic of reading and how can it be a useful tool for reading Jewish texts?
3. How can critical reading skills enhance our experience as readers of sacred texts?

Required Materials:

- Copies of text sheet for every student
- Markers & pens

Notes to Teacher:

This is the very first lesson of this entire curriculum. In addition to introducing students to the concepts and material of this curriculum, this introductory lesson seeks to show students that they are being asked to grapple with high-level, sophisticated material. Teens are not being asked to absorb information so that they can regurgitate back. This curriculum is designed to teach teens critical reading skills and how to develop an ethic of reading. Achieving those goals begins with this first lesson.

Introductory Essay:

This lesson seeks to introduce students to the idea of bringing critical reading skills to our sacred texts and to the idea of an ethic of reading. These are high-level concepts: they are not expected to master these concepts in one lesson, but this lesson should help them feel confident in continuing exploring these topics. In order to understand what an ethics of reading in Judaism is and how it works, please read "An Introduction to Creating an Ethics of Reading in Reform Judaism." This will provide a theoretical framework and an exploration of Reform Judaism as it relates to developing an ethic of reading. This lesson will provide participants with a foundation, but subsequent study will continue to help them develop their critical reading skills.

The main text of this lesson is a midrash from Midrash Eliyahu Zuta. (This was written in Talmudic Babylon, Israel, and Italy, and its final redaction was likely around the end of the 10th century CE.) In this midrash, we read a parable about a human king. The parable is meant to correct the random traveler who says that scripture/Torah is God-given from Mount Sinai, but Mishnah (by which he means any kind of 'received tradition' like

midrash, Talmud, etc.) is not God-given. The parable tells of two men, each who received flour and flax from their king. One turns the flour into bread and the flax into a tablecloth, the other does nothing with the flour and flax. The parable asks, Which man does the king like better? The king likes the one who turns the raw ingredients into something usable. The parable ends by saying that this is like the Torah: God gave the Torah in order that we would make something out of it.

The beauty of this midrash is that it shows that for centuries, Judaism has understood that scripture must be interpreted. Torah is like flour; in order to make it into bread, it must be sifted, ground, kneaded, and baked. This is a revolutionary way of thinking about Jewish texts! This text should inspire all of us to think about how we take our "raw materials" of Jewish texts and turn them into meaningful ideas.

At the same time, one challenge of this text is that it believes that Mishnah/any received tradition (like midrash, Talmud, etc.) is also sacred. As Reform Jews, we know that we should study texts beyond just our biblical texts, but we have actively de-emphasized the inherent sacredness of those texts. This does not mean that they are not important, only that we understand them to be part of the long history of Jews talking about Judaism. We should not gloss over this fact when teaching this text, but the reason this text is so exciting for our study in this curriculum is because it shows us how the work we are doing—reading critically, analyzing our texts for meaning—is actually not a new endeavor. We may be doing this work differently than previous generations, but whether or not people admit it, we are all engaged in the work of interpreting our texts. The goal of this curriculum is to become attuned to the ethical implications of texts dealing with emotions. The first step, however, is to become comfortable and excited about reading as a critical reader.

The second half of this lesson focuses specifically on helping participants understand what an ethic of reading is and why it is a useful tool when reading biblical and rabbinic texts about emotional expression. This lesson uses three statements to explain the core ideas of developing an ethic of reading: 1) A Jewish ethic of reading is a strategy that is sensitive to the ethical implications of sacred Jewish texts and uses ethics as a lens through which to view our texts; 2) We are not passive recipients of biblical texts; we are active partners in determining the meaning of our texts. Therefore, we as readers have an impact on the text, *just as* the text has an impact on us as readers; and 3) Reading our texts critically does not diminish them, but rather enhances our experience as Jewish readers.

Part 3: Defining an Ethic of Reading should help participants read and unpack each of these statements. Some participants may be more comfortable with these statements than others. Part 4: Applying an Ethic of Reading to Emotional Expression should help participants see how these statements will be applied to the specifics of this curriculum. Part 4 also seeks to emphasize how our study applies to the lives of teenagers by asking them to think about their own emotional expression and to bring that knowledge to bear on our study of individual texts.

Lesson Plan:

Part 1: Introduction

Ask students to introduce themselves. (If they elected to participant in this, ask them what drew them to this study.) Ask students to share one thing they remember learning about the Torah when they were in elementary and middle school and what they think about that now.

Part 2: Text Study and Discussion

Read the text of Midrash Eliyahu Zuta together. Use the discussion questions to unpack and process this text together.

Part 3: Defining an Ethic of Reading

Write each of the three statements on a large piece of paper and place them around the room. Ask students to read each statement and respond to the question "How can this help us read our biblical texts?" After they have answered each question, ask them to walk around once more, reading what their classmates have written and responding to it on the large piece of paper. Come back together and discuss their insights. If possible, leave these three large pieces of paper on display throughout the course of study as a touchstone and reminder of what an ethic of reading is.

Part 4: Applying an Ethic of Reading to Emotional Expression

Ask students to think about how and why we might apply these three statements to our reading of biblical and rabbinic texts that deal with emotions. Have students write silently for 7-10 minutes then share what they have written.

Finally, ask students what role emotions play in their own lives. Encourage them to share stories of ways that emotion and emotional expression relate to their lived experiences of teenagers. Ask if they feel that they are encouraged to express their emotions and if their emotions are respected.

Introduction: What is an Ethic of Reading?

Midrash Eliyahu Zuta, Chapter 2 **Translation by Aryeh Bernstein**	
One time, I was walking on the road and someone chanced upon me, coming at me with heretical ways, saying that he has Scripture [Torah], but not Mishna [received traditions/interpretations]. He said to me, "Torah was given to me from Mt. Sinai; Interpretations were not given to me from Mt. Sinai." So, I said to him, "Son, weren't both Torah and Interpretations stated from the mouth of God? So what's the difference between Torah and Interpretations? They made a parable [a story]: What does this resemble? It's like a king of flesh and blood [a human king], who had two servants whom he loved completely. He gave each of them a measure of wheat and a bundle of flax. The intelligent one -- what did he do? He wove the flax into a cloth and made flour from the wheat, sifted it, ground it, kneaded it, and baked it and arranged it on the table, spread upon it the cloth and left it until the king returned. The foolish one did not do anything. After some days, the king came into his house and said to them: 'My children, bring me what I gave you.' One brought out the table set with the bread and the cloth spread upon it, and the other brought the wheat in a basket and the bundle of flax with it. Oh, what an embarrassment! Oh, what a disgrace! Which do you think was most beloved? The one who brought the table with the bread upon it… (Similarly) when God gave the Torah to Israel, God gave it as wheat from which to make flour and flax from which to make clothing."	פעם אחת הייתי מהלך בדרך ומצאני אדם אחד. ובא אלי בדרך מינות. ויש בו מקרא ואין בו משנה. אמר לי, "מקרא ניתן לנו מהר סיני. משנה לא ניתן לנו מהר סיני." ואמרתי לו. "בני, והלא מקרא ומשנה מפי הגבורה נאמרו? ומה בין מקרא למשנה? משלו משל: למה הדבר דומה? למלך בשר ודם שהיה לו שני עבדים. והיה אוהבן אהבה גמורה. ונתן לזה קב חיטין ולזה קב חיטין. לזה אגודה של פשתן ולזה אגודה של פשתן. הפקח שבהן מה עשה? נטל את הפשתן וארגו מפה. ונטל את החיטין ועשאן סולת, ביררה טחנה ולשה ואפה וסידרה על גבי השולחן. ופרס עליה מפה. והניחה עד שלא בא המלך. והטפש שבהן לא עשה ולא כלום. לימים בא המלך בתוך ביתו ואמר להן, "בניי. הביאו לי מה שנתתי לכם." אחד הוציא את]פת[הסולת על גבי השולחן ומפה פרוסה עליו. ואחד הוציא את החיטין בקופה. ואגודה של פשתן עליהן. אוי לה לאותה בושה! אוי לה לאותה כלימה. הוי אומר איזה מהן חביב? זה שהוציא את השולחן ואת]פת[הסולת עליו....אלא כשנתן הקב"ה את תורה לישראל לא נתנה להם אלא כחטין להוציא להם סולת וכפשתן לארוג מהן בגד.

Discussion Questions:

- What message is this midrash trying to convey? How do you know?
- How, if at all, does this text change the way you think about reading and interpreting biblical texts?
- Play out the analogy for yourself—in order to make bread out of flour, you must sift it, grind it, knead it, and bake it. What must we do to biblical texts in order to "make bread from flour"?

A Jewish Ethic of Reading: Three Statements
1) A Jewish ethic of reading is a strategy that is sensitive to the ethical implications of sacred Jewish texts and uses ethics as a lens through which to view our texts. 2) We are not passive recipients of biblical texts; we are active partners in determining the meaning of our texts. Therefore, we as readers have an impact on the text, *just as* the text has an impact on us as readers. 3) Reading our texts critically does not diminish them, but rather enhances our experience as Jewish readers.

In what ways can these three statements be used when exploring biblical and rabbinic texts that deal with emotions? What questions do you have about what we have studied today?

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Unit 1: Love
Lesson 1: Isaac & Rebecca, David & Jonathan

Enduring Understandings:

1. Biblical and rabbinic texts offer us a way to grapple with significant, deep emotional concerns.
2. The Bible is a dynamic text and we as readers are obligated to interpret it.
3. Emotions are a critically important part of Judaism and of the human experience.

Essential Questions:

1. Which biblical texts can help us understand the emotion of love?
2. How can biblical texts support and challenge our own assumptions about love?
3. Who defines 'love' and its role in society? How do we expand our definition of love?

Required Materials:

- Copies of text sheet for every student

Notes to Teacher:

This lesson will introduce the first unit: the emotion of love. In this lesson, participants will be exposed to texts that talk about the relationship between Isaac and Rebecca and the relationship between David and Jonathan. These texts will allow students to talk about the nature of love between two adults, in particular ones that are presented as partners. The selection of these texts is meant to be accessible to students, but not basic or simplistic. Hopefully, students will begin to analyze the texts on the basis of their ethical implications. Students will also have the chance to think about how the stories of Isaac and Rebecca and David and Jonathan impact the liturgy of Jewish wedding ceremonies and can impact our ideas about marriage/romantic partnership in general.

There are four parts to this lesson. For this lesson, it is important to move through the parts in order. Students may need your help in providing the context and narrative background for both biblical stories. For the story of Isaac and Rebecca, you may want to re-read Genesis 24. For the story of David and Jonathan, read the attached chapter of Rabbi Steven Greenberg's book *Wrestling with God and Men: Homosexuality in Jewish Tradition* (of which there is an excerpt included on the text sheet for participants).

Introductory Essay:

This lesson looks at two stories of love in the TaNaKh. Let us begin with the story of Isaac and Rebecca. Isaac is the son of Abraham (and the father of Jacob, which will be important for the next lesson in this unit). In Genesis 24:67, we learn that Isaac marries Rebecca and that he "loved her." This is the first time in the TaNaKh that we read about a man's love for a woman and the first time that we read about love between adults. The challenge of this text is that we read only about Isaac's feelings for Rebecca and we never read about Rebecca's feelings for Isaac.

Another challenge of this first discussion on the emotion of love is the challenge of pre-feminist depictions of interpersonal relationships. We are exploring the role of women in this story, but we are also uncovering and discovering attitudes towards women in biblical literature. There is no such thing in biblical literature as a woman who is a "free-agent," i.e., a woman who controls her own destiny when it comes to the context of marriage. Certainly, we see women who have agency and power in their lives; there are biblical women, especially in Genesis, who are a kind of accelerant for biblical drama.

In Genesis Rabbah 60:16, we read about how the rabbis imagined Rebecca. They offer several examples of ways that Rebecca was like Sarah, implying that Rebecca was righteous like Sarah was. This text, however, does not offer any insight into how Rebecca felt about Isaac. The biblical text centers itself around what Rebecca *did for* Isaac, mainly helping to alleviate his grief over his mother. The rabbinic text also centers itself on Rebecca's actions—actions that supposedly account for why Isaac was drawn to and fell in love with Rebecca. Lastly, I have included a text from Samson Raphael Hirsh, a 19th century German Orthodox rabbi. Hirsch's commentary also highlights the way that Rebecca helped Isaac and how this story can be extrapolated to understand the role of women. Hirsch's comment seems complimentary of women, but when explored deeper, is actually a very problematic reading of the biblical text. The role of women should not be reduced to role as wives and mothers. Hirsch's comment is included in this lesson because it demonstrates one of the ways that the story of Isaac and Rebecca has been interpreted by traditional commentators; the goal in including this text is to see how our reading strategy, that of a Jewish ethic of reading, can challenge the 'traditional' view of this story.

On the one hand, the biblical story of Isaac and Rebecca can be inspiring because it is the first husband-wife relationship that explicitly includes a description of the emotion of love. On the other hand, the biblical text, along with rabbinic and modern commentary, ignores the possibility of reciprocal feelings between Isaac and Rebecca. These texts can help us understand some of the social context of love in the biblical texts, as well as provide a platform for discussing ways in which biblical texts are sometimes not be as expansive as we might like. Do Rebecca's feelings towards Isaac matter? When we ask this question about Isaac and Rebecca's relationship, it is important to note that we are not asking about two historical figures, but rather how an author (in this case, a biblical author) depicts a man and a woman who are biblical spouses. Additionally, what are the ethical implications of a text that only considers a man's feelings towards his wife and not vice versa? Is it mutually exclusive to wish this text was more expansive and celebrate it at the same time? These are the questions that students will grapple with. Students should use the strategies we discussed in the introductory lesson to frame their conversations.

The second set of texts, the story of David and Jonathan, will continue the conversation about love between two adults in biblical texts. Like the story Isaac and Rebecca, the story of David and Jonathan is not about two historical figures, but rather about two men

who are in relationship with each other. Stories expose cultural values; authors make choices in how they tell stories using characters.

Jonathan is son of Saul, king of Israel. Almost immediately upon meeting, Jonathan falls in love with David: "Jonathan's soul became bound up with the soul of David" (1 Sam 18:1). Again, we see an example of a biblical text that describes one characters' love for another character without showing any reciprocity. However, later in the story, David grieves for Jonathan after he dies, and declares: "I grieve for you, my brother Jonathan, you were most dear to me. Your love was wonderful to me, more than the love of women" (2 Samuel 1:26). When David grieves for Jonathan, we feel the reciprocity of love between the two men. Many traditional texts seek to gloss over the possibility that Jonathan and David had a sexual relationship, despite the fact that the word 'love' between adults is used almost exclusively to connote sexual relationships or desire. David here is explicitly stating that Jonathan's love for him was somehow greater than the love of women for David (the text tells us of several women who love and/or are enamored with David). Exactly what was greater about Jonathan's love is not clear, but this declaration cannot be ignored.

I also included a text from Rabbi Steven Greenberg's book, *Wrestling with God and Men: Homosexuality in Jewish Tradition* (you are encouraged to read all of chapter five, "Princely Love" for more context). The purpose of this text is two-fold. First, the text helps to explain and contextualize the story of the Book of Samuel, a text with which many Jews are not intimately familiar. Second, the text serves as a commentary on the relationship between Jonathan and David. Participants are of course free to disagree with this text or argue with it, but it should serve as an important and powerful counterpoint to the notion that the relationship between David and Jonathan is not romantic or sexual at all.

The texts about David and Jonathan share some similarities to the story of Isaac and Rebecca: both tell the story of two adults in romantic relationships. David and Jonathan, however, add an additional layer of how to read critically our texts that deal with homosexuality. The story of David and Jonathan can also provide an important foil for the Isaac and Rebecca story in that David and Jonathan show reciprocity in their feelings towards each other.

An important note on discourse about homosexuality in our biblical texts: we must remember and remain aware that sexuality in general is highly contingent upon culture. This means that same-sex relationships can be easily misinterpreted. Consider that when Abraham Lincoln was running for president, he travelled with a campaign secretary and they would share a hotel room and therefore a bed. In today's cultural context, two men sharing a bed implies something about their homosexuality, but in the 19th century, most people slept communally because individual beds were only something the very wealthy had access to. The goal of including the David and Jonathan story is two-fold: 1) to provide another biblical example of two adults in some kind of relationship that includes the emotion of love; 2) to destabilize the notion that David and Jonathan *could not* have been in a homosexual relationship and conversely, that they *absolutely* were in a

homosexual relationship. Students will use their critical reading skills to explore the ethical implications of this biblical story. They will also examine how another commentator, Steven Greenberg, uses an ethical lens to examine this biblical story.

After exploring the biblical texts and their ethical implications, students will be asked to think about the Jewish wedding ceremony. The purpose of this activity is to engage students in a real-world application of our biblical texts and to show that our conversations about the ethical implications of our texts matter. We will not be exploring the entirety of the Jewish wedding ceremony or Jewish wedding customs, but rather focusing on two specific pieces of text that are sometimes used during wedding ceremonies. Students will be asked to imagine standing under the chuppah with a partner and listening to the words of the wedding ceremony. Traditional Jewish weddings include the blessing "Our sister, may you be the mother of multitudes" (Genesis 24:60). This blessing comes from a scene in the Isaac and Rebecca story just before the texts explored in this lesson. Rebecca's family offers her this blessing before she leaves her home to go towards Isaac. Students will also be asked to consider the phrase "souls being bound up with each other" (from the Book of Samuel), even though this phrase is not traditional to a Jewish wedding ceremony. Having studied these texts, what would students think and feel if they heard either of these phrases as part of their own wedding ceremony? Do they prefer one over the other? Neither? Both? How do they explain their preferences in terms of the ethics of emotional expression in our biblical texts? These are the questions they will be asked to discuss and debate at the end of this lesson.

Lesson Plan:

Part 1: Introduction

> Ask students to share a romantic relationship that is inspiring to them and why. They could share about a couple they know personally or they could be inspired by a famous couple (alive, dead, or fictional).

Part 2: Isaac & Rebecca

> Read through the three texts about Isaac and Rebecca. Be sure to provide any context about the story of Isaac and Rebecca up until this point (err on the side of providing more context). Use the discussion questions to guide your conversation.

Part 3: David & Jonathan

> Move to the texts about David and Jonathan. Be sure to leave ample time to read the excerpt from Rabbi Steven Greenberg's book. Use the discussion questions to guide your conversation. Encourage students to draw comparisons to the story of Isaac and Rebecca, but also investigate these texts on their own.

Part 4: Jewish Wedding Texts

Invite students to explore a real-world application of these biblical texts. Explain that Jewish wedding ceremonies often include many biblical citations. Explain that traditional ceremonies include a line from the Isaac and Rebecca story and that some ceremonies use text from David and Jonathan's story (though this is not traditional). In small groups, have students explore the two texts (see the last page of the attached text sheet). Ask them to imagine themselves under the chuppah with a partner. In their small groups, have them list out their associations with each text (perhaps based on or influenced by their study in this lesson) and the ethical implications of using each text at a wedding ceremony. Finally, ask them to think about which texts (if any!) they would choose to include in a wedding ceremony. Encourage students to try to use an ethic of reading as part of their justification. Leave time for small groups to share their findings and discuss further.

Unit 1: Love
Lesson 1: Isaac & Rebecca, David & Jonathan

Genesis 24: 62-67: Isaac & Rebecca	
24:62: Isaac had just come back from the vicinity of Beerlahai-roi, for he was settled in the region of the Negev. **24:63:** And Isaac went out walking in the field toward evening and, looking up, he saw camels approaching. **24:64:** Raising her eyes, Rebecca saw Isaac. She alighted from the camel **24:65:** and said to the servant, "Who is that man walking in the field toward us?" And the servant said, "That is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself. **24:66:** The servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. **24:67:** Isaac then brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he took Rebecca as his wife. Isaac loved her, and thus found comfort after his mother's death.	**Gen. 24:62** וְיִצְחָק֙ בָּ֣א מִבּ֣וֹא בְּאֵ֣ר לַחַ֣י רֹאִ֑י וְה֥וּא יוֹשֵׁ֖ב בְּאֶ֥רֶץ הַנֶּֽגֶב׃ **Gen. 24:63** וַיֵּצֵ֥א יִצְחָ֛ק לָשׂ֥וּחַ בַּשָּׂדֶ֖ה לִפְנ֣וֹת עָרֶ֑ב וַיִּשָּׂ֤א עֵינָיו֙ וַיַּ֔רְא וְהִנֵּ֥ה גְמַלִּ֖ים בָּאִֽים׃ **Gen. 24:64** וַתִּשָּׂ֤א רִבְקָה֙ אֶת־עֵינֶ֔יהָ וַתַּ֖רְא אֶת־יִצְחָ֑ק וַתִּפֹּ֖ל מֵעַ֥ל הַגָּמָֽל׃ **Gen. 24:65** וַתֹּ֣אמֶר אֶל־הָעֶ֗בֶד מִי־הָאִ֤ישׁ הַלָּזֶה֙ הַהֹלֵ֣ךְ בַּשָּׂדֶ֔ה לִקְרָאתֵ֑נוּ וַיֹּ֣אמֶר הָעֶ֔בֶד ה֥וּא אֲדֹנִ֖י וַתִּקַּ֥ח הַצָּעִ֖יף וַתִּתְכָּֽס׃ **Gen. 24:66** וַיְסַפֵּ֥ר הָעֶ֖בֶד לְיִצְחָ֑ק אֵ֥ת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִ֖ים אֲשֶׁ֥ר עָשָֽׂה׃ **Gen. 24:67** וַיְבִאֶ֣הָ יִצְחָ֗ק הָאֹהֱלָה֙ שָׂרָ֣ה אִמּ֔וֹ וַיִּקַּ֤ח אֶת־רִבְקָה֙ וַתְּהִי־לֹ֣ו לְאִשָּׁ֔ה וַיֶּאֱהָבֶ֖הָ וַיִּנָּ֣חֶם יִצְחָ֑ק אַחֲרֵ֖י אִמּֽוֹ׃

<u>Discussion Questions:</u>

- How does this text describe the relationship between Isaac and Rebecca?
- What, if anything, do you think is missing from this text?
- This is the first time the TaNaKh describes love between two adults. What are the ethical implications of the way this text describes Isaac and Rebecca's relationship?

Genesis Rabbah 60:16: Sarah's Tent	
"Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah" (Genesis 24:67). As long as Sarah lived, a cloud hovered over the entrance to the tent. After she died, the cloud disappeared. But when Rebecca came, the cloud returned. As long as Sarah lived, her doors were wide open to wayfarers; at her death, such openness ceased. But when Rebecca came, openness returned. As long as Sarah lived, blessing was dispatched into the dough she baked;	וַיְבִאֶהָ יִצְחָק הָאֹהֱלָה שָׂרָה (בראשית כד, סז) אִמּוֹ כָּל יָמִים שֶׁהָיְתָה שָׂרָה קַיֶּמֶת הָיָה עָנָן קָשׁוּר עַל פֶּתַח אָהֳלָהּ, כֵּינָן שֶׁמֵּתָה פָּסַק אוֹתוֹ עָנָן, וְכֵינָן שֶׁבָּאת רִבְקָה חָזַר אוֹתוֹ עָנָן. כָּל יָמִים שֶׁהָיְתָה שָׂרָה קַיֶּמֶת הָיוּ דְּלָתוֹת פְּתוּחוֹת לִרְוָחָה, וְכֵינָן שֶׁמֵּתָה שָׂרָה פָּסְקָה אוֹתָהּ הָרְוָחָה, וְכֵינָן שֶׁבָּאת רִבְקָה חָזְרָה אוֹתָהּ הָרְוָחָה. וְכָל יָמִים שֶׁהָיְתָה שָׂרָה קַיֶּמֶת הָיָה בִּרְכָה מְשֻׁלַּחַת בָּעִסָּה, וְכֵינָן

at her death, such blessing ceased. But when Rebecca came, the blessing returned. As long as Sarah lived, a lamp was light [in her tent] from one Sabbath eve to the next; at her death, the light ceased. But when Rebecca came, the light returned. When Isaac saw her following his mother's ways, separating challah in ritual cleanness, and cutting up her dough ritual cleanness, "Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah."	שֶׁמֵּתָה שָׂרָה פָּסְקָה אוֹתָהּ הַבְּרָכָה, כֵּינָן שֶׁבָּאת רִבְקָה חָזְרָה. כָּל יָמִים שֶׁהָיְתָה שָׂרָה קַיֶּמֶת הָיָה נר דּוֹלֵק מִלֵּילי שַׁבָּת וְעַד לֵילי שַׁבָּת, וְכֵינָן שֶׁמֵּתָה פָּסַק אוֹתוֹ הַנֵּר, וְכֵינָן שֶׁבָּאת רִבְקָה חָזַר. וְכֵינָן שֶׁרָאָה אוֹתָהּ שֶׁהִיא עוֹשָׂה כְּמַעֲשֵׂה אִמּוֹ, קוֹצָה חַלָּתָהּ בְּטָהֳרָה וְקוֹצָה עִסָּתָהּ בְּטָהֳרָה, מִיָּד וַיְבִאֶהָ יִצְחָק הָאֹהֱלָה.

Discussion Questions:

- How does the rabbinic commentary add to or change your understanding of Isaac and Rebecca's relationship?
- What do you think the goal of the author of this text was? Why do think that?

Sampson Raphael Hirsh[13]
"A forty-year old man cannot be consoled for the death of his mother until he finds the right wife. Such is the importance of the woman, mother, and wife in Israel."

Discussion Questions:

- How does this text add to or change your understanding of Isaac and Rebecca's relationship?
- What do you think the goal of Hirsch was when writing this commentary? Why do you think that?

[13] Esther Takac, *Genesis--the Book with Seventy Faces, A Guide for the Family* (New York: Pitspopany Press, 2008), 109.

1 Samuel 18:1-3: David & Jonathan	
18:1: When David finished speaking with Saul, Jonathan's soul became bound up with the soul of David; Jonathan loved David as himself. **18:2:** Saul took him [into his service] that day and would not let him return to his father's house **18:3:** Jonathan and David made a pact, because Jonathan loved him as much as himself.	**1Sam. 18:1** וַיְהִי כְּכַלֹּתוֹ לְדַבֵּר אֶל־שָׁאוּל וְנֶפֶשׁ יְהוֹנָתָן נִקְשְׁרָה בְּנֶפֶשׁ דָּוִד וַיֶּאֱהָבֵהוּ]ו[יְהוֹנָתָן כְּנַפְשׁוֹ׃ **1Sam. 18:2** וַיִּקָּחֵהוּ שָׁאוּל בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וְלֹא נְתָנוֹ לָשׁוּב בֵּית אָבִיו׃ **1Sam. 18:3** וַיִּכְרֹת יְהוֹנָתָן וְדָוִד בְּרִית בְּאַהֲבָתוֹ אֹתוֹ כְּנַפְשׁוֹ׃

Discussion Questions:

- How does this text describe the relationship between David and Jonathan?
- In what ways is the story of David and Jonathan similar to the story of Isaac and Rebecca? In what ways is it different?
- What are the ethical implications of a biblical story about love between men?

Rabbi Steven Greenberg
***Wrestling with God and Man: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition*[14]**

As the story progresses, David achieves great military stature. His success in the battlefield eclipses not only Jonathan but Saul [Jonathan's father] as well. Saul's love of David turns quickly to jealousy and suspicion as David's fame and reputation among the people rises. In fits of anger Saul's jealousy turns murderous. Saul tries many times to do away with David, to pin him to the wall with spears, or to bring about his death in other ways. Jonathan defends and protects David, which infuriates his father.

After Jonathan helps David escape his father's clutches on a new moon feast, Saul flies into a rage against Jonathan. "You perverse and rebellious son! I know that you have chosen the son of Jesse [David] to your own shame and the shame of your mother's nakedness!" (1 Samuel 20:30). Saul rages in this scene not at David, but at Jonathan. David makes Saul feel embattled and threatened, but his own son raises in him feelings of disgust. Jonathan's disinterest in his own welfare, his refusal to compete with David for honors, and his unmanly love of the man who will, if not stopped, take his throne repulses Saul. Indeed, Saul understands everything correctly.

Saul is disgusted with Jonathan's naïve disregard of the mounting threat David poses to his political future. Apparently unaware of the machinations around him, Jonathan wants everyone just to get along. Saul has tried to hide from Jonathan his earlier attempts to murder David. But now he reveals everything, not only his love of David

[14] Rabbi Steven Greenberg, *Wrestling with God & Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 101–2.

turned to hatred, but his disgust for his own son. Saul plainly sees that Jonathan has no care for the royal office he might someday hold. Jonathan's act of dressing the young David in his own princely clothing the moment that they met expressed both Jonathan's instantaneous love and his wish, conscious or not, to divest himself of his royal identity. Saul is right. Jonathan is unconsciously in league with David and so rebellious, in love with David and so perverse.

The language of the verse clinches the argument that Jonathan's love for David cannot exclude the sexual. Jonathan's choice of David is associated not only with rebellion, but with his own shame and the shame of his mother's nakedness. The phrase "mother's nakedness" in this context is not easily understood. The Hebrew word for nakedness here, *erva*, is the word used in Leviticus and elsewhere to express sexual violation. To uncover nakedness is to have illicit sexual relations. Add to this that the first of Saul's insults to Jonathan is that he is perverse. Jonathan has chosen David in a perverse and shaming way that offends his mother's nakedness. Saul is not offended by a platonic friendship, but by his son's perverse, shameful and naked love of David.

A last bit of evidence, given the language just described, is very evocative. In his rage at Jonathan for his shameful and perverse choice of David, Saul demands that Jonathan bring David to him for execution. Jonathan rises to defend David, innocently asking what David has done to deserve to be put to death. Saul, frustrated with his clueless son, does the unexpected. He throws a spear at Jonathan. The text does not seem to worry that perhaps Jonathan might have been injured by the attack. There is no statement to the effect that Saul missed. We are led to believe that Saul had no intention of really hitting Jonathan. If so, what was the demonstration about? It could be pure rage and nothing more. However, it could be more pointed than just blowing off steam. Could it not mark his rage at Jonathan's lack of male virtue by having chosen for himself a male to love? If so, the violent gesture could be demonstrating what real men do. Real men, for Saul, penetrate women in love and men in battle. Or perhaps the lodging of a spear in the wall behind Jonathan was meant as a taunting threat on the order of "If you want to be penetrated by a man, then I will penetrate you!"

Discussion Questions:

- Is Greenberg's argument about David and Jonathan's relationship convincing? Why or why not?
- Does Greenberg use an ethical lens to make his argument? Support your answer.
- How does Greenberg's commentary change your understanding of David and Jonathan's relationship?

2 Samuel 1:25-26: David's Speech at Jonathan's Funeral	
1:25: How the mighty have fallen. In the thick of battle—Jonathan, slain on your heights! **1:26:** I grieve for you, my brother Jonathan, you were most dear to me. Your love was wonderful to me, more than the love of women.	**2Sam. 1:25** אֵיךְ נָפְלוּ גִבֹּרִים בְּתוֹךְ הַמִּלְחָמָה יְהוֹנָתָן עַל־בָּמוֹתֶיךָ חָלָל: **2Sam. 1:26** צַר־לִי עָלֶיךָ אָחִי יְהוֹנָתָן נָעַמְתָּ לִי מְאֹד נִפְלְאָה אַהֲבָתְךָ לִי מֵאַהֲבַת נָשִׁים:

Discussion Questions:

- What do we learn about David and Jonathan's relationship from this text?

Wedding Texts	
Option 1: Genesis 24:60 אֲחֹתֵּנוּ אַתְּ הֱיִי לְאַלְפֵי רְבָבָה "Our sister, may you be the mother of multitudes."	Option 2: 1 Samuel 18:1 (modified) שהנשמות שלך יהיו קשורות זו לזו May your souls be bound up together.

Associations:

Ethical Implications:

What would you choose? Why? Try to justify your answer using an ethic of reading.

Unit 1: Love
Lesson 2: Jacob & Problematic Love

Enduring Understandings:

1. Biblical and rabbinic texts offer us a way to grapple with significant, deep emotional concerns.
2. The Bible is a dynamic text and we as readers are obligated to interpret it.
3. Emotions are a critically important part of Judaism and of the human experience.

Essential Questions:

1. Which biblical texts can help us understand the emotion of love?
2. How can biblical texts support and challenge our own assumptions about love?
3. Who defines 'love' and its role in society? How do we expand our definition of love?

Required Materials:

- Copies of text sheet for every student

Notes to Teacher:

This lesson will continue exploring the emotion of love, but will move from looking at relationships between two adults into the topic of 'problematic love.' Problematic love here means that love that is complicated and, in the case of the two biblical texts that students will explore, love that results in favoritism. Though students will likely not be able to personally relate the experience of having two wives and loving one more than the other, students will look at ways that the story of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel affects us and our liturgy and tradition. Lastly, students will look at a few verses that introduce the Joseph novella and discuss the ethical implications of favoritism among siblings. Favoritism among siblings is an oft-repeated theme in the book of Genesis, but is only discussed in this lesson, though this theme is a rich topic for further exploration using a Jewish ethic of reading.

This lesson does not address the question/challenge of wife-acquisition in biblical texts. It is possible (perhaps likely) that this will come up in discussing these texts. The autonomy of women is, of course, an important topic with ethical implications for our world today. In the case of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel, Jacob 'acquires' both Leah and Rachel. This is not the language we would use to talk about marriage today. If this topic seems of interest to students, it would be worthwhile to set aside time for additional study of this passage/issue. Using a feminist reading strategy with this text would help students become especially attuned to issues of gender and authorial usage of gender. In the case of this text, a feminist lens brings to the surface the realization that this story of love is also a story of economic acquisition. Rachel and Leah, as well as Bilhah and Zilpah, are acquired—they pass from one man, Laban, to another, Jacob. In the ancient world, marriage was not about love, but rather about economic gain. The purpose of our study, however, is to explore the role of love between adults within the biblical context. This

does not mean ignoring the feminist reading, but our focus is on the interpersonal relationships of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel, and not on the broader economic context.

This lesson has four parts to it. Each part builds on the previous part, so they should be done in order. After exploring the story of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel, students will look at two practical applications of the biblical texts: the Amidah and the *bedeken* ceremony of weddings. Lastly, students will explore the issue of parental favoritism and its ethical implications. The biblical texts should be read and discussed as a group, with the teacher serving as facilitator. Part 3: Application of Texts: Amidah and Wedding Ceremonies can be done in combinations of small groups who then report back to the larger group.

Introductory Essay:

Let us begin by unpacking the biblical texts used in this lesson. The story of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel is a story of problematic love within a marital relationship. This story may be familiar to students from religious school. They will certainly recognize the names of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel from our liturgy (which they will also explore in this lesson). Jacob arrives in Haran, where he meets Rachel and falls in love with her. Rachel's father, Laban, tells Jacob that he can marry Rachel if he works for Laban for seven years. Jacob works for Laban for seven years, but Laban tricks Jacob into marrying Leah, the older daughter. An incensed Jacob insists on marrying Rachel; Laban allows him to marry Rachel, but requires that Jacob works another seven years. The text tells us that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah.

A number of issues are present in this text. The villain of this story is Laban; he is the one who tricks Jacob, and in turn hurts both his daughter by engineering a marriage in which both of them will struggle to be happy and fulfilled. We might have some sympathy for Jacob, who clearly made his preference for Rachel known, but was deceived into marrying a woman he did not love. Perhaps we cannot always control who we love romantically. At the same time, Jacob treats his two wives very differently and this has serious consequences for the family unit. (You may want to remind students about the drama between Jacob, Leah, and Rachel and their offspring. If needed, read Genesis 29:31-30:22, which continues the saga of Jacob and his wives.) When we read this text, we confront the question of preferential treatment and the problems of loving one wife more than another. Today, we do not encounter men who have two wives, but there are situations when we find ourselves treating people who are supposed to be equals differently.

This leads directly into the second biblical text: the story of Jacob and Joseph. We know that Jacob has twelve sons. However, we learn that Jacob loves his son Joseph more than his other sons. (Joseph is the son of Rachel, one of the long-lasting consequences of Jacob loving one wife more than the other.) Not only does Jacob love his son Joseph more than his other sons, he also treats him differently. Jacob's preferential treatment for Joseph causes major tension within the family unit and results in Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery. We need to unpack this text on two levels: from the perspective of the sons, who are treated differently, and from the perspective of Jacob, the parent who is loving

some children more than others. Students may relate to this text on a visceral level as they themselves may have siblings and family tension.

In looking at these two texts, students will be asked to explore the ethical implications of stories that demonstrate problematic love. At first glance, students should come to realize that our biblical characters and the stories we tell about them are not perfect—these characters are extremely human in their interactions. On a deeper level, students can explore how these stories affect us as readers and what they teach us about human relationships. What are some of the ways that we might want to be *unlike* our patriarch Jacob?

This lesson also asks students to explore to applications of the biblical story of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel. First, they will look at the first prayer of the Amidah. Hopefully, this text will be familiar to them. The goal here is to focus on one way that our biblical texts are used in our liturgy. However, using our texts in our liturgy is not a neutral act; every choice of biblical text is laden with ethical implications. The text of the Amidah did not spontaneously come into being—people made choices about how to formulate this text. By looking at this text in concert with the biblical story of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel, students will have the opportunity to explore the meaning and implication of the Amidah. In particular, students will be asked to focus on the order in which the matriarchs and patriarchs appear in the Amidah. In Mishkan T'filah (the Reform Movement's prayer book and the text used in this lesson), the patriarchs appear first, followed by the matriarchs. In the list of matriarchs, Rachel appears before Leah. Using an ethical lens, students will discuss the pros and cons of listing Rachel before Leah. Students will also be asked to use their imagination for another way that the ancestors could be listed.

Second, students will look at a text that explains the tradition of *bedeken* in a wedding ceremony. (Be sure to read this text in advance to familiarize yourself with the tradition of *bedeken*.) This will hopefully provide another connection to the last lesson which looked at biblical texts used in a wedding ceremony. This text, which comes from the book *Beyond Breaking the Glass: A Spiritual Guide to Your Jewish Wedding*, succinctly explains the history and traditions of veiling at a wedding and addresses some of the challenges of this tradition. Students will be asked to discuss the connection between biblical texts (including a piece about Isaac and Rebecca's first meeting, another connection to the previous lesson) and how this text addresses traditions created based on potentially challenging biblical texts. By looking at two practical implications of biblical texts that deal with love, students will both see and feel how texts affect us as readers and as Jews. This is perhaps the most important goal of this lesson.

Lesson Plan:

Part 1: Introduction

Ask students to share something that they learned from the last session and/or something that is staying with them from their discussion. This will help ground the lesson as a continuation of the previous lesson.

Part 2: Jacob, Leah, & Rachel Text

Read Genesis 29:15-30 together. Use the discussion questions to unpack the challenges of the text. Encourage students to see this text as a depiction of complicated relationships within marriage rather than a depiction of historical characters.

Part 3: Application of Texts: Amidah and Wedding Ceremonies

Have students form small groups (they can use the same group for both the Amidah exercise and the wedding exercise or switch groups). Have them read the text and use the discussion questions to guide their conversation. Ask the small groups to report back on their findings and possible innovations to the larger group.

Part 4: Jacob & Joseph

Come back together as a large group. Read Genesis 37:2-4 together. Use the discussion questions to unpack the implications of the text. Encourage students to connect Jacob's actions with Leah and Rachel with Jacob's actions with Joseph.

Genesis 29:15-30 **Jacob, Leah, and Rachel**	
29:15: Laban said to Jacob, "Just because you are a kinsman, should you serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?"	**Gen. 29:15** וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן לְיַעֲקֹב הֲכִי־אָחִי אַתָּה וַעֲבַדְתַּנִי חִנָּם הַגִּידָה לִּי מַה־מַּשְׂכֻּרְתֶּךָ:
29:16: Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older one was Leah, and the name of the younger one was Rachel.	**Gen. 29:16** וּלְלָבָן שְׁתֵּי בָנוֹת שֵׁם הַגְּדֹלָה לֵאָה וְשֵׁם הַקְּטַנָּה רָחֵל:
29:17: Leah had weak eyes; Rachel was shapely and beautiful.	**Gen. 29:17** וְעֵינֵי לֵאָה רַכּוֹת וְרָחֵל הָיְתָה יְפַת־תֹּאַר וִיפַת מַרְאֶה:
29:18: Jacob loved Rachel; so he answered, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel."	**Gen. 29:18** וַיֶּאֱהַב יַעֲקֹב אֶת־רָחֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֶעֱבָדְךָ שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים בְּרָחֵל בִּתְּךָ הַקְּטַנָּה:
29:19: Laban said, "Better that I give her to you than that I should give her to an outsider. Stay with me."	**Gen. 29:19** וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן טוֹב תִּתִּי אֹתָהּ לָךְ מִתִּתִּי אֹתָהּ לְאִישׁ אַחֵר שְׁבָה עִמָּדִי:
29:20: So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her.	**Gen. 29:20** וַיַּעֲבֹד יַעֲקֹב בְּרָחֵל שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים וַיִּהְיוּ בְעֵינָיו כְּיָמִים אֲחָדִים בְּאַהֲבָתוֹ אֹתָהּ:
29:21: Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife, for my time is fulfilled, that I may cohabit with her."	**Gen. 29:21** וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל־לָבָן הָבָה אֶת־אִשְׁתִּי כִּי מָלְאוּ יָמָי וְאָבוֹאָה אֵלֶיהָ:
29:22: And Laban gathered all the people of the place and made a feast.	**Gen. 29:22** וַיֶּאֱסֹף לָבָן אֶת־כָּל־אַנְשֵׁי הַמָּקוֹם וַיַּעַשׂ מִשְׁתֶּה:
29:23: When evening came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to him; and he cohabited with her.	**Gen. 29:23** וַיְהִי בָעֶרֶב וַיִּקַּח אֶת־לֵאָה בִתּוֹ וַיָּבֵא אֹתָהּ אֵלָיו וַיָּבֹא אֵלֶיהָ:
29:24: Laban had given his maidservant Zilpah to his daughter Leah as her maid.	**Gen. 29:24** וַיִּתֵּן לָבָן לָהּ אֶת־זִלְפָּה שִׁפְחָתוֹ לְלֵאָה בִתּוֹ שִׁפְחָה:
29:25: When morning came, there was Leah! So he said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? I was in your service for Rachel! Why did you deceive me?"	**Gen. 29:25** וַיְהִי בַבֹּקֶר וְהִנֵּה־הִוא לֵאָה וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־לָבָן מַה־זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ לִּי הֲלֹא בְרָחֵל עָבַדְתִּי עִמָּךְ וְלָמָּה רִמִּיתָנִי:
29:26: Laban said, "It is not the practice in our place to marry off the younger before the older.	**Gen. 29:26** וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן לֹא־יֵעָשֶׂה כֵן בִּמְקוֹמֵנוּ לָתֵת הַצְּעִירָה לִפְנֵי הַבְּכִירָה:
29:27: Wait until the bridal week of this one is over and we will give you that one too, provided you serve me another seven years."	**Gen. 29:27** מַלֵּא שְׁבֻעַ זֹאת וְנִתְּנָה לְךָ גַּם־אֶת־זֹאת בַּעֲבֹדָה אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲבֹד עִמָּדִי עוֹד שֶׁבַע־שָׁנִים אֲחֵרוֹת:
29:28: Jacob did so; he waited out the bridal	**Gen. 29:28** וַיַּעַשׂ יַעֲקֹב כֵּן וַיְמַלֵּא שְׁבֻעַ זֹאת וַיִּתֶּן־לוֹ אֶת־רָחֵל בִּתּוֹ לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה:
	Gen. 29:29 וַיִּתֵּן לָבָן לְרָחֵל בִּתּוֹ אֶת־בִּלְהָה שִׁפְחָתוֹ לָהּ לְשִׁפְחָה:
	Gen. 29:30 וַיָּבֹא גַּם אֶל־רָחֵל וַיֶּאֱהַב גַּם־אֶת־רָחֵל מִלֵּאָה וַיַּעֲבֹד עִמּוֹ עוֹד שֶׁבַע־שָׁנִים אֲחֵרוֹת:

week of the one, and then he gave him his daughter Rachel as wife. **29:29:** Laban had given his maidservant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maid. **29:30:** And Jacob cohabited with Rachel also; indeed, he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he served him [Laban] another seven years.	

Discussion Questions:

- How does this text describe the relationship between Jacob and Rachel, between Jacob and Leah?
- What are the ethical implications of a husband who loves one wife more than another?
- Make an argument for which character is most hurt by Laban's deception.
- The text fails to mention Leah or Rachel's feelings. What does this reveal about the cultural world of the author?

Text of the Amidah	
Blessed are you, Adonai our God, God of our fathers and mothers, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob, God of Sarah, God of Rebecca, God of Rachel, and God of Leah, the great mighty and awesome God, transcendent God who bestows loving-kindness, creates everything out of love, remembers the love of our fathers and mothers, and brings redemption to their children's children for the sake of the Divine Name. Sovereign, Deliverer, Helper, and Shield, Blessed are You, Adonai, Abraham's shield and Sarah's helper.	בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהינוּ ואלֹהי אֲבוֹתינוּ וְאִמּוֹתינוּ, אֱלֹהי אַבְרָהָם, אֱלֹהי יִצְחָק, ואלֹהי יַעֲקֹב, אֱלֹהי שָׂרָה, אֱלֹהי רִבְקָה, אֱלֹהי רָחֵל, ואלֹהי לֵאָה, הָאֵל הַגָּדוֹל הַגִּבּוֹר וְהַנּוֹרָא, אֵל עֶלְיוֹן, גּוֹמֵל חֲסָדִים טוֹבִים, וְקוֹנֵה הַכֹּל, וְזוֹכֵר חַסְדֵי אָבוֹת וְאִמָּהוֹת, וּמֵבִיא גּוֹאֵל לִבְנֵי בְנֵיהֶם לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ בְּאַהֲבָה מֶלֶךְ עוֹזֵר וּמוֹשִׁיעַ וּמָגֵן בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ מָגֵן אַבְרָהָם וְעֶזְרַת שָׂרָה

Discussion Questions:

- What does the current order of the Amidah express in terms of values?
- Make an argument for listing Rachel before Leah. Make an argument for listing Leah before Rachel.
- How else might you arrange the text of the Amidah? (Imagine the Amidah has not been written yet—how would you achieve the goal of crafting a prayer that invokes the names of our ancestors?)
- What will you think about the next time you recite the Amidah during communal prayer?

Beyond Breaking the Glass: A Spiritual Guide to Your Jewish Wedding
By Rabbi Nancy H. Wiener, D.Min.[15]

In many parts of the world, women regularly wear veils as a sign of modesty. We, who trace our earliest roots to the Middle East, can find evidence of this custom among Jews well into the twentieth century. Dowry lists for Jewish brides from Yemen to Marrakesh reveal that the most plentiful single item listed among the bride's clothing was her collection of veils. In such a world, it is easy to imagine how a young woman, upon seeing a man she might marry, would modestly cover her face with a veil, as Rebecca did upon seeing Isaac (Genesis 24:65); or how a young groom might be tricked into marrying a woman other than his intended, as with Jacob, who worked for seven years to be able to marry his beloved, Rachel, only to find that he had been married to her sister, Leah. He did not discover her true identity until he awoke the morning after the wedding and saw her unveiled face (Genesis 29:18-25). The Rabbis trace our customs about veiling and unveiling the bride back to these two biblical stories.

The need to make sure that the bride is indeed the right woman has found expression in many customs related to veiling and unveiling. In some Jewish communities, particularly those of Central and Eastern European origin, the groom has the honor and responsibility of placing the veil over the bride's face in a ceremony known in Yiddish as *bedeken,* from the verb "to cover." In other Jewish circles, the groom lifts and lowers the bride's veil during the ceremony itself, to check her face/identity. Curiously, a Hebrew word, *badak*, meaning "check," accurately describes the groom's action and is remarkably similar in sound to the Yiddish verb *bedeken*. Whether the groom "covers" or "checks" his bride, the symbolism is important.

Today many Jews consider anything having to do with a veil objectionable. They associate the veil with societies in which women are expected to be subservient and thus do not wish to include a symbol that resonates as non-egalitarian. Others us a diaphanous fabric that permits the bride to see and to be seen. For others still, a white wedding gown, veil and all, merely contributes to the pageantry and otherworldly aesthetic they desire.

There are couples who choose to retain the groom's veiling of the bride as a ritualized preparatory moment prior to the actual *kiddushin*. Others, responding to other cultural influences, have a custom of keeping the members of the couple separate until they approach the chuppah. When this custom is practiced, the groom can be given the opportunity during the ceremony to lift the veil and "check" the woman to whom he is about to pledge his loving commitment. He can then either put it back down or leave her face exposed. Certainly a veil is not a necessity; like many of the other customs discussed here, it is an option, with many meanings and possible variations for you to consider.

[15] Rabbi Nancy H. Weiner, D.Min., Beyond Breaking the Glass: A Spiritual Guide to Your Jewish Wedding (New York: CCAR Press, 2012), 68–69.

An innovative reinterpretation of this tradition is another option. Since dressing and undressing another individual is an extremely intimate act, perhaps it might be meaningful to choose one article of clothing to put on each other just before the ceremony begins. It can be a planned, private moment amidst the mayhem that will likely surround you. Any article of clothing will do—a cummerbund, a piece of jewelry, shoes, veil, *kippah*, tallit, and so on. Thus, you can put the finishing touch on each other's clothing, in lieu of the traditional unilateral *bedeken*.

Discussion Questions:

- How do biblical texts get translated into wedding ceremony traditions?
- Respond to Rabbi Wiener's "innovative reinterpretation." Does it work for you? What other innovations would you suggest based on our reading of the biblical text?

Genesis 37:2-4 **Jacob & Joseph**	
37:2: This, then, is the line of Jacob: At seventeen years of age, Joseph tended the flocks with his brothers, as a helper to the sons of his father's wives Bilhah and Zilpah. And Joseph brought bad reports of them to their father. **37:3:** Now Israel [Jacob] loved Joseph best of all his sons, for he was the child of his old age; and he had made him an ornamented tunic. **37:4:** And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of his brothers, they hated him so that they could not speak a friendly word to him.	**Gen. 37:2** אֵלֶּה ׀ תּוֹלְדוֹת יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף בֶּן־שְׁבַע־ עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה הָיָה רֹעֶה אֶת־אֶחָיו בַּצֹּאן וְהוּא נַעַר אֶת־בְּנֵי בִלְהָה וְאֶת־בְּנֵי זִלְפָּה נְשֵׁי אָבִיו וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת־דִּבָּתָם רָעָה אֶל־אֲבִיהֶם׃ **Gen. 37:3** וְיִשְׂרָאֵל אָהַב אֶת־יוֹסֵף מִכָּל־בָּנָיו כִּי־בֶן־זְקֻנִים הוּא לוֹ וְעָשָׂה לוֹ כְּתֹנֶת פַּסִּים׃ **Gen. 37:4** וַיִּרְאוּ אֶחָיו כִּי־אֹתּוֹ אָהַב אֲבִיהֶם מִכָּל־אֶחָיו וַיִּשְׂנְאוּ אֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ דַּבְּרוֹ לְשָׁלֹם׃

Discussion Questions:

- How does this text describe the relationship between Jacob and his sons?
- What are the ethical implications of a father who loves one child more than his others?
- Make an argument for which character is most hurt by Jacob's preferential treatment.
- Given the biblical text we read earlier, how might Jacob have acted differently?

Unit 1: Love
Lesson 3: Loving the Stranger

Enduring Understandings:

1. Biblical and rabbinic texts offer us a way to grapple with significant, deep emotional concerns.
2. The Bible is a dynamic text and we as readers are obligated to interpret it.
3. Emotions are a critically important part of Judaism and of the human experience.

Essential Questions:

1. Which biblical texts can help us understand the emotion of love?
2. How can biblical texts support and challenge our own assumptions about love?
3. Who defines 'love' and its role in society? How do we expand our definition of love?

Required Materials:

- Copies of text sheet for every student

Notes to Teacher:

This is the last lesson of the first unit. This lesson represents a shift in how we are talking about the emotion of love: we are moving from discussions about the interpersonal relationships of biblical characters to a discussion of the biblical command to "love the stranger." While the texts examined in this lesson are different than the texts in the first two lessons, the goals remain the same: to apply a Jewish ethic of reading to our texts to uncover and reveal the ethical implications of our texts.

This lesson has three parts to it. The parts should be done in order. After a brief introduction, the lesson moves into examining and exploring biblical texts related to the treatment of the stranger. Students will explore texts from Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. The Leviticus and Deuteronomy texts will help push the conversation explicitly towards talking about love in a societal and systemic context. The second part of the lesson examines three texts related to Passover. The purpose of including the Passover texts is to show how the biblical texts influence liturgy and ritual, as well as affect us as readers using these texts as part of our sense of morality.

Both Part 2: Biblical Texts and Part 3: Passover Texts can be done as a large discussion or in smaller groups. If any part is done in smaller groups, students are encouraged to share their findings with the larger group before moving on to the next section.

Introductory Essay:

This lesson represents a shift into talking about the commandment to love the stranger. This may feel significantly different than the previous two lessons. However, this lesson builds on the ideas that students have already explored.

Let's begin by examining the biblical texts included in this lesson. The two Exodus texts use the Israelites' experience in Egypt to justify the command to love the stranger. The Israelites' personal experience with slavery and oppression becomes a driving force for how they are subsequently supposed to treat the stranger in their midst. This commandment may be familiar to students; the command to welcome/love/not oppress the stranger is the most repeated commandment in the entire Torah. The Leviticus and Deuteronomy texts move from a negative commandment "not to oppress" the stranger to a positive commandment "to love the stranger." This semantic shift is subtle, but the Leviticus and Deuteronomy texts are what connect this lesson to the larger theme of love in biblical texts. Where we previously explored love between two (or three) characters and its implications for personal relationships, these texts raise a different set of questions about love within societies and care for groups of people.

Nahum Sarna, in his commentary on the book of Exodus, writes about the Hebrew term *ger*, meaning "stranger." He says:

> The Hebrew term *ger*, "stranger," denotes a foreign-born permanent resident whose status was intermediate between the native-born citizen (*'ezrah*) and the foreigner temporarily residing outside his community (*nokhri*). Because he could not fall back upon local family and clan ties, he lacked the social and legal protections that these ordinarily afforded. Being dependent on the goodwill of others, he could easily fall victim to discrimination and exploitation. The numerous biblical prohibitions against the maltreatment of strangers are supplemented in the legislation by the positive injunction to love them, even as God does, which entails supplying their basic needs and extending to them the same social services and amenities to which disadvantaged Israelites were entitled. It was inevitable that over time strangers would be absorbed into the body politic of Israel and take upon themselves the obligations and duties that devolved upon a member of the covenantal society. Hence, in post-biblical Hebrew the term *ger* (fem. *giyyoret*) eventually came to be synonymous with "proselyte."[16]

Sarna's writing helps elucidate the plight of the *ger* in the biblical context: a stranger is more likely than others to be taken advantage of, to be exploited, or to be hurt because of their vulnerable state. Sarna also highlights that biblical commands both *prohibit* oppressing the stranger and *require* loving the stranger. Finally, Sarna includes an important note about the way that *ger* became understood by rabbinic authorities. In rabbinic literature, *ger* overwhelming refers to someone who wants to convert to Judaism. While this is not the focus of this lesson, it is important context for the teacher to know and understand.

Rabbi Jill Jacobs write about this phenomenon as well. She says:

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[16] Nahum M. Sarna, ed., *Exodus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 137–38.

> For the rabbis, themselves living under foreign rule, it may have been inconceivable to imagine a situation in which Jews constituted the majority and non-Jews needed protection. Perhaps for this reason, the rabbis reconstructed the biblical mandate to protect the stranger as a warning not to discriminate against converts to Judaism. Such is the nature of the world: in times of personal struggle, it becomes difficult to look outward. Ultimately, the lesson implicit both in the biblical protections of sojourners, and in the rabbinic re-imagination of the ger as a convert, is that history imposes obligations. For the bible, the experience of not being fully secure in Egypt obligates the Jewish people, now secure in their own land, to care for those who remain perpetually on the outside. Though we may reject the rabbis' disregard for non-Jews, we can at least learn from the rabbis that our own history of imperfection should prevent us from feeling superior to others. Within the American context, many Jews have reinterpreted the word "ger" as "immigrant." Here, the idea that history imposes obligations is extended to reminding Jews that our own community once occupied the position now held by newer immigrant groups.[17]

Jacobs provides context for why the rabbis might have constructed the biblical mandate about the stranger to be about the convert. At the same time, she re-applies the biblical commandment to the modern world (while still respecting the various ways the commandment has been understood). The idea that "history imposes obligations" is one of the key lessons of exploring these four biblical texts. The history of having been slaves (whether this is historical or a *conception we have about ourselves as Jews*) affects our sensibility about how we treat strangers in our midst. We must also investigate the question of whether or not one can be commanded to have a certain feeling. Is the commandment "to love" requiring a certain feeling, or is it asking us to undertake certain actions that demonstrate what love looks like in public?

After looking at these two sets of texts, students are asked to analyze two short texts about the Passover offering and who eats of it. The first text, Exodus 12:43, is clear that no stranger shall eat of the Passover offering. Sarna's Exodus commentary explains that the stranger "does not profess the religion of Israel and does not identify with the community's historical experiences. He is therefore exempted from the religious obligations and restrictions imposed on Israelites."[18] However, in Numbers 9:14, we see that the text says that everyone can eat of the Passover offering. Michael Fishbane, in *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, posits that "Since conditions were formulated in Exod. 12:48 for the conversion of strangers via circumcision, so as to enable them to participate in the paschal-offering, it may be concluded that the stranger to which

[17] Rabbi Jill Jacobs, "Rabbi Jill Jacobs, Judaism and Immigrant Rights (Jewish Funds for Justice)," n.d., https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/114395.
[18] Sarna, *JPS Exodus*, 63.

reference is made in Num. 9:14 is a circumcised proselyte."[19] Nevertheless, these two texts show how opinions and conceptions about strangers are not static, but very dynamic. We can and should explore the ethical implications of the differences in these texts and investigate the intent of the authors of these texts. Highlighting the ethical tension in these texts will raise the stakes of the conversation about Passover texts: one document (in this case, the Torah is one composite document) can convey multiple ideologies.

This leads into the exploration of three texts related to Passover. Passover is the holiday in which we retell the story of the Exodus; one explicit purpose of the Passover seder is to teach our children our national narrative. This lesson focuses on one small part of the Passover seder, a section often referred to as *B'chol Dor V'dor*, "in every generation." This small section of text relies on biblical passages to explain that every person is obligated to see themselves as having come out of Egypt. Students should explore the ethical implications of seeing themselves as having been slaves: does this make them more or less likely to relate to the biblical commandment to love the stranger? Why do we need to be reminded every year to see ourselves as having been slaves?

This lesson also brings in two additional commentaries on this small piece of the Passover seder. In 1993, Elie Wiesel published a Passover Haggadah with his commentary. He comments on the b'chol dor v'dor section and offers a compelling reading about what it means to live "as if." Wiesel writes that the Haggadah's injunction to see ourselves as personally having come out of Egypt requires us to live "as if" that had just happened to us—this injunction requires a level of imagination on the part of every individual. Rambam (also known as Maimonides), the medieval philosopher, plays with the Hebrew of the injunction to "see ourselves" in order to make it read that we must "show ourselves" as having just left Egypt.[20] By bringing in both of these texts, students will be asked to evaluate what, if anything, is the difference between "seeing oneself" and "showing oneself" as having left Egypt. Are they functionally the same injunction? Or is the semantic difference also an ethical difference?

Lastly, we must investigate the connection between the Passover seder and the commandment to love the stranger. Though the Passover seder does not explicitly mention loving the stranger in the texts that are explored here, the ideas are indelibly related. Our self-conception is intertwined with our public actions. How might Passover be a yearly reminder of our obligation to love the stranger? How might Passover be a cautionary tale of the havoc and devastation wreaked on a society that does not prioritizing loving the stranger? In what ways does the emotion of love extend beyond relationships between two people and into our conception of a society? These are the questions this lesson explores.

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[19] Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 103.
[20] Rambam does this by changing the Hebrew from *lirot*, to see, to *l'harot*, to show. This change only requires adding one Hebrew letter. If possible, read these words (written in green) out loud so students can hear how the Hebrew functions.

Lesson Plan:

Part 1: Introduction

Ask students to reflect on the phrase: "A stranger is simply someone whose story I do not yet know." They can discuss in pairs, journal silently and then share out loud, etc.

Part 2: Biblical Texts

Explore the biblical texts using the discussion questions. Start by reading the two texts from Exodus and then the two texts from Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Be explicit about drawing connections between the emotion of love present in the Leviticus and Deuteronomy texts and the previous two lesson plans. Lastly, explore the texts from Exodus and Numbers that deal with who eats of the Passover offering. Use these texts to explore the idea that our relationship to the stranger is not static.

Part 3: Passover Texts

Explore the three Passover texts using the discussion questions. Encourage students to reflect on their personal experiences with Passover and how this study might impact their future seder observance. Be explicit about encouraging students to connect biblical ideas of loving the stranger to the texts and meaning of the Passover seder.

Unit 1: Love
Lesson 3: Loving the Stranger

Exodus 22:20-22 **Do Not Oppress a Stranger**	
22:20: You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. **22:21:** You shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan. **22:22:** If you do mistreat them, I will heed their outcry as soon as they cry out to Me.	**Ex. 22:20** וְגֵר לֹא־תוֹנֶה וְלֹא תִלְחָצֶנּוּ כִּי־גֵרִים הֱיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם׃ **Ex. 22:21** כָּל־אַלְמָנָה וְיָתוֹם לֹא תְעַנּוּן׃ **Ex. 22:22** אִם־עַנֵּה תְעַנֶּה אֹתוֹ כִּי אִם־צָעֹק יִצְעַק אֵלַי שָׁמֹעַ אֶשְׁמַע צַעֲקָתוֹ׃

Exodus 23:9 **Do Not Oppress a Stranger (Again)**	
23:9: You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the soul of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.	**Ex. 23:9** וְגֵר לֹא תִלְחָץ וְאַתֶּם יְדַעְתֶּם אֶת־נֶפֶשׁ הַגֵּר כִּי־גֵרִים הֱיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם׃

Discussion Questions:

- How do these texts use the Israelites' experience in Egypt? (To put it another way: what would these texts lose if they *didn't* include information about Egypt?)

Leviticus 19:33-34 **Love the Stranger**	
19:33: When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him. **19:34:** The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I, the Eternal, am your God.	**Lev. 19:33** וְכִי־יָגוּר אִתְּךָ גֵּר בְּאַרְצְכֶם לֹא תוֹנּוּ אֹתוֹ׃ **Lev. 19:34** כְּאֶזְרָח מִכֶּם יִהְיֶה לָכֶם הַגֵּר ׀ הַגָּר אִתְּכֶם וְאָהַבְתָּ לוֹ כָּמוֹךָ כִּי־גֵרִים הֱיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם׃

Deuteronomy 10:17-19 **Love the Stranger (Again)**	
10:17: For the Eternal your God is God supreme and Lord supreme, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who shows no favor and takes no bribe, **10:18:** but upholds the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the	**Deut. 10:17** כִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הוּא אֱלֹהֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וַאֲדֹנֵי הָאֲדֹנִים הָאֵל הַגָּדֹל הַגִּבֹּר וְהַנּוֹרָא אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִשָּׂא פָנִים וְלֹא יִקַּח שֹׁחַד׃ **Deut. 10:18** עֹשֶׂה מִשְׁפַּט יָתוֹם וְאַלְמָנָה וְאֹהֵב גֵּר לָתֶת לוֹ לֶחֶם וְשִׂמְלָה׃ **Deut. 10:19** וַאֲהַבְתֶּם אֶת־הַגֵּר כִּי־גֵרִים הֱיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם׃

stranger, providing him with food and clothing. **10:19:** You too must love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.	

Discussion Questions:

- How are these texts similar to and different from the Exodus texts?
- Can one be *commanded* "to love"? Why or why not?

Exodus 12:43: **The Passover Offering**	
12:43: The Eternal said to Moses: This is the law of the passover offering: No foreigner shall eat of it.	**Ex. 12:43** וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן זֹאת חֻקַּת הַפָּסַח כָּל־בֶּן־נֵכָר לֹא־יֹאכַל בּוֹ:

Numbers 9:14: **The Passover Offering (Again)**	
9:14: And when a stranger who resides with you would offer a Passover sacrifice to the Eternal, he must offer it in accordance with the rules and rites of the passover sacrifice. There shall be one law for you, whether stranger or citizen of the country.	**Num. 9:14** וְכִי־יָגוּר אִתְּכֶם גֵּר וְעָשָׂה פֶּסַח לַיהוָה כְּחֻקַּת הַפֶּסַח וּכְמִשְׁפָּטוֹ כֵּן יַעֲשֶׂה חֻקָּה אַחַת יִהְיֶה לָכֶם וְלַגֵּר וּלְאֶזְרַח הָאָרֶץ:

Discussion Questions:

- How do these two texts talk differently about who shall eat of the Passover offering?
- How do these differences practically affect the Passover observance?
- What do we learn about how different generations (and different authors) conceptualize their relationship with foreigners/the stranger?

B'Chol Dor V'Dor: **Passover Haggadah**	
In each and every generation, a person is obligated to see themselves as if they personally had come out of Egypt. As the Torah says: "And you shall tell your child on that day, 'It is because of that which God did for me when I came out of Egypt.'" (Exodus 13:8) For it was not our ancestors alone whom God, blessed be	**בְּכָל־דּוֹר וָדוֹר חַיָּב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת אֶת־עַצְמוֹ, כְּאִלּוּ הוּא יָצָא מִמִּצְרַיִם** שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר, בַּעֲבוּר זֶה עָשָׂה יי לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם . לֹא אֶת אֲבוֹתֵינוּ בִּלְבָד גָּאַל הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא, אֶלָּא אַף אוֹתָנוּ גָּאַל עִמָּהֶם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וְאוֹתָנוּ הוֹצִיא מִשָּׁם

God, redeemed. God redeemed all of us with them. As it is said: "And God freed us from there that God might lead us to and give us the land which God promised our ancestors.'" (Deuteronomy 6:23).	לְמַעַן הָבִיא אֹתָנוּ, לָתֶת לָנוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לַאֲבֹתֵנוּ

Discussion Questions:

- What does it mean see yourself as if you had personally come out of Egypt?

A Passover Haggadah As Commented Upon by Elie Wiesel[21]
Two comments: First, the text does not say that every *Jew* must feel as if he had come out of Egypt. It says "every individual." And here we find the universal dimension of Jewish experience. After all, though the Torah was given to our people, have we not shared it with every other people? Second, the text says that every one of us must consider himself "as if" he had come out of Egypt. No, I did not leave Egypt, but I must think "as if" I had been among those who did. Certain Talmudic legends explain that actually our souls were there. Or we may accept the literal interpretation, and say: Though I have not personally taken part in those events, I must live "as if" I had. This lesson is especially relevant for those of our contemporaries who declare that all of us "are survivors of the Holocaust." No, all of us are not. Only those who went through the agony of Night survived that Night. Only those who knew death in Auschwitz survived Auschwitz. But all of us should think and act "as if" we had all been there. This "as if" defines the role of literature.

Discussion Questions:

- What does Elie Wiesel mean by his use of "as if"?
- Would the world look different if we all lived "as if" we had just left Egypt? In what ways?
- What do you think the role of literature is?

Rambam: Hilchot Chametz U'Matza 7:6	
In each and every generation, a person is obligated to show themselves as though they just now left the slavery of Egypt.	בְּכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר חַיָּב אָדָם לְהַרְאוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלּוּ הוּא בְּעַצְמוֹ יָצָא עַתָּה מִשִּׁעְבּוּד מִצְרַיִם

Discussion Questions:

- What is the difference between "seeing oneself" and "showing oneself" as having just left Egypt?
- How are these Passover texts connected to "loving the stranger"?
- How will our study impact the way you observe or think about the next Passover seder you attend?

[21] Elie Weisel, *A Passover Haggadah* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1993), 68.

Unit 2: Anger
Lesson 1: Sodom & Gomorrah

Enduring Understandings:

1. Biblical and rabbinic texts offer us a way to grapple with significant, deep emotional concerns.
2. The Bible is a dynamic text and we as readers are obligated to interpret it.
3. Emotions are a critically important part of Judaism and of the human experience.

Essential Questions:

1. Which biblical texts can help us understand the emotion of anger?
2. How do biblical texts elucidate the experience of God's anger at humans and humans' anger at God?
3. What do biblical texts teach us about ourselves and our experience of anger?

Required Materials:

- Copy of text sheet for every student

Notes to Teacher:

This is the first lesson of the second unit. This unit focuses on the emotional expression of anger. The primary texts of this lesson are Genesis 18:16-33 and Genesis 19:23-29, which tell the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. Teenagers may be familiar with the story of Sodom and Gomorrah from previous religious school classes, but they likely have not explored the text deeply nor been exposed to the rabbinic commentary on these texts. One goal of this lesson is to show how rabbinic texts can complement, enhance, and challenge our biblical texts. This lesson also asks students to explore the story of Jonah (which we traditionally read on Yom Kippur because of its theme of repentance). The story of Jonah is a kind of foil for the Sodom and Gomorrah story.

This lesson also seeks to encourage teenagers to think about what in the world today makes them angry and how they express that anger. Teens should walk away knowing that contrary to some societal beliefs, anger can actually be a very useful and productive emotion. We should always ask: What is the function of anger, and how can I use it to fuel change?

There are five parts of this lesson. The sections should go in order, but you can decide how much time you would like to spend on each section. For those familiar with the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah, you may need to spend less time on the biblical texts. You can also decide to use small discussion groups for Parts 2-4. If you choose to use small discussion groups, it is recommended that you leave time for each group to report back on their conversations and findings. The accompanying text sheet breaks up the texts into 'Biblical Texts 1,' 'Rabbinic Texts,' and 'Biblical Texts 2' so that the sheet is easy to navigate. Though the story of Jonah is only four relatively short chapters, I have included only the relevant verses and have summarized the intermediary plot lines for clarity. There are also discussion questions on the text sheet so that teens can be self-

directed in their discussion. Depending on the length of your class sessions, you may choose to do this lesson over the course of two weeks to allow ample time for discussion and analysis.

You should read the introductory essay as well as the texts and discussion questions before the beginning of the session. The introductory essay will help frame the entire lesson and give you the background you need to confidently lead this lesson. (For more information, you are encouraged to read the short chapter "The Ethics of our Stories" in *Genesis Ideology: Essays on the Uses and Meanings of Stories*.) Remember, though, that you are learning with your students.

Introductory Essay:

How does the story of Sodom and Gomorrah and the rabbinic commentaries on that story help us understand the emotion of anger? How does the Jonah story complement and complicate the story of Sodom and Gomorrah? Let us begin by looking at the biblical texts of Genesis 18:16-33 and 19:23-29. In Genesis 18, we learn that God reveals God's plan to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to Abraham. When Abraham learns about God's plan, he pleads with God not to "sweep away the innocent along with the guilty" (18:23). Abraham further pleads with God not "to bring death upon the innocent as well as the guilty, so that the innocent and guilty fare alike" (18:25). Abraham negotiates with God, starting by asking that if there are 50 righteous people in the city, will God spare the city? Abraham finally negotiates the number down to 10. God agrees that if there are 10 righteous people, God will not destroy the cities. Abraham can be contrasted with other biblical character, such as Noah, who does not argue with God about destroying the generation of the flood, or Jonah, who runs away when God asks him to tell the people of Nineveh to repent. (These two stories would be useful texts to study in conjunction with this lesson: How and when do we argue with God? What makes anger righteous?) In this lesson, students will actively compare Abraham with Jonah.

In 19:23-29, we learn that God does in fact destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Only Lot and his family (relatives of Abraham) are allowed to escape the destruction. Famously, Lot's wife turns into a pillar of salt when she looks back at Sodom and Gomorrah. In these biblical texts, we feel both God's anger at human beings *and* Abraham's anger at God for choosing to wipe out entire cities because of their wickedness. When God first introduces the idea of destroying Sodom and Gomorrah, we do not know any specifics about the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah. In Genesis 19:1-11 (which is not included on the text sheet), we learn the story of how the men of Sodom show up at Lot's house to abuse the guests staying with Lot. As we will see in the rabbinic texts, however, there are many conceptions of why Sodom and Gomorrah were full of wickedness, most of them having nothing to do with homosexuality.

Nahum M. Sarna, in his commentary on the book of Genesis, writes about Abraham's expostulation with God:

> Abraham now stands before God to plead for the lives of depraved pagans. He senses kinship with the people of Sodom and feels himself involved in their fate. The ensuing dialogue assumes that the man of faith is not expected to accept morally absurd behavior with silent resignation. God rules the pagans, judges their deeds, decides their fate, and executes His decisions. His universality finds expression, above all, in His punishment for pagans for moral corruption because He is the architect of a societal pattern that is universal in scope. Because God is universal and omnipotent, humankind needs assurance that His almighty power is not indiscriminately applied and that He is not capricious like the pagan gods. […] The patriarch's contention that the innocent not be made to suffer along with the guilty is clear enough. More complicated is his second request that the entire city be spared for the sake of an innocent minority. This is no longer a simple appeal to the attribute of justice but a call for divine mercy. It carries with it two implications: Indirectly it asserts that there is a greater infraction of justice in the death of an innocent few than in allowing a guilty majority to escape retribution; it assumes that the merit of a minority is powerful enough to overcome the wickedness of the majority. These are major themes in later biblical literature because divine mercy can also be divine tolerance of evil, a problem of serious dimensions to the prophet and sage alike. The second issue, the question of individual versus communal responsibility, has a long history of controversy.[22]

Both God and Abraham express their anger in these biblical passages, but only Abraham argues with God about his anger. Abraham, in his anger, 'speaks truth to power,' both by negotiating the number of righteous individuals needed to spare the city and by asking God about being a just God. Abraham's belief in God's justice motivates him to question, rather forcefully, God's action. Even though God ultimately did not spare the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham reminds us of the power of using our anger to 'speak truth to power.' Because Abraham is outraged (a kind of fierce anger), he becomes an activist who lobbies God to change God's plan.

In Ezekiel 16, there are two verses that recap the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. These texts set the scene for the exploration of rabbinic commentary. The texts of Sanhedrin 109b paints a distressing and disturbing picture of the city of Sodom. According to these texts, the people of Sodom were not only not welcoming to strangers, wayfarers, and the poor, but actively sought out ways to harm the most vulnerable in their midst. What is the effect of these texts on our understanding and conception of God's anger? How do the stories of Sodom remind us of our own cities and nations? The rabbinic texts related to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah show us how the rabbis conceptualized the wickedness of the destroyed cities. In some ways, the rabbis *create* a reality that makes the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah so apparent that their destruction does not seem unjust.

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[22] Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 132–33.

After analyzing the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah and rabbinic texts on it, this lesson moves to an exploration of the story of Jonah. At first glance, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah and the story of Jonah share a lot in common. However, the Jonah story is a foil for the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. God wants to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah to teach what is just; God wants Nineveh to repent so that they will not be destroyed. Abraham argues with God in order to convince God not to convince the cities; Jonah runs away because he doesn't want the city of Nineveh to be spared. At the end of the Genesis story, Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed; at the end of the Jonah story, Nineveh repents and is spared.

David H. Aaron writes about analyzing Sodom and Gomorrah in juxtaposition to the Jonah story:

> Looming over both narratives are these questions: What is just punishment? Is repentance always acceptable? To what lengths should we go to avoid punishments that have irreversible effects? Justice in the Jonah story means *saving the people from their destiny*. Justice in the Abraham story means *punishing those who deserve punishment*. In Jonah, God stands for justice; in Genesis, Abraham appears to be the voice of justice, unless, of course, we accept the premise that Sodom and Gomorrah were fundamentally irredeemable (which is surely the attitude of the writer). In Jonah, God rebukes Jonah's insensitivity over the destruction of Nineveh: "Should I not care about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not yet know their right hand from their left, and many beasts as well?" The God in our Genesis story does not convey this type of sensitivity to animals, never mind people.[23]

What Aaron highlights for us here is that the Bible rarely, if ever, teaches only one idea. Here, we see conflicting ideas about repentance and destruction of cities. When we read these two stories in concert, we feel how different the messages are. In both stories, we get a sense of God's anger, but there are vastly different outcomes for the people God is angry at. Students should feel empowered to engage in a sophisticated conversation about the intent and ideology of biblical authors, as well as the uses of anger in biblical texts and our own lives.

[23] David H. Aaron, *Genesis Ideology: Essays on the Use and Meanings of Stories* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2017), 46–47.

Lesson Plan:

Part 1: Introduction

Ask students to think about a time that they were very angry about an injustice in the world. If they are comfortable, ask them to share their experience, how they felt, and what they did. This will set the stage for beginning our unit on anger.

Part 2: Exploration of Biblical Texts

Read through the biblical texts and use the discussion questions to prompt conversation. Be sure to ask students to be sensitive to their experience as readers.

Part 3: Exploration of Rabbinic Texts

Read through the rabbinic texts and use the discussion questions to prompt conversation. Ask students to consider how the rabbinic texts complement, enhance, and challenge their understanding of the biblical texts.

Part 4: The Jonah Story

Read through the texts about the Jonah story. Use the discussion questions to guide your conversation. Highlight and underscore the ways in which the Jonah story is a kind of foil for the Sodom and Gomorrah story.

Part 5: Discussion of Ethical Implications

Transition into a conversation about the ethical implications of anger in these texts. First, ask students to put the story of Sodom and Gomorrah into conversation with the story of Jonah. Ask how the story of Jonah fits as part of our Yom Kippur liturgy and rituals (the question of Yom Kippur liturgy will come up again in the third lesson of this unit).

In what ways do these passages help us see and feel a sense of righteous anger? What do these texts teach about God's anger? Abraham's outrage? Jonah's feelings? What, if anything, do these texts remind us of in our world today?

Lastly, be sure to move the conversation into the realm of ethical implications. Both of these stories exist in our canon, so we must grapple with them and their conflicting ideologies.

Unit 2: Anger
Lesson 1: God & Abraham at Sodom and Gomorrah

Biblical Texts 1:

Genesis 18:16-33: **Abraham Argues with God**	
18:16: The men [guests that Abraham had previously welcomed to his tent] set out from there and looked down toward Sodom, Abraham walking with them to see them off. **18:17:** Now the Eternal had said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, **18:18:** since Abraham is to become a great and populous nation and all the nations of the earth are to bless themselves by him? **18:19:** For I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the Eternal by doing what is just and right, in order that the Eternal may bring about for Abraham what He has promised him." **18:20:** Then the Eternal said, "The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave! **18:21:** I will go down to see whether they have acted altogether according to the outcry that has reached Me; if not, I will take note." **18:22:** The men went on from there to Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the Eternal. **18:23:** Abraham came forward and said, "Will You sweep away the innocent along with the guilty? **18:24:** What if there should be fifty innocent within the city; will You then wipe out the place and not forgive it for the sake of the innocent fifty who are in it?	**Gen. 18:16** וַיָּקֻמוּ מִשָּׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיַּשְׁקִפוּ עַל־ פְּנֵי סְדֹם וְ ׳בְרָהָם הֹלֵךְ עִמָּם לְשַׁלְּחָם׃ **Gen. 18:17** וַיהוָה אָמָר הַמְכַסֶּה אֲנִי מֵאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה׃ **Gen. 18:18** וְ ׳בְרָהָם הָיוֹ יִהְיֶה לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְעָצוּם וְנִבְרְכוּ בּוֹ כֹּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָ רֶץ׃ **Gen. 18:19** כִּי יְדַעְתִּיו לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יְצַוֶּה אֶת־ בָּנָיו וְאֶת־בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו וְשָׁמְרוּ דֶּרֶךְ יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט לְמַעַן הָבִיא יְהוָה עַל־אַבְרָהָם אֵת אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר עָלָיו׃ **Gen. 18:20** וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה זַעֲקַת סְדֹם וַעֲמֹרָה כִּי־ רַבָּה וְחַטָּאתָם כִּי כָבְדָה מְאֹד׃ **Gen. 18:21** אֵרְדָה־נָּא וְאֶרְאֶה הַכְּצַעֲקָתָהּ הַבָּאָה אֵלַי עָשׂוּ ו כָלָה וְאִם־לֹא אֵדָעָה׃ **Gen. 18:22** וַיִּפְנוּ מִשָּׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיֵּלְכוּ סְדֹמָה וְ ׳בְרָהָם עוֹדֶנּוּ עֹמֵד לִפְנֵי יְהוָה׃ **Gen. 18:23** וַיִּגַּשׁ אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמַר הַ ־ף תִּסְפֶּה צַדִּיק עִם־רָשָׁע׃ **Gen. 18:24** אוּלַי יֵשׁ חֲמִשִּׁים צַדִּיקִם בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר הַ ־ף תִּסְפֶּה וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא לַמָּקוֹם לְמַעַן חֲמִשִּׁים הַצַּדִּיקִם אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבָּהּ׃ **Gen. 18:25** חָלִלָה לְךָ מֵעֲשֹׂת ו כַּדָּבָר הַזֶּה לְהָמִית צַדִּיק עִם־רָשָׁע וְהָיָה כַצַּדִּיק כָּרָשָׁע חָלִלָה לָּךְ הַשֹּׁפֵט כָּל־הָאָרֶץ לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט׃ **Gen. 18:26** וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אִם־אֶמְצָא בִסְדֹם חֲמִשִּׁים צַדִּיקִם בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר וְנָשָׂאתִי לְכָל־ הַמָּקוֹם בַּעֲבוּרָם׃ **Gen. 18:27** וַיַּעַן אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמַר הִנֵּה־נָא הוֹאַלְתִּי לְדַבֵּר אֶל־אֲדֹנָי וְאָנֹכִי עָפָר וָאֵפֶר׃ **Gen. 18:28** אוּלַי יַחְסְרוּן חֲמִשִּׁים הַצַּדִּיקִם חֲמִשָּׁה הֲתַשְׁחֵית בַּחֲמִשָּׁה אֶת־כָּל־הָעִיר וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אַשְׁחִית אִם־אֶמְצָא שָׁם אַרְבָּעִים וַחֲמִשָּׁה׃

18:25: Far be it from You to do such a thing, to bring death upon the innocent as well as the guilty, so that innocent and guilty fare alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" **18:26:** And the Eternal answered, "If I find within the city of Sodom fifty innocent ones, I will forgive the whole place for their sake." **18:27:** Abraham spoke up, saying, "Here I venture to speak to my Lord, I who am but dust and ashes: **18:28:** What if the fifty innocent should lack five? Will you destroy the whole city for want of the five?" And the Eternal answered: "I will not destroy if I find forty-five there." **18:29:** But he spoke to the Eternal again, and said, "What if forty should be found there?" And the Eternal said, "I will not do it, for the sake of the forty." **18:30:** And he said, "Let not my Lord be angry if I go on: What if thirty should be found there?" And the Eternal answered, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." **18:31:** And he said, "I venture again to speak to my Lord: What if twenty should be found there?" And the Eternal answered, "I will not destroy, for the sake of the twenty." **18:32:** And he said, "Let not my Lord be angry if I speak but this last time: What if ten should be found there? And the Eternal answered, "I will not destroy, for the sake of the ten." **18:33:** When the Eternal had finished speaking to Abraham, the Eternal departed; and Abraham returned to his place.	**Gen. 18:29** וַיֹּסֶף עוֹד לְדַבֵּר אֵלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר אוּלַי יִמָּצְאוּן שָׁם אַרְבָּעִים וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה בַּעֲבוּר הָאַרְבָּעִים׃ **Gen. 18:30** וַיֹּאמֶר אַל־נָא יִחַר לַאדֹנָי וַאֲדַבְּרָה אוּלַי יִמָּצְאוּן שָׁם שְׁלֹשִׁים וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה אִם־אֶמְצָא שָׁם שְׁלֹשִׁים׃ **Gen. 18:31** וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה־נָא הוֹאַלְתִּי לְדַבֵּר אֶל־אֲדֹנָי אוּלַי יִמָּצְאוּן שָׁם עֶשְׂרִים וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אַשְׁחִית בַּעֲבוּר הָעֶשְׂרִים׃ **Gen. 18:32** וַיֹּאמֶר אַל־נָא יִחַר לַאדֹנָי וַאֲדַבְּרָה אַךְ־הַפַּעַם אוּלַי יִמָּצְאוּן שָׁם עֲשָׂרָה וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אַשְׁחִית בַּעֲבוּר הָעֲשָׂרָה׃ **Gen. 18:33** וַיֵּלֶךְ יְהוָה כַּאֲשֶׁר כִּלָּה לְדַבֵּר אֶל־אַבְרָהָם וְאַבְרָהָם שָׁב לִמְקֹמוֹ׃

Discussion Questions:

- Who are the characters in this story? What is each of their role?
- At the end of this passage, what are your impressions of God? Of Abraham?
- What is the end result of this discussion? As a reader, are you satisfied with this ending?

Genesis 19:23-29: The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah	
19:23: As the sun rose upon the earth and Lot entered Zoar, **19:24:** the Eternal rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah sulfurous fire from the Eternal out of heaven. **19:25:** The Eternal annihilated those cities and the inhabitants of the cities and the vegetation of the ground. **19:26:** Lot's wife looked back, and she thereupon turned into a pillar of salt. **19:27:** Next morning, Abraham hurried to the place where he had stood before the Eternal, **19:28:** and, looking down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and all the land of the Plain, he saw the smoke of the land rising like the smoke of a kiln. **19:29:** Thus it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the Plain and annihilated the cities where Lot dwelt, God was mindful of Abraham and removed Lot from the midst of the upheaval.	**Gen. 19:23** הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ יָצָא עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְלוֹט בָּא צֹעַרָה׃ **Gen. 19:24** וַיהוָה הִמְטִיר עַל־סְדֹם וְעַל־עֲמֹרָה גָּפְרִית וָאֵשׁ מֵאֵת יְהוָה מִן־הַשָּׁמָיִם׃ **Gen. 19:25** וַיַּהֲפֹךְ אֶת־הֶעָרִים הָאֵל וְאֵת כָּל־הַכִּכָּר וְאֵת כָּל־יֹשְׁבֵי הֶעָרִים וְצֶמַח הָאֲדָמָה׃ **Gen. 19:26** וַתַּבֵּט אִשְׁתּוֹ מֵאַחֲרָיו וַתְּהִי נְצִיב מֶלַח׃ **Gen. 19:27** וַיַּשְׁכֵּם אַבְרָהָם בַּבֹּקֶר אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־עָמַד שָׁם אֶת־פְּנֵי יְהוָה׃ **Gen. 19:28** וַיַּשְׁקֵף עַל־פְּנֵי סְדֹם וַעֲמֹרָה וְעַל־כָּל־פְּנֵי אֶרֶץ הַכִּכָּר וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה עָלָה קִיטֹר הָאָרֶץ כְּקִיטֹר הַכִּבְשָׁן׃ **Gen. 19:29** וַיְהִי בְּשַׁחֵת אֱלֹהִים אֶת־עָרֵי הַכִּכָּר וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־אַבְרָהָם וַיְשַׁלַּח אֶת־לוֹט מִתּוֹךְ הַהֲפֵכָה בַּהֲפֹךְ אֶת־הֶעָרִים אֲשֶׁר־יָשַׁב בָּהֶן לוֹט׃

Discussion Questions:

- What happens to Sodom and Gomorrah? To Abraham?
- Does this change your opinion of the previous passage? In what ways?

Ezekiel 16:49-50: Recap of Sodom	
16:49: Only this was the sin of your sister Sodom: arrogance! She and her daughters had plenty of bread and untroubled tranquility; yet she did not support the poor and the needy. **16:50:** In their haughtiness, they committed abomination before Me; and so I removed them, as you saw.	**Ezek. 16:49** הִנֵּה־זֶה הָיָה עֲוֹן סְדֹם אֲחוֹתֵךְ גָּאוֹן שִׂבְעַת־לֶחֶם וְשַׁלְוַת הַשְׁקֵט הָיָה לָהּ וְלִבְנוֹתֶיהָ וְיַד־עָנִי וְאֶבְיוֹן לֹא הֶחֱזִיקָה׃ **Ezek. 16:50** וַתִּגְבְּהֶינָה וַתַּעֲשֶׂינָה תוֹעֵבָה לְפָנָי וָאָסִיר אֹתָהֶן כַּאֲשֶׁר רָאִיתִי׃

Discussion Questions:

- How does Ezekiel retell the story of Sodom?
- What message do you think Ezekiel is trying to convey here?

Rabbinic Texts:

Talmud Sanhedrin 109b: Bricks & Garlic	
When a bricklayer had set out a row of bricks, the inhabitants of Sodom would come and each of them help himself to a brick. When accused, each would say, "But I took only one." When a greengrocer spread out garlic or onions [to season them], the inhabitants of Sodom would come and each of them steal one; when accused, each would say "But I took only one."	דהוה ליה)תורא( ]דרא[דלבני אתי כל חד וחד שקל' חדא א"ל אנא חדא דשקלי דהוה שדי תומי או שמכי אתו כל חד וחד שקיל חדא א"ל אנא חדא דשקלי

Talmud Sandhedrin 109b: Beds for Guests	
In Sodom they had a bed on which wayfarers were made to lie. If a wayfarer was too long for the bed, they cut him down to fit it. If he was too short, they stretched his limbs until he filled it. When Eliezer came to Sodom and was told, "Come on up and lie down on this bed," he replied, "Since the day my mother died, I vowed never to lie down on a bed."	הויא להו פורייתא דהוו מגני עלה אורחין כי מאריך גייזי ליה כי גוץ מתחין ליה אליעזר עבד אברהם אקלע להתם אמרו ליה קום גני אפוריא אמר להון נדרא נדרי מן יומא דמיתת אמא לא גנינא אפוריא

Talmud 109b: The Poor in Sodom, Part 1	
When a poor man came to the land of Sodom, each Sodomite would give him a denar with the Sodomite's name inscribed on it, but not one of them would sell him a morsel of bread to eat. Eventually, when the poor man died of hunger, each Sodomite would come to claim his denar.	כי הוה מתרמי להו עניא יהבו ליה כל חד וחד דינרא וכתיב שמיה עליה וריפתא לא הוו ממטי ליה כי הוה מית אתי כל חד וחד שקיל דידיה

Talmud 109b: The Poor in Sodom, Part 2	
There was a maiden in Sodom who once brought a morsel of bread concealed in her pitcher to a poor man. When three days passed and the poor man did not die, the reason for his staying alive became clear. The Sodomites smeared the maiden with honey and placed her	הויא ההיא רביתא דהות קא מפקא ריפתא לעניא בחצבא איגלאי מלתא שפיוה דובשא ואוקמוה על איגר שורא אתא זיבורי ואכלוה ויאמר ה' (בראשית יח, כ) והיינו דכתיב זעקת סדום ועמורה כי רבה ואמר רב יהודה אמר רב על עיסקי ריבה

on a rooftop, so that the bees came and stung her to death. Of this maiden's anguish, Scripture says, "The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great" (Genesis 18:20)—the cry was so great because of what befell that maiden.	

Discussion Questions:

- How does the Talmud understand the sin of Sodom? How do these texts support or challenge the biblical texts we read earlier?
- Do these four vignettes share anything in common? What distinguishes them from each other?

Biblical Texts 2:

The Story of Jonah	
1:1: And the word of Adonai came up to Jonah son of Amittai: **1:2:** "Get up! Go to the great city of Nineveh, and proclaim against it—for their evil deeds have risen up before Me." **1:3:** But Jonah got up to flee to Tarshish—away from the presence of Adonai. And he went down to Jaffa and found there a ship heading for Tarshish, and he paid its fare and went down into it, to head with them to Tarshish—away from the presence of Adonai. [God sent a storm and the men of the ship throw Jonah overboard. Jonah is swallowed by a great fish that God sent. After three days, the fish spewed Jonah onto dry land.] **3:1:** And the word of Adonai came to Jonah a second time: **3:2:** "Get up! Go to the great city of Nineveh, and call out to it the proclamation that I will tell you." **3:3:** So Jonah got up and went to Nineveh according to word of Adonai.	**Jonah 1:1** וַ יְהִ֣י דְבַר־יְהוָ֔ה אֶל־יוֹנָ֖ה בֶּן־אֲמִתַּ֑י לאמֹֽר׃ **Jonah 1:2** קוּם֩ לֵ֨ךְ אֶל־נִינְוֵ֜ה הָעִ֤יר הַגְּדוֹלָה֙ וּקְרָ֣א עָלֶ֔יהָ כִּי־עָלְתָ֥ה רָעָתָ֖ם לְפָנָֽי׃ **Jonah 1:3** וַיָּ֤קָם יוֹנָה֙ לִבְרֹ֣חַ תַּרְשִׁישָׁ֔ה מִלִּפְנֵ֖י יְהוָ֑ה וַיֵּ֣רֶד יָפוֹ֔ וַיִּמְצָ֥א אָנִיָּ֖ה ׀ בָּ֣ ה תַרְשִׁישׁ֑ וַיִּתֵּ֣ן שְׂכָרָ֔הּ וַיֵּ֣רֶד בָּ֔הּ לָב֥וֹא עִמָּהֶ֖ם תַּרְשִׁישָׁ֑ה מִלִּפְנֵ֖י יְהוָֽה׃ **Jonah 3:1** וַיְהִ֣י דְבַר־יְהוָ֔ה אֶל־יוֹנָ֖ה שֵׁנִ֥ית לאמֹֽר׃ **Jonah 3:2** קוּם֩ לֵ֨ךְ אֶל־נִינְוֵ֜ה הָעִ֤יר הַגְּדוֹלָה֙ וּקְרָ֣א אֵלֶ֔יהָ אֶת־הַקְּרִיאָ֖ה אֲשֶׁ֥ר אָנֹכִ֛י דֹּבֵ֥ר אֵלֶ֖יךָ׃ **Jonah 3:3** וַיָּ֤קָם יוֹנָה֙ וַיֵּ֣לֶךְ אֶל־נִינְוֵ֔ה כִּדְבַ֖ר יְהוָ֑ה וְנִינְוֵ֗ה הָיְתָ֤ה עִיר־גְּדוֹלָה֙ לֵֽאלֹהִ֔ים מַהֲלַ֖ךְ שְׁלֹ֣שֶׁת יָמִֽים׃ **Jonah 3:4** וַיָּ֣חֶל יוֹנָ֔ה לָב֖וֹא בָּעִ֑יר מַהֲלַ֣ךְ יֹ֔ום וְנִינְוֵ֖ה אָ֥חָד וַיִּקְרָ֖א וַיֹּאמַ֑ר עֹ֚וד אַרְבָּעִ֣ים יֹ֔ום וְנִינְוֵ֖ה נֶהְפָּכֶֽת׃ **Jonah 3:5** וַיַּאֲמִ֣ינוּ אַנְשֵׁ֣י נִינְוֵ֔ה בֵּאלֹהִ֑ים וַיִּקְרְא֤וּ־צוֹם֙ וַיִּלְבְּשׁ֣וּ שַׂקִּ֔ים מִגְּדוֹלָ֖ם וְעַד־קְטַנָּֽם׃

Now Nineveh was a great city of God—three days' journey across. **3:4:** And Jonah started out and made his way into the city the distance of a one-day walk. And he called out and said: "Forty more days and Nineveh shall be overturned!" **3:5:** The people of Nineveh trusted in God, and they proclaimed a fast; and they put on the sackcloth, from the richest to the poorest. [The King of Nineveh heard about Jonah's proclamation and announced a nation-wide fast.] **3:8:** [The king of Nineveh said:] "Let all turn back from their evil ways and from the violence which is in their hands. **3:9:** Who knows? God may turn and relent—turn back from the heat of anger—so that we do not perish. **3:10:** God saw that they did—how they were turning back from their evil ways; and God relented from the evil planned for them, and did not carry it out. [Jonah became angry that God spared the city of Nineveh. God responded:] **4:11:** "Should I, then, not have compassion for the great city of Nineveh, a place of more than a hundred and twenty thousand human beings unable to tell their right hand from their left, and also many beasts?"	**Jonah 3:8** וְיִתְכַּסּוּ שַׂקִּים הָאָדָם וְהַבְּהֵמָה וְיִקְרְאוּ אֶל־אֱלֹהִים בְּחָזְקָה וְיָשֻׁבוּ אִישׁ מִדַּרְכּוֹ הָרָעָה וּמִן־הֶחָמָס אֲשֶׁר בְּכַפֵּיהֶם: **Jonah 3:9** מִי־יוֹדֵעַ יָשׁוּב וְנִחַם הָאֱלֹהִים וְשָׁב מֵחֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ וְלֹא נֹאבֵד: **Jonah 3:10** וַיַּרְא הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם כִּי־שָׁבוּ מִדַּרְכָּם הָרָעָה וַיִּנָּחֶם הָאֱלֹהִים עַל־הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר לַעֲשׂוֹת־לָהֶם וְלֹא עָשָׂה: **Jonah 4:11** וַאֲנִי לֹא אָחוּס עַל־נִינְוֵה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה אֲשֶׁר יֶשׁ־בָּהּ הַרְבֵּה מִשְׁתִּים־עֶשְׂרֵה רִבּוֹ אָדָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַע בֵּין־יְמִינוֹ לִשְׂמֹאלוֹ וּבְהֵמָה רַבָּה:

Discussion Questions:

- Who are the characters of this story? What is each of their role?
- Compare this story to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah.
    - How is God's anger expressed in each story?
    - How are the endings of the stories different? What are the ethical implications of these two endings?
- What is the effect of reading this story on Yom Kippur? (What would the effect of reading the story of Sodom and Gomorrah on Yom Kippur be?)

Unit 2: Anger
Lesson 2: Rachel's Anger at God

Enduring Understandings:

1. Biblical and rabbinic texts offer us a way to grapple with significant, deep emotional concerns.
2. The Bible is a dynamic text and we as readers are obligated to interpret it.
3. Emotions are a critically important part of Judaism and of the human experience.

Essential Questions:

1. Which biblical texts can help us understand the emotion of anger?
2. How do biblical texts elucidate the experience of God's anger at humans and humans' anger at God?
3. What do biblical texts teach us about ourselves and our experience of anger?

Required Materials:

- Copies of text sheet for every student
- Access to computers/tablets/phones for students to do their own research

Notes to Teacher:

This is the second lesson in the unit on anger. In this lesson, students will be asked to explore a midrash in which Rachel expresses extreme and profound anger at God. Like the previous lesson, we will focus on ways that Jewish texts understand and express the emotion of anger. Here, students will encounter a text that explicitly and poignantly records anger at God. This text, however, is a midrash (not a biblical text). This fact will be an important part of the conversation about the role of emotion in Jewish texts and using an ethic of reading to engage with our texts.

This lesson has three parts to it. Part 1: Introduction asks students to share something in the world that makes them righteously angry. The goal here is to help students access some of their own indignation at wrongs in the world. Part 2: Reading the Midrash requires students to read and discuss the midrash. Here, they will unpack the nuances of this text. Students will be able to recall our previous study of the biblical story of Rachel and Leah; that will help inform their study of this text (and hopefully boost their confidence that they are skilled and authoritative interpreters of Jewish text). Part 3: Modern Anger invites students to do their own research into individuals who have used anger to fuel their work.

Introductory Essay:

The main text of this lesson is from Eicha Rabbah, Petichta 24. This is a departure from previous lessons that always begin with texts from TaNaKh. However, the text from Eicha Rabbah, a midrash, is an explicit and poignant text that records the expression of anger.

Midrash, contrary to popular belief, is *not* a commentary on a text, nor is it an explanation of a text's meaning. Midrashim are highly political, and often polemical, texts. Midrashim are an opportunity for the rabbis to convey their ideology about all kinds of ideas. Through reading midrashim, we gain access to the way that the rabbis thought about different ideas and values. Just as we have investigated the role of the author(s) and redactors of the Torah and their possible ideologies, we can and must investigate the ideologies of authors of midrashim.

In the case of this midrash, we see an extraordinary text that not only *allows* anger at God, but in fact celebrates it and the way that righteous anger can influence God. Anger at God may seem like a surprising topic to be recorded in our texts. However, there are actually a number of texts that explicitly record anger at God. The Book of Job and commentaries on it are full of expressions of anger specifically at God and theological questions about God's role in the universe. (The Book of Job is too large a document to study in one or even two sessions. If this lesson sparks particular interest, studying the Book of Job would be a fruitful next step to continue the conversation.)

In the midrash included in this lesson, Rachel rails at God. She explains that when she learned that her father Laban was going to have Leah marry Jacob in her place, she and Jacob established a 'secret code' so that Jacob could distinguish between Rachel and Leah. However, after considering her own sister's potential shame and disgrace, Rachel taught Leah the secret code. Rachel uses the experience of not being jealous of her "rival wife" as an analogy for how God is treating Israel in light of their embrace of idolatry (the supposed reason for the exile from the Land of Israel and the subject of the Book of Lamentations). In this midrash, Rachel's anger ultimately moves God, and the author of this midrash concludes the text by having God recite words from Jeremiah that promises a future in which the Israelites will return to their land.

An important piece of context for reading this midrash: this text is dealing with the historical event of Jerusalem's catastrophic destruction. For the authors of this midrash, the destruction of Israel is the most important and salient historical event of their lifetimes. In this midrash, Rachel uses her own situation (of having kindness and compassion for her sister) to express anger that God cannot seem to muster that same kind of kindness and compassion for God's people. This is a radical and chutzpadik idea to express! That Jews can express anger, even outrage, at God in the wake of Jerusalem's destruction, we too can (and perhaps should) express our own anger at God when the situation calls for it. This midrash gives us *permission* to be angry at God.

What is the function of this text and how does our reading strategy help us unpack it? One function of this text is to show how righteous anger is expressed. Another function of the text is to demonstrate how righteous anger can move those in a position of power to act differently. The author of this text believes in a God who is influenced by and sympathetic to the cries of God's people. During a time of exile and upheaval, this may have brought great comfort to the Jewish people. Our strategy of using an ethic of reading allows us to see *how* anger *functions* in a rabbinic text. Anger here functions as fuel. This

midrash also demonstrates that anger directed at God—in this case, for allowing the Israelites to be exiled from the Land of Israel—is acceptable and recognized. From this, we can extrapolate that anger we might feel at God today is also acceptable and should be recognized. This may be a radical concept for students to explore and forms the heart of this lesson.

Lesson Plan:

Part 1: Introduction

Ask students to share something that makes them righteously angry about the world today. Ask them to describe the feeling of righteous anger as best they can—what does it feel like in their body? Their soul?

Part 2: Reading the Midrash

Read the text together. Use the discussion questions to guide the conversation. Be sure to remind students that they have read and analyzed the biblical story of Rachel and Leah.

Part 3: Modern Anger

Ask students to recall the introductory question about something that makes them righteously angry. Ask them how their response to that question feels in light of examining this midrash.

Ask: have you ever experienced a time when you were angry when you were told you were not supposed to be angry? Discuss the implications of being told that your anger is not justified or not worthy. Connect this to the midrash—in what ways does this rabbinic text celebrate the emotion of anger and outrage?

Move students towards thinking about modern expressions of anger. Ask them to use their phones/tablets/computers (see required materials above) to research modern-day people and organizations who use anger as part of their rhetoric effectively. Some initial suggestions include:

People:

- Martin Luther King Jr.
- Joachim Prinz
- Greta Thunberg
- Tarana Burke

Organizations:

- March for Our Lives
- Equal Justice Initiative

Have students report on their findings based on their research.

Eicha Rabba, Petichta 24: **Rachel's Anger**	
At that moment, Rachel our Matriarch jumped forward before the Holy One, Blessed be God, and said: "Master of the Universe! It is known before You that Your servant Jacob's love for me knew no bounds, and he worked for my father for seven years for me. When those seven years were completed and the time came for my marriage to my husband, my father advised exchanging me with my sister. This was exceedingly difficult for me, when I learned of this counsel. I informed Jacob, and I gave him a sign so that he could distinguish between me and my sister, so that my father would not be able to exchange me. After that I consoled myself, I suffered [to overcome] my desire and had compassion for my sister that she not suffer disgrace, and I gave her all the signs that I had given to my husband, so that he would think that she was Rachel. I acted kindly with her, I was not jealous of her, and I did not cause her to be shamed and disgraced. What am I, flesh and blood, dust and ashes, that I was not jealous of my rival wife, and that I did not allow her to be shamed and disgraced, but You, Merciful Living and Eternal King, why were You jealous of idolatry that is of no import, and exiled my children who were slain by the sword, and allowed their enemies to do with them as they pleased?" God's mercy was immediately revealed, and God said: "For your sake, Rachel, I shall return Israel to their place—for there is a reward for your labor […]. And there is hope for your future—declares the Lord: Your children shall return to their country" (Jeremiah 31:16-18).	בְּאוֹתָהּ שָׁעָה קָפְצָה רָחֵל אִמֵּנוּ לִפְנֵי הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא וְאָמְרָה רִבּוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, גָּלוּי לְפָנֶיךָ שֶׁיַּעֲקֹב עַבְדְּךָ אֲהָבָה יְתֵרָה וְעָבַד בִּשְׁבִילִי לְאַבָּא שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים, וּכְשֶׁהִשְׁלִימוּ אוֹתָן שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים וְהִגִּיעַ זְמַן נִשּׂוּאַי לְבַעְלִי, יָעַץ אָבִי לְהַחֲלִיפֵנִי לְבַעְלִי בִּשְׁבִיל אֲחוֹתִי, וְהֶקְשָׁה עָלַי הַדָּבָר עַד מְאֹד כִּי נוֹדְעָה לִי הָעֵצָה, וְהוֹדַעְתִּי לְבַעְלִי וּמָסַרְתִּי לוֹ סִימָן שֶׁיַּכִּיר בֵּינִי וּבֵין אֲחוֹתִי כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹּא יוּכַל אָבִי לְהַחֲלִיפֵנִי, וּלְאַחַר כֵּן נִחַמְתִּי בְּעַצְמִי וְסָבַלְתִּי אֶת תַּאֲוָתִי וְרִחַמְתִּי עַל אֲחוֹתִי שֶׁלֹּא תֵצֵא לְחֶרְפָּה, וְלָעֶרֶב חִלְּפוּ אֲחוֹתִי לְבַעְלִי בִּשְׁבִילִי, וּמָסַרְתִּי לַאֲחוֹתִי כָּל הַסִּימָנִין שֶׁמָּסַרְתִּי לְבַעְלִי, כְּדֵי שֶׁיְּהֵא סָבוּר שֶׁהִיא רָחֵל. וְלֹא עוֹד אֶלָּא שֶׁנִּכְנַסְתִּי תַּחַת הַמִּטָּה שֶׁהָיָה שׁוֹכֵב עִם אֲחוֹתִי וְהָיָה מְדַבֵּר עִמָּהּ וְהִיא שׁוֹתֶקֶת וַאֲנִי מְשִׂיחָתוֹ עַל כָּל דָּבָר וְדָבָר, כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹּא יַכִּיר לְקוֹל אֲחוֹתִי וְגָמַלְתִּי חֶסֶד עִמָּהּ, וְלֹא קִנֵּאתִי בָּהּ וְלֹא הוֹצֵאתִיהָ לְחֶרְפָּה. וּמָה אֲנִי שְׂאֲנִי בָּשָׂר וָדָם עָפָר וָאֵפֶר לֹא קִנֵּאתִי לַצָּרָה שֶׁלִּי וְלֹא הוֹצֵאתִיהָ לְבוּשָׁה וּלְחֶרְפָּה, וְאַתָּה מֶלֶךְ חַי וְקַיָּם, רַחֲמָן, מִפְּנֵי מָה קִנֵּאתָ לַעֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים שֶׁאֵין בָּהּ מַמָּשׁ, וְהִגְלִיתָ בָּנַי וְנֶהֶרְגוּ בַּחֶרֶב וְעָשׂוּ אוֹיְבִים בָּם כִּרְצוֹנָם. מִיָּד נִתְגַּלְגְּלוּ רַחֲמָיו שֶׁל הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא וְאָמַר, בִּשְׁבִילְךָ רָחֵל אֲנִי מַחֲזִיר אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל לִמְקוֹמָן, הֲדָא הוּא דִכְתִיב כֹּה אָמַר ה' קוֹל בְּרָמָה נִשְׁמָע (ירמיה לא, טו) נְהִי בְּכִי: תַּמְרוּרִים רָחֵל מְבַכָּה עַל בָּנֶיהָ מְאֲנָה ירמיה לא,) לְהִנָּחֵם עַל בָּנֶיהָ כִּי אֵינֶנּוּ. וּכְתִיב כֹּה אָמַר ה' מָנְעִי: קוֹלֵךְ מִבֶּכִי וְעֵינַיִךְ (טז מִדְּמָעָה כִּי יֵשׁ שָׂכָר לִפְעֻלָּתֵךְ וגו', וּכְתִיב וְיֵשׁ תִּקְוָה לְאַחֲרִיתֵךְ נְאֻם ה': (ירמיה לא, יז) .וְשָׁבוּ בָנִים לִגְבוּלָם

Discussion Questions:

- Describe the tone of Rachel's speech. How does it make you feel to hear this?
- What is the role of anger in this text? What are the ethical implications of anger here?
- How would you describe God's reaction? What can we learn about the ideology or intent of the author of this text from that?
- In what ways does Rachel's speech move or influence God?

Unit 2: Anger
Lesson 3: Prophetic Anger

Enduring Understandings:

1. Biblical and rabbinic texts offer us a way to grapple with significant, deep emotional concerns.
2. The Bible is a dynamic text and we as readers are obligated to interpret it.
3. Emotions are a critically important part of Judaism and of the human experience.

Essential Questions:

1. Which biblical texts can help us understand the emotion of anger?
2. How do biblical texts elucidate the experience of God's anger at humans and humans' anger at God?
3. What do biblical texts teach us about ourselves and our experience of anger?

Required Materials:

- Copies of text sheet for every student

Notes to Teacher:

This is the third lesson of the unit on anger and the last lesson of the curriculum. In this session, students will be asked to apply the reading strategy of a Jewish ethic of reading to verses from Isaiah. These verses, Isaiah 58:1-14, are traditionally read on Yom Kippur. After analyzing the text, students will be asked to think about how and why this text is used in our liturgy. Additionally, students will be asked to imagine/re-imagine what interacting with this text on Yom Kippur could look like. The goal here is to underscore and *feel* that the text affects us.

There are four parts to this lesson. This lesson begins by providing some text and context for the role of the prophet. If your students have previously studied prophets/prophetic literature, you may be able to skip this section and provide a small recap. However, if students are not deeply familiar with prophetic literature, then this part of the lesson will help given them the necessary context to continue on to Part 3: Reading Isaiah with confidence. Part 4: High Holiday Discussion seeks to open up a conversation about how our texts are used within our liturgy and how those texts affect us. Students will be asked to think about how an entire community/congregation can and should interact with this text on one of our holiest days. In addition to using the reading strategy that we have been developing throughout this curriculum, asking students to reimagine how a text is used by a community shows that teens are respected members of their community and they are empowered to be leaders of that community.

Introductory Essay:

Let's begin by talking about the role of the prophet. The first text, the excerpt from Heschel, provides a short overview of how he conceptualizes the role of the prophet in Israelite society. A prophet is often a lonely character, one whose prophetic insights do not earn him a lot of friends and often leave him isolated from the rest of society. Part of the prophet's role is to speak Divine Truth to the ordinary citizens of Israelite society. Often, the prophet seeks to encourage the populace to turn aside from their sinful, corrupt, dangerous ways and towards righteous and upright behavior. Righteous and upright behavior almost always includes caring for the most vulnerable (which, in the case of Israelite society, were the orphan, the widow, and the stranger). This context is important for looking at the fourteen verses from Isaiah: students should understand how the role of the prophet functioned in society before analyzing the text.

The text from Isaiah 58:1-14 is one of the texts that we read on Yom Kippur. This is important context because of the role of fasting in this text. Isaiah castigates the people for making a performance out of their fasting while the most vulnerable in society are oppressed. Isaiah, in channeling God's voice, asks if "this is the fast I desire?" The answer is a resounding, "No." God does not desire a fast among God's people that does not also take into consideration those in society who are still vulnerable and still oppressed. Fasting should, according to Isaiah, make us feel more connected to as well as empathetic with the hungry and the downtrodden. If fasting does not do this, as Isaiah is seeing among his society, then God will not pay any heed to the prayers of those who are fasting.

These fourteen verses provide both a condemnation of the current behavior of the Israelites (that they are fasting without actually making any systemic changes in society), as well as a blueprint for how they might move forward. We must bring our ethic of reading to both pieces of this text.

How does Isaiah use anger? Isaiah fulfills the role of the prophet that Heschel describes for us in the excerpt from *The Prophets*. He sees injustice in his society and uses holy rage as a motivating factor in speaking out against the status quo. Like many prophets, Isaiah stands alone to condemn the callousness of his society. What are the ethical implications of Isaiah's anger? In what ways does Isaiah's anger help him convey his message? Investigating these questions is central to understand how and why prophetic anger functions in biblical texts and in our world today.

Selecting this passage to read on Yom Kippur is a choice. There are hundreds of prophetic texts that we could choose from, but this is the passage in our Machzor. This text will affect us as readers, listeners, and prayers. Reading this text is not a neutral act. Reading Isaiah 58:1-14 without subsequently moved to act to correct injustices in our society means that we have not been deeply affected by our traditions sacred words. Ultimately, students should see and feel how all texts, not just this one, affect us. All texts are opportunities to be moved.

Lesson Plan:

Part 1: Introduction

Ask students to think about someone, present or past, who speaks the truth but is widely ignored. Ask them to share that person's message and how that person is perceived in the world.

Part 2: Role of the Prophet

Read the excerpt from Heschel. Use the discussion questions to guide the conversation. Be sure that students have a firm grasp on the role of a prophet in society before moving on to explore Isaiah 58:1-14.

Part 3: Reading Isaiah

Read the text from Isaiah. Be sure to provide the context that this is a text we read on Yom Kippur, a day on which we fast. Use the discussion questions to guide the conversation. Ask students to highlight the ways Isaiah uses anger to convey his message. Look at the commentary from Mishkan HaNefesh as well to enhance your discussion of this text.

Part 4: High Holiday Discussion

Open the conversation up to talk about how we as a community observe the High Holidays and Yom Kippur in particular. Invite teens to imagine/re-imagine how they would want their community to read and interact with this text on Yom Kippur. Use these questions to prompt conversation:

1. What is the goal of reading this text on Yom Kippur?
2. How do you want people to feel/what do you want people to know after reading this text?
3. What mediums could we use to interact with this text besides reading/chanting?
4. What message/feeling do we want people to leave Yom Kippur services with?

These questions can help uncover some of the goals of this piece of Yom Kippur liturgy.

Students can work in small groups to brainstorm and workshop their ideas. Encourage students to be expansive in their imagining. What would it look like if they wrote a play based on their study? Could they write a song? Who would they want to invite to speak to the community to illustrate the ideas of Isaiah 58? What if Isaiah 58:1-14 was read line by line, but interspersed with the text of Martin Luther King Jr., William Barber III, or Valarie Kaur? As hard as it might be

to reimagine our Yom Kippur worship experience, invite teens to 'dream big' about what could be possible here. Encourage them to think about using what they have learned about an ethic of reading to influence their planning.

If possible, invite interested students to continuing working on this idea and implement it for your community during your Yom Kippur celebrations.

Alternative Plan:

Studying this text, rather than merely reading it, is another way that a community could engage with Isaiah 58:1-14 on Yom Kippur. Using the same lesson plan as above, modify the parts slightly for a larger group and ask people to reflect on the ethical implications of reading this text on the actual day of Yom Kippur. Perhaps this could be a catalyst for a conversation about what future readings/engagement with this text could look like on observances of Yom Kippur of the future.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel
***The Prophets,*[24]**

Above all, the prophets remind us of the moral state of a people: Few are guilty, but all are responsible. If we admit that the individual is in some measure conditioned or affected by the spirit of society, an individual's crime discloses society's corruption. In a community not indifferent to suffering, uncompromisingly impatient with cruelty and falsehood, continually concerned for God and every man, crime would be infrequent rather than common.

To a person endowed with prophetic sight, everyone else appears blind; to a person whose ear perceives God's voice, everyone else appears deaf. No one is just; no knowing is strong enough, no trust complete enough. The prophet hates the approximate, he shuns the middle of the road. Man must live on the summit to avoid the abyss. There is nothing to hold except God. Carried away by the challenger, the demand to straighten out man's ways, the prophet is strange, one-sided, an unbearable extremist.

Others may suffer from the terror of cosmic aloneness; the prophet is overwhelmed by the grandeur of divine presence. He is incapable of isolating the world. There is an interaction between man and God which to disregard is an act of insolence. Isolation is a fairy tale.

Where an idea is the father of faith, faith must conform to the ideas of the given system. In the Bible the realness of God came first, and the task was how to live in a way compatible with His presence. Man's coexistence with God determines the course of history.

The prophet disdains those for whom God's presence is comfort and security; to him it is a challenge, an incessant demand. God is compassion, not compromise; justice, though not inclemency. The prophet's predictions can always be proved wrong by a change in man's conduct, but never the certainty that God is full of compassion.

Discussion Questions:

- According to Heschel, what is the role of the prophet?
- Based on this description, what would you expect to find in prophetic writings (such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, etc.)?

[24] Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 19.

Isaiah 58:1-14:
Prophetic Anger

Is. 58:1 קְרָא בְגָרוֹן אַל־תַּחְשֹׂךְ כַּשּׁוֹפָר הָרֵם
קוֹלֶךָ וְהַגֵּד לְעַמִּי פִּשְׁעָם וּלְבֵית יַעֲקֹב חַטֹּאתָם:
Is. 58:2 וְאוֹתִי יוֹם יוֹם יִדְרֹשׁוּן וְדַעַת דְּרָכַי
יֶחְפָּצוּן כְּגוֹי אֲשֶׁר־צְדָקָה עָשָׂה וּמִשְׁפַּט אֱלֹהָיו
לֹא עָזָב יִשְׁאָלוּנִי מִשְׁפְּטֵי־צֶדֶק קִרְבַת אֱלֹהִים
יֶחְפָּצוּן:
Is. 58:3 לָמָּה צַמְנוּ וְלֹא רָאִיתָ עִנִּינוּ נַפְשֵׁנוּ וְלֹא
תֵדָע הֶן בְּיוֹם צֹמְכֶם תִּמְצְאוּ־חֵפֶץ וְכָל־עַצְּבִיכֶם
תִּנְגֹּשׂוּ:
Is. 58:4 הֶן לְרִיב וּמַצָּה תָּצוּמוּ וּלְהַכּוֹת בְּאֶגְרֹף
רֶשַׁע לֹא־תָצוּמוּ כַיּוֹם לְהַשְׁמִיעַ בַּמָּרוֹם קוֹלְכֶם:
Is. 58:5 הֲכָזֶה יִהְיֶה צ֫וֹם אֶבְחָרֵהוּ יוֹם עַנּוֹת
אָדָם נַפְשׁוֹ הֲלָכֹף כְּאַגְמֹן רֹאשׁוֹ וְשַׂק וָאֵפֶר יַצִּיעַ
הֲלָזֶה תִּקְרָא־צ֫וֹם וְיוֹם רָצוֹן לַיהוָה:
Is. 58:6 הֲלוֹא זֶה֫ צ֫וֹם אֶבְחָרֵהוּ פַּתֹּחַ חַרְצֻבּוֹת
רֶשַׁע הַתֵּר אֲגֻדּוֹת מוֹטָה וְשַׁלַּח רְצוּצִים חָפְשִׁים
וְכָל־מוֹטָה תְּנַתֵּקוּ:
Is. 58:7 הֲלוֹא פָרֹס לָרָעֵב לַחְמֶךָ וַעֲנִיִּים
מְרוּדִים תָּבִיא בָּיִת כִּי־תִרְאֶה עָרֹם וְכִסִּיתוֹ
וּמִבְּשָׂרְךָ לֹא תִתְעַלָּם:
Is. 58:8 ׳ז יִבָּקַע כַּשַּׁחַר אוֹרֶךָ וַאֲרֻכָתְךָ מְהֵרָה
תִצְמָח וְהָלַךְ לְפָנֶיךָ צִדְקֶךָ כְּבוֹד יְהוָה יַאַסְפֶךָ:
Is. 58:9 ׳ז תִּקְרָא וַיהוָה יַעֲנֶה תְּשַׁוַּע וְיֹאמַר
הִנֵּנִי אִם־תָּסִיר מִתּוֹכְךָ מוֹטָה שִׁלַּח אֶצְבַּע וְדַבֶּר־
אָוֶן:
Is. 58:10 וְתָפֵק לָרָעֵב נַפְשֶׁךָ וְנֶפֶשׁ נַעֲנָה
תַּשְׂבִּיעַ וְזָרַח בַּחֹשֶׁךְ אוֹרֶךָ וַאֲפֵלָתְךָ כַּצָּהֳרָיִם:
Is. 58:11 וְנָחֲךָ יְהוָה֫ תָּמִיד וְהִשְׂבִּיעַ בְּצַחְצָחוֹת
נַפְשֶׁךָ וְעַצְמֹתֶיךָ יַחֲלִיץ וְהָיִיתָ כְּגַן רָוֶה וּכְמוֹצָא
מַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יְכַזְּבוּ מֵימָיו:
Is. 58:12 וּבָנוּ מִמְּךָ חָרְבוֹת עוֹלָם מוֹסְדֵי דוֹר־
וָדוֹר תְּקוֹמֵם וְקֹרָא לְךָ גֹּדֵר פֶּרֶץ מְשֹׁבֵב נְתִיבוֹת
לָשָׁבֶת:
Is. 58:13 אִם־תָּשִׁיב מִשַּׁבָּת רַגְלֶךָ עֲשׂוֹת חֲפָצֶיךָ
בְּיוֹם קָדְשִׁי וְקָרָאתָ לַשַּׁבָּת עֹנֶג לִקְדוֹשׁ יְהוָה
מְכֻבָּד וְכִבַּדְתּוֹ מֵעֲשׂוֹת דְּרָכֶיךָ מִמְּצוֹא חֶפְצְךָ
וְדַבֵּר דָּבָר:

58:1: Cry from the depth, says God—do not hold back, lift up your voice like the shofar! Tell My people their transgression, and the House of Jacob their sin.
58:2: Yes, they seek Me daily, as though eager to learn My ways—as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not abandoned God's law. They ask of Me the right way, eager for God's nearness:
58:3: They said, "Why did we fast, and You do not know it?" Because even on your fast day you think only of desire, while oppressing all who work for you.
58:4: Because your fasting is filled with strife, and with callous fist you strike. No, your fasting this day will not lift up your voice before heaven.
58:5: Is this the fast I desire? A day to afflict body and soul? Bowing your head like a reed, covering yourself with sackcloth and ashes? Do you call this a fast—a day worthy of the favor of Adonai?
58:6: Is not this the fast I desire—to break bonds of injustice and remove the heavy yoke; to let the oppressed go free and release all those enslaved?
58:7: Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and to take the homeless poor into your home, and never neglect your own flesh and blood?
58:8: Then shall your light burst forth like the dawn, and your wounds shall quickly heal, your Righteous One leading the way before you, the Presence of Adonai guarding you from behind.
58:9: Then, when you call, Adonai will answer, and, when you cry, will respond, "I am here." If you remove the chains of oppression, the menacing hand, the malicious word;

58:10: if you offer your compassion to the hungry and satisfy the suffering— then shall your light shine through the darkness, and your night become bright as noon; **58:11:** Adonai will guide you always, slake your thirst in parched places, give strength to your bones. You shall be like a well-watered garden, an unfailing spring. **58:12:** From you they will rebuild ancient ruins, lay foundations for ages to come. And you shall be called "the one who mends the breach and brings back the streets for dwelling." **58:13:** If you cease to trample Shabbat, stop pursuing your affairs on My holy day; if you call Shabbat "a delight," the holy day of Adonai "honored"; and if you honor God by not doing business or speaking of everyday matters— **58:14:** then shall you take pure delight in Adonai. I will lift up your journey on earth to the highest of places, and nourish you from the heritage of your father Jacob. For thus spoke Adonai!	**Is. 58:14** ׀ז תִּתְעַנַּג עַל־יְהוָה וְהִרְכַּבְתִּיךָ עַל־ בָּמֳתֵי אָרֶץ וְהַאֲכַלְתִּיךָ נַחֲלַת יַעֲקֹב אָבִיךָ כִּי פִּי יְהוָה דִּבֵּר׃

Discussion Questions:

- What is the main message of this text? How does Isaiah convey that message?
- How does this text use anger and rage?
- What are the ethical implications of Isaiah's speech?
- Why do you think we read this text on Yom Kippur?

Commentary **Mishkan HaNefesh, Yom Kippur[25]**
Isaiah is called by God to address the people with a powerful sermon that will resound throughout the community, as the ram's horn summoned ancient Israel to battle or sacred assembly. His words are intended to be as discordant as a shofar blast, shattering complacency and disrupting the normal ceremonies of the holy day. The prophet notes, ironically, that God pays no heed to the people's ritual acts of fasting and prostration; their hypocritical displays of piety fall, as it were, on deaf ears. Only if these rituals are accompanied by humility, generosity, and care for the needy will God "hear" the worshipers and attend to their call. Thus, the entire passage plays on the theme of crying out and lifting up the voice. How does one effectively communicate with the Holy One? God, it seems, understands and responds to the language of compassion.

Discussion Questions:

- What is hypocrisy? How do you recognize it when you see it?
- How does this commentary understand Isaiah's message and how he delivers it?
- What does 'language of compassion' mean to you?

[25] Rabbi Edwin Goldberg et al., eds., *Mishkan HaNefesh: Machzor for the Days of Awe, Yom Kippur* (New York: CCAR Press, 2015), 276.