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FIRE AMIDST THE HAIL:
RABBINIC AUDACITY AND JEWISH AUTHENTICITY

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Dr. Rachel Adler, advisor

A thesis in partial fulfillment of requirements for rabbinic ordination at
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

Contents

INTRODUCTION

Rabbinic Dialectics: Fire Amidst the Hail

> *There was hail, and fire blazing inside the hail.*
> Exodus 9:24

How can two opposing forces occupy the same space? This is the question posed by Plato's doctrine of opposites, which then answers: They cannot. The same answer appears in Hegel's dialectic of Absolute Spirit, which demands that there must be an overcoming of contradictions. For Hegel, such continuous synthesizing of opposites is identified with the emergence of Reason into history and its relentless movement toward the totalization of reality, the ultimate triumph of a singular truth. Rabbinic literature resists such obliteration of opposing thoughts. The discourse of the Talmud in particular is driven not so much by a desire for resolution of conflict but by an exploitation of ambiguities in order to expand our capacities for judgment. The Gemara preserves conflicting opinions not merely to respect minority views but out of an abhorrence of the finality that is dogma. Possibilities not presently adopted are preserved for future consideration. What is not true today may prevail tomorrow. This engendering of perspectival refractions reflects, paradoxically, God's Oneness, for: "the multiple stances of the scholars would constitute...[the] very life [of the unity of the Revelation], all of them being the 'words of the living God.'"[1] For Emmanuel Levinas, pluralism is a human reflection of Divine unity. Rabbinic

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[1] Emmanuel Levinas, *Beyond the Verse*, trans. Gary D. Mole (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) 101.

discourse insists that life is more meaningful when paradox is embraced rather than negated.

This sense of paradox informs a model of authenticity that contrasts with the view that a culture's genuineness resides in settled symbolic meanings which are transmitted unmutated. Rabbinic vision constantly reanimates words in a text, causing them to move around into new formulations. Rabbinic scriptural interpretation classically begins with the phrase that the exegete "opened" ("patah"), which is followed by a Biblical verse. This signifies more than the beginning of the exegete's speaking. It is the opening up of the verse, a conveyance of familiarity, to new meaning. The Rabbinic imagination is not in the service of summation but exploration. What is transmitted is the ever-renewed passion to search, to open up the familiar. As Levinas writes, "A true culture cannot be summarized, for it resides in the very effort that cultivates it."[2] From this perspective authenticity reflects a continual interpretive process that embodies both continuity and discontinuity. It is an enterprise that requires both a movement into the past and a movement into the future, the discipline of law and leaps of imagination, a submission to and a subversion of tradition. It requires fire amidst the hail.

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[2] Emmanuel Levinas, "Comment le judaisme est-il possible?" *Difficile liberte* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1963) 277; as cited in Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) xv.

Beginnings

Though I did not know it at the time, the impetus for this thesis was sown some ten years ago. I was actively involved in Jewish communal affairs, including service on my local Jewish Federation's leadership development and allocation committees and on my congregation's board of trustees. The item that then dominated agendas across the Jewish community was concern about "Jewish continuity." By this term most policy makers meant the rate of intermarriage, a sociological phenomenon highlighted by the recent national Jewish population survey. Yet, the phrase "Jewish continuity" so captured contemporary Jewish conversation as to affect more generally how one understood the development of Judaism. It reinforced a linear model of Judaism and Jewish identity. About such a model Stuart Charme has written:

> Linear models of Jewish identity that focus primarily
> on its atrophy and decline can sometimes slip into
> nostalgia about past periods that were problematic
> in their own right.[3]

However, at the time, I had no theoretical framework by which to critique this communal discussion. All I had was an unease that this emphasis on "Jewish continuity" was misdirected and not helpful.

During the same period I encountered in my congregational life a dissonance between the Judaism that members practiced and that which they characterized as "authentic." By the latter, congregants meant a form of Judaism that could be traced

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[3] Stuart Charme, "The Varieties of Modern and Postmodern Jewish Identity," *Religious Studies Review* 22 (July 1996): 222.

back several hundred, if not a couple thousand, years and that had remained relatively unchanged in its essence. While not apologizing for their choice of a more "modern" form of Judaism, these congregants often acknowledged that others, especially the Ultra-Orthodox, practiced a more authentic Judaism. This perspective seemed related to the concept of "Jewish continuity." Both reflected the idea that there was an essential Judaism which could be identified across time. Those who had chosen to observe this essence were seen as preservers of authenticity. Again, I found myself instinctually opposed to this definition but without the theoretical tools for an articulate response.

During my studies at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, to formulate a coherent challenge to the linear and essentialist conceptions of Jewish continuity and authenticity I turned to a variety of disciplines: anthropology, sociology, historiography, philosophy, and literary criticism. I then returned to my reading of Rabbinic literature and discovered a non-linear and non-essentialist model of Judaism that had been waiting for me all along.

Discontinuous Growth and Authenticity

Until recently the dominant paradigm in the study of cultural identity assumed that one could identify an unbroken chain of rituals, values and perspectives that constituted a core heritage for any particular people. Such a continuity across generations represented that culture's authentic tradition. The role of the anthropologist was to distinguish genuine from false cultural elements. This was the

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natural sciences paradigm. With the rising influence of the sociology of knowledge, anthropologists questioned whether it was possible to conduct such an objective study. The concept of identifiable essential characteristics was undermined by the notion that norms which elevate or denigrate cultural experiences are also culturally constructed. In place of the objective naturalistic paradigm, recent anthropologists have adopted a constructivist paradigm. This model assumes that tradition refers to an interpretive process that embodies both continuity and discontinuity. People are constantly in the process of recreating their tradition, and the notion of a cultural essence reflects more the ontology of the observer than the life of the observed. In Chapter One I review this field of constructivist anthropology and its significance for the study of authenticity.

Constructivist anthropologists suggest that the boundary between past and present in the creation of a group's cultural identity is more porous than previously thought. This perspective finds an analogue in the historiography of Eric Hobsbawm and others. These historians have written a series of works on the invention of tradition, in which they argue that many traditions which present themselves as rooted in an ancient past are in fact quite recent in origin. Chapter Two explores the work of these historians, including applications by three Jewish scholars. Also in Chapter Two I examine the work of Maurice Halbwachs on the related field of collective memory. Halbwachs argues that collective memory is a socially constructed mechanism, the main purpose of which is not the retrieval of the past but its reconfiguration in the service of the present. This dynamic of projecting

contemporary notions into the past is particularly useful when considering how the Rabbis used the past both to portray their continuity with it and to infuse it with their radically new perspectives.

The reconstruction of the past involves both remembrance and forgetfulness. Both creatively shape memory. By acknowledging the role of forgetfulness in this enterprise we affirm that cultural identity consists of both continuous flows and discontinuous eruptions. The construction of tradition is elliptical. Chapter Three examines the third generation tanna Rabbi Eleazar Ben Arach, whom the Talmud celebrates as one of the most creative Rabbinic expositors. Yet, he is most famously remembered for having forgotten matters of Torah. His story allows for reflection on the relationship between rejuvenation of the present and obliteration of the past. It also offers some insight into the value the Rabbis placed on the role of an interpretive community and the judgment they imposed on those who chose to create outside of it.

In the course of interpreting Scripture and shaping a mythology and a praxis responsive to a community destabilized by social, political and religious crises, the Rabbis produced a rich body of literature. Some of it, midrash, is an audacious and imaginative departure from the literalism of the Scriptural text. It bursts open simplistic thought, shakes up the tranquility of a single and linear truth. Other forms, the halachic texts, seek to establish the continuity between Rabbinic prescriptions and Scripture. The literary critic Harold Bloom provides us with a model by which to examine how some writers lay claim to a textual tradition by creatively reconstructing

it. These "strong poets" appropriate precursor texts and restate them in such a way as to allow their own works to be seen as extensions of those traditions while covertly manipulating how such traditions are now to be read. Chapter Four examines Bloom's model. Chapter Five applies this model to two Talmudic texts, exercises of Rabbinic audacity in reshaping the past in order to preserve it and to subtly assert their authority over that tradition.

This simultaneous embrace of both continuity and discontinuity also finds expression in the work of the twentieth century rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira. Born into a rich Hasidic tradition, Rabbi Shapira served as a rebbe in the Warsaw Ghetto where he taught, preached and tended to communal needs under extreme conditions until his death in a labor camp in 1943. Chapter Six examines a sermon Rabbi Shapira gave on Succot in 1930, in which he advocates that innovation is essential for the continuity of authenticity. His distinction between mere replication of tradition and innovative renewal of it anticipates Bloom's contrast between canonical and creative readings of received traditions. Such calls for rewriting risk what Susan Handelman identifies as "heretic hermeneutics:" the displacement of origins. Similarly, Shaul Magid has defined as a form of heresy an excursion into tradition which covertly expands and reconstructs traditional boundaries so as to make room for radical new concepts articulated in canonical discourse.[4] Rabbi Shapira insists that to achieve authenticity as a Jew, one must undertake such an

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[4] Shaul Magid, "Translating into Tradition: Subversion and Constructive Heresy in the Hebrew Writings of Reb Zalman," unpublished paper delivered at the Conference on the Hasidic Roots of Contemporary Jewish Spiritual Expression, New York, New York, March 28, 2003.

excursion, even at the risk that such boundaries may not be merely expanded but fractured.

Through the discourse they shaped the Rabbis yet call out to us, challenging us to renew our tradition as we meet our times with creativity and audacity. Their initial dialogic encounter with received tradition became known as the Mishnah, which literally means "to repeat." Yet, this work far from constituting a repetition of Torah combusts with the possibilities lying within scriptural verses, ignited by the demands of the interpreters' times and shaped by those interpreters into instruments of direction: "It is the Torah fed by its own flame through time."[5] This is our inheritance. How well we honor the challenge of the Rabbis may be the true measure of our Jewish authenticity.

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[5] Emmanuel Levinas, "Contempt for the Torah as Idolatry," *In the Time of the Nations*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) 66.

CHAPTER ONE: THE SEARCH FOR AUTHENTICITY

A Trip to Israel

In the winter of 1999-2000, approximately six thousand young Jewish adults from the United States and Canada journeyed free of charge to Israel for a ten-day educational experience. All of their travel and educational expenses were paid for by a partnership that included the Jewish Agency and federations, the government of Israel, and a consortium of private philanthropists. This program, Birthright Israel, emerged against the backdrop of anxiety about the continuation of Jewish identity and affiliation that the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey had generated. In reaction to the Survey's finding that 52% of Jews who had married within the previous five years had wed non-Jews, leaders of major Jewish communal institutions spoke of a threat to Jewish continuity. Jewish federations and other funding agencies realigned spending priorities to focus on outreach campaigns to alienated fringe members of the Jewish community. Birthright Israel was developed to provide an educational tour of an environment rich in the heritage of Judaism with the hope that this would enhance the Jewish identity of the participants.

From its inception, critics of the Birthright program charged that by its very nature tourism precluded an encounter with authentic Judaism. Many of these criticisms reflected the position articulated forty years previously by Daniel Boorstin on the tourism experience:

> Today what [the tourist] sees is seldom the living
> culture, but usually specimens collected and embalmed

especially for him, or attractions specifically staged
for him.[6]

For such critics, the tourist eye does not perceive life as it is actually lived but life in its edited version. Tourists journey not to live as indigenous members of a culture but to gaze with their preconceptions about that culture. Birthright Israel, according to its critics, would expose young Jews only to an artificial Judaism, the effects of which could be neither enduring nor meaningful. In his study of Birthright Israel, Shaul Kelner, a Research Associate with the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University, argues that it is precisely the encounter between a culture and a tourist who looks "not just at the thing, but to what it represents" which enabled the participants to have an authentic encounter with Judaism.[7]

A Constructivist Conception of Authenticity

Kelner refers to recent studies by sociologists of tourism who distinguish between objectivist and constructivist conceptions of authenticity.[8] The objectivist conception borrows the definition of authenticity developed in the context of museums, where curators are concerned with whether objects of art are what they are claimed to be. Authenticity, in this sense, is a quality inherent in the object. As applied to tourism, the objectivist's concern is with whether or not the sites, objects, and rituals experienced are genuine to that culture. As with works of art in museums, it is experts who are qualified to determine the authenticity of the tourist's encounters.

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[6] Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Vintage, 1961) 102.

[7] Shaul Kelner, "Authentic Sights and Authentic Narratives on *Taglit*," paper presented at the 33rd Annual Meeting of the Association for Jewish Studies, Washington, D.C., December 16, 2001, 6.

[8] See, for example, Ning Wang, "Rethinking Authenticity in Tourism Experience," *Annals of Tourism Research* 26.2 (1999): 349-70.

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The constructivist conception of authenticity, emergent from the sociology of knowledge,[9] stresses the intersubjective process in the construction of knowledge and reality. Sociologist Ning Wang identifies five basic characteristics of constructivism:

- There is no unique real world that preexists and is independent of human mental activity and human symbolic language.

- Reality is best seen as the results of versions of our interpretations and constructions.

- Reality is thus pluralistic and plastic.

- Multiple and plural meanings of and about identical phenomena can be constructed from different perspectives.

As applied to the issue of authenticity in the tourism context, Wang notes that the constructivist approach embraces the following principles:

➢ There is no absolute and static original or origin on which the absolute authenticity of originals relies.

➢ Our notions of origins are constructed to serve present needs.

➢ The construction of traditions or origins involves power. Rather than being a property inherent in an object or event and fixed forever in time, authenticity is the result of social contest.

➢ The experience of authenticity is pluralistic, a result of the encounter between the experience encountered by the tourist and the preconceptions and expectations he or she brings to it.

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[9] See, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Irvington, 1966).

> ➤ Phenomena initially defined as "inauthentic" may subsequently be redefined through the process of "emergent authenticity" over time.

Wang summarizes the constructivist approach as applied to tourism by stating that "tourists are indeed in search of authenticity; however, what they quest for is not objective authenticity (i.e., authenticity as originals) but *symbolic* authenticity which is the result of social construction."[10]

Kelner adopts the above principles in his study of Birthright Israel. In accordance with Wang's summary, Kelner states that "much of what one tours are notions and conceptions and feelings that already reside within the traveler him/herself."[11] What is important is not merely the "genuiness" of the article observed but the process of signification within the participant that is evoked by the encounter. In his review of Birthright Israel, Kelner found that the program expressly encouraged participants to relate what they experienced with their own knowledge of Judaism. As Kelner writes, "they fit [their encounters] into the stories that were most meaningful to themselves."[12] In the course of assessing their experiences in Israel, participants pieced together "selected elements of their own life histories." As a result, they "constructed personal narratives about their own Jewishness."[13]

This element of narrativity is fundamental to Heidegger's notion of existential authenticity. As noted by cultural anthropologists Richard Handler and William Saxton:

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[10] Wang, 356 (emphasis in the original).
[11] Kelner, 6.
[12] *Ibid.*, 7.
[13] *Ibid.*, 9.

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> Heideggerian authenticity, writ large, is life as a
> readable first person narrative, operationally read in
> the process of its composition, a life individuated in
> its authorship, integrated through its emplotment, and
> creative by dint of its invention.[14]

In this sense, authenticity no longer refers to the study of an object determined by an expert to be genuine but to the creative participation by the tourist as a subject within an ongoing story.

Authenticity as a Modern Concern

Contemporary sociologists and cultural anthropologists such as Kelner and Handler not only reject an objectivist conception of authenticity but also identify concern about authenticity as a uniquely modern one. Handler, Kelner and Wang all acknowledge the contribution of Lionel Trilling's cultural history of the concepts of sincerity and authenticity. In *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Trilling traces the earliest English usage of the term "sincerity" to the sixteenth century.[15] He identifies the emergence of the term with the collapse of the feudal order and the rise of modern individualism. With the decline of feudal social status as a means of self-definition, individuals turned to the congruence between one's outer position and one's inner self as a measurement of identity. Sincerity replaced fixed status as a means of clarifying and facilitating social relationships. With the development of more radical notions of individualism during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, "authenticity," which Trilling defines as one's inherent worth apart from any social relations, displaced

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[14] Richard Handler and William Saxton, "Dyssimulation: Reflexivity, Narrative, and the Quest for Authenticity in 'Living History'," *Cultural Anthropology* 3 (1988): 250.
[15] Trilling, Lionel, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971) 12.

sincerity as the measure of personal identity. In short, "authenticity is a cultural construct closely tied to Western notions of the individual."[16] Authenticity is not so much a characteristic of cultures as it is an expression of "anxiety over the credibility of existence and of individual existences" for moderns.[17] Handler, critiquing those anthropologists who search for authenticity as archaeologists might hunt for ancient relics, states:

> That [authenticity] has been a central, though implicit,
> idea in much anthropological enquiry is a function of
> a Western ontology rather than of anything in the non-
> Western cultures we study. Our search for authentic
> cultural experiences – for the unspoiled, pristine, genuine,
> untouched and traditional – says more about us than about
> others. Explaining anthropological discourse about others
> proves to be a working-out of our own myths.[18]

Constructivist Anthropology and Tradition

Cultural anthropologists such as Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin have applied this constructivist approach to a broad examination of such concepts as "identity," "custom," and "tradition." In "Tradition, Genuine or Spurious," Handler and Linnekin consider the issue: "Does tradition refer to a core of inherited culture traits whose continuity and boundedness are analogous to that of a natural object, or must tradition be understood as a wholly symbolic construction?"[19]

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[16] Richard Handler, "Authenticity," *Anthropology Today*, 2.1 (1986): 2.
[17] T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920*, (New York: Pantheon, 1981) 93.
[18] Handler, "Authenticity," 2.
[19] Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin, "Tradition, Genuine or Spurious," *Journal of American Folklore*, 97 (1984): 273.

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Handler and Linnekin begin their analysis by critiquing the "naturalistic conception of tradition." Similar to the objectivist approach discussed above, the function of the naturalistic conception is to identify and describe the essential attributes of cultural traits. Rooted in the social and scientific paradigms associated with the Enlightenment, this approach assumes that tradition is a settled phenomenon susceptible to an objective study which can disclose its essence. Thus, A. L. Kroeber can define tradition as the "internal handing on through time."[20] Tradition is thus seen as a core of traits handed down from one generation to the next. This understanding of tradition, which predominated in the social sciences until at least the 1970's, embodies the premise that temporal continuity is the defining characteristic of social identity.[21] Even social scientists such as Edward Shils who recognize that tradition does change over time still adhere to a naturalistic paradigm, which presumes the existence of an essential identity that persists over time throughout modifications:

> Each society remains the same society. Its members do not wake up one morning and discover they are no longer living in, let us say, British society....Memory leaves an objective deposit in tradition.[22]

Handler and Linnekin challenge this notion that tradition can be significantly understood as an object apart from the interpretations of that object. In their ethnographic studies Handler and Linnekin found that members of a culture did not merely passively receive but actively selected aspects of that culture in their

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[20] A. L. Kroeber, *Anthropology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co, 1948) 411.
[21] Handler and Linnekin, 274.
[22] Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) 163, 167.

signification of tradition. Correspondingly, other aspects were ignored or forgotten. These choices were not based on ignorance but on the conceptual needs of the present: "Tradition is not handed down from the past, as a thing or collection of things; it is symbolically reinvented in an ongoing present."[23]

In contrast with the naturalistic paradigm, which presumes boundedness and essence, Handler and Linnekin conclude that tradition refers to an interpretive process that embodies both continuity and discontinuity. The naturalistic paradigm posits a false dichotomy between tradition and modernity as fixed and exclusive states. A constructive approach sees a dynamic relationship between past and present in the shaping of tradition: "The relationship of prior to present representations is symbolically mediated, not naturally given."[24] Each makes demands on the other. Thus, "we must understand tradition as a symbolic process that both presupposes past symbolisms and creatively reinterprets them."[25] Rather than search for a genuine artifact, constructivist anthropologists focus their vision on the ever-present dialectic of the receipt and re-creation of cultural symbols.

Constructing Jewish Authenticity

Stuart Charme, Professor of Religion at Rutgers University, utilizes the work of Handler, Linnekin and other constructivist anthropologists in his examination of

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[23] Handler and Linnekin, 280.
[24] *Ibid.*, 287.
[25] *Ibid.*

contemporary Jewish anxieties about continuity and authenticity.[26] He begins by observing how in the arguments over religious pluralism, assimilation, and Jewish continuity various sides (from the ultra-Orthodox to progressives to secular Jews) all invoke "authenticity" as the ultimate legitimizer or de-legitimizer of various positions. He notes that when each party uses the term "authenticity" in such contexts, its assumption is that authentic Judaism can be identified with the essence of Jewish tradition. For some this might mean strict adherence to Orthodox halacha; for others, social justice; and for yet others, a vibrant secular Jewish culture.

Charme states that such an essentialist model, which identifies a primordial and largely homogeneous tradition located in some idealized past, reflects an anxiety about cultural trends in the present. In periods when communal consensus is challenged and boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable practices become fuzzy, new lines of communal identity and purpose are drawn. Yet, those seeking to have these new forms of cultural identity accepted as normative usually claim that any such innovations are merely rediscoveries or returns to the true tradition. Such a present identification of a past tradition is a boldly creative act. Consistent with the work of Handler, Linnekin and other constructive anthropologists, Charme writes:

> To designate some aspect of the past as the "authentic
> tradition" is therefore not a passive discovery of some
> characteristic of the past but a particular appropriation
> and legitimation of the past by the present. Tradition
> is more accurately seen as a process or a project of

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[26] Stuart Z. Charme, "Varieties of Authenticity in Contemporary Jewish Identity," *Jewish Social Studies* 6.2 (2000).

dialectical interchange of past and present.[27]

Charme's approach to authenticity in Jewish life is also informed by his study of the work of Jean Paul Sartre, who suggested a model of "existential authenticity" in his essay *Anti-Semite and Jew*.[28] Handler, Linnekin, Kelner, and Wang also make use of this model in their work. Existential authenticity highlights the capacity of individuals to redefine for themselves their identity. Sartre did not intend with this model to discourage Jews from practicing their religion as they and their ancestors had. His purpose was to encourage present generations to define their identity in their own particular social and historical contexts. A definition of authenticity which adopted only what prior generations had embraced and which excluded contemporary concerns Sartre labeled as "false." "True" authenticity for Sartre does not demand a rejection of ancestral traditions, but it does require disavowing essentialism in those traditions. In this sense, authenticity involves "a continual 'uprooting' from one's roots, projecting toward the future, renewing assumptions and foundations, and rejecting any ossification of the self – that is, the subjectivity of a people in permanent revolution."[29]

The past and the present each makes demands on us in the shaping of our cultural identity. Recognition of this temporal instability affects our current project of understanding of what constitutes authentic Judaism. The contribution of constructivist anthropologists to this project is the notion that there is no such thing as

[27] *Ibid.*, 139.
[28] Jean Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew* (New York: Schocken, 1948).
[29] Charme, Stewart, "Varieties," 149.

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a cultural essence that is passively received and pristinely transmitted. Members of a culture symbolically reinvent their tradition in an ongoing present. The existentialist model treats as an ethical principle our own conscious participation in this process of ongoing self-recreation:

> A position can be authentically Jewish only by realizing
> its own potential inauthenticity: that it is historical, may
> be given different meanings at different moments in history,
> and becomes fixed or congealed only at the price of bad faith.[30]

In accordance with Sartre's notion, "bad faith" here means a refusal of the present to interrogate the past. It is an unconditional submission to the demands of tradition, a failure to contend with that tradition on behalf of contemporary challenges. For Sartre, such bad faith is a relinquishment of human responsibility for one's self and one's time.

This model of authenticity, which recognizes the dynamic process of both continuity and discontinuity, is also evident in the work of historians who have focused on the nature of collective memory and its role in the creation of tradition. It is to them that we now turn.

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[30] *Ibid.,* 150-51.

CHAPTER TWO: THE INVENTION OF TRADITION AND THE ROLE OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY

The Invention of Tradition

Constructive anthropologists have revealed how porous is the boundary between past and present within a group's cultural identity. Eric Hobsbawm has done the same in his historical analysis of the traditions of various nationalities. In *The Invention of Tradition* six historians and anthropologists argue that many traditions which present themselves as rooted in ancient pasts are in fact quite recent in origin.[31] Hobsbawm, in his introduction, defines the term "invented tradition:"

> "Invented tradition" is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past....However, insofar as there is reference to a historic past, the peculiarity of "invented" traditions is that the continuity with it is largely fictitious. In short, they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition.[32]

Although Hobsbawm recognized that the invention of tradition was a dynamic applicable to all epochs and societies, he argued that invented traditions occurred

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[31] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
[32] *Ibid.*, 1-2.

more frequently at times of rapid social transformation. In such periods of change "old traditions and their institutional carriers and their promulgators no longer prove sufficiently adaptable and flexible."[33] Hobsbawm identifies the past two hundred years as a likely period during which such rapid formalizations of new traditions developed.

Recent studies of the ultra-Orthodox movement within Judaism confirm Hobsbawm's expectations. In "The Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy: The Invention of a Tradition," Michael Silber examines a movement which purports to be the only truly authentic form of Judaism, one which is guided by a phrase attributed to the Hatam Sofer: "All innovation is prohibited by the Torah."[34] However, Silber shows ultra-Orthodoxy to be not an unchanged and unchanging remnant of pre-modern, traditional society but a product of modernity. It was a response to the destabilization of modern society that creatively crafted marginal elements of Jewish tradition into its own myth of what constituted authentic Judaism. As Silber demonstrates, ultra-Orthodoxy's legal methodology for justifying its particular positions in fact constituted a break from traditional approaches to halacha. In this sense, ultra-Orthodoxy may be considered as innovative as any of the other responses to modernity that developed within Judaism during the nineteenth century.

Haym Soloveitchik has also analyzed ultra-Orthodoxy's claims that it represents continuity with an immutable essence of Jewish tradition handed down

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[33] *Ibid.*, 4-5.
[34] Michael K. Silber, "The Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy: The Invention of a Tradition," *The Uses of Tradition*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (New York: Jewish Theological Society of America, 1992) 23-84.

from generation to generation. In "Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy," he demonstrates that the ultra-Orthodox worldview actually conceals a complex reconstruction of Judaism, in which mimesis had previously played the preeminent role in the transmission of tradition, custom, and legitimacy.[35] Soloveitchik writes that although halacha regulates all aspects of daily life, until recent generations it was primarily transmitted through observation and imitation in a variety of settings: home life; synagogue; school; friendships. The resulting mimetic norms sometimes did and sometimes did not conform with legal norms. In this sense, authority over identity was broadly distributed across a number of linked but separate domains. The rabbinate, even during the periods of their maximum influence such as in sixteenth century Poland, had social status and deference but little actual power.

The influence of the home and other social relationships was shattered by the various assaults on traditional communities by modernity. Within the Orthodox world this resulted in a particular shift in power. The home in particular lost its status as religious authenticator. Conduct and custom as sources of authoritative norms were replaced by "the demands of the written word."[36] Parents, friends and co-workers yielded to those who held a monopoly over such knowledge. As a result, lay members of the community lost confidence in their entitlement to power and in their own authenticity.

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[35] Haym Soloveitchik, "Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy," *Tradition* 28.4 (1994): 85-7.
[36] *Ibid.*, 69.

A Pluralistic Approach to Jewish History

One of the necessary corollaries of Hobsbawm's notion of the invention of tradition is a rejection of the essentialism of any particular culture's history. If a "tradition" can be viewed as having been constructed in such a way as to create a myth about the true source of its origins, it becomes difficult to identify a stable, unchanging core within that culture's history. Hobsbawm reveals that beneath a tradition's claim to ancient roots may lie contemporary reconstructions of the past in response to present-day concerns.

Hobsbawm focuses on the past two hundred years to expose myths about the antiquity of certain cultural traditions. Some scholars have recently applied this approach to Jewish history and argued that the reconstruction of Jewish identity did not begin only with the modern period. They challenge the notion of a pre-modern golden age characterized by a unified Jewish identity disrupted by the intrusions of modernity. Jonathan Webber, in a volume on Jewish identity in Europe, observes that there has been from the biblical beginnings a tension between "the underlying belief in the unity and continuity of the Jewish people, despite an awareness of the existence of considerable ethnographic diversity; and a feeling that the Jewish community of one's own village or town constituted the only true Jewish identity."[37] In this sense, Jewish identity has always been in a process of change and redefinition.

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[37] Jonathan Webber, ed., *Jewish Identities in the New Europe* (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1994) 74.

Efraim Shmueli, in his work *Seven Jewish Cultures*, embraces this conception of Jewish history as a site of tension and difference rather than as a carrier of a unified national vision. For Shmueli, "Jewish essence" has no basis in historical reality. Rather, Jewish history is a dramatic arena of conflicts and innovations, in which old cultures are overthrown and new ones take their places. Specifically, he sees in Jewish history an unfolding of seven successive systems of cultures.[38] Each one emerges in its own time both as rebel and as a successor of previous cultures. The myth of a single, uninterrupted and integrated national vision has resulted, according to Shmueli, from Jewish historiography, both from a religious historiography and from a secular historiography. Traditional religious historiography sees in Israel's history a continuity of sacrosanct values transmitted in an unbroken chain of legators and inheritors. In this view, Israel's past is enveloped in "a hallowed cloak of divine providence, impervious to conflict or change."[39] Secular Jewish historiography, Shmueli charges, has also overlooked the extent of contradictions in Jewish history. It has adopted "the modern structural-functional approach that prizes the permanent over the transitory."[40]

In his delineation of the seven cultures, Shmueli emphasizes not any unified vision but the ruptures, which represent the displacement of one vision by another:

> The multiple faces of Jewish culture informs (sic) us that
> unity and continuity are not self-evident in Jewish history.

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[38] The seven cultures that Shmueli identifies are: Biblical; Talmudic; Poetic-Philosophic; Mystical; Rabbinic; the culture of the Emancipation; and the National-Israeli culture.

[39] Efraim Shmueli, *Seven Jewish Cultures*, trans. Gila Shmueli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 10.

[40] *Ibid.*

> There are tears and ruptures, new beginnings,
>
> discontinuations and endings wrought by destiny
>
> and its contingencies...[41]

Each of these discontinuations did not demarcate itself as a new beginning. On the contrary, each culture appeared to present itself as a renaissance of something older than itself: a restoration of Biblical revelation and purpose. In reality, each culture's revival was in service not of the past but of the present:

> Every culture linked itself to the chain of tradition,
>
> preserving and destroying the antecedent in keeping
>
> with its own needs and with a care not to let the burden
>
> of the past hamper its own forward march.[42]

Of all the cultures Shmueli analyzes, the one of greatest interest for our purposes here is the Talmudic. Shmueli notes three propositions advanced by the Rabbis of the Talmudic period regarding legitimization of their enterprise:

1. The statutes and ordinances contained in Torah require interpretation, and only the interpretation of the Rabbis accurately renders their true meaning.

2. The Torah was given to Moses at Sinai complete with all its subsequent interpretations and nuances.

3. Not only Moses and the Prophets had received their authority at Sinai, but each Sage in every generation had such authority from that same source.

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[41] *Ibid.*, 251.
[42] *Ibid.*, 26.

After reviewing examples of how the Rabbis articulated each of these propositions, Shmueli concludes: "As we listen to these clamors for legitimation we cannot help sensing that the molders of the Talmud culture were fully aware they had created a system of meanings very new and quite different from the Biblical framework."[43] We will explore in Chapter Five this aspect of the Rabbinic enterprise and the extent to which it constitutes an endorsement of conscious reformulation of received tradition.

Shmueli's "perspectivistic pluralism"[44] serves his larger project: the fostering of a spirit of tolerance in order to achieve some kind of rapprochement between ideological opponents in modern Israel. He also seeks to restore to secular Jews in particular a way to reclaim their spiritual and historical heritage without feeling inferior about their Judaism. Regardless of his own political purpose or valuation of religious observance, Shmueli's emphasis on the constant reformulation of Jewish culture, ostensibly in the name of preserving the past but in fact done for the sake of the present, contributes to our sense of Jewish authenticity as an ongoing enterprise of creation and destruction: "We venture to say that Israel owes its survival to this ability to both eradicate and revitalize its past."[45]

Collective Memory

From constructivist anthropologists we learn that cultural authenticity has as much to do with an inventive present as with a settled past, its preservation or retrieval. Historians such as Hobsbawm reveal tradition as an ongoing construction

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[43] *Ibid.*, 95.
[44] *Ibid.*, 135.
[45] *Ibid.*, 25.

of past meaning in the present. Maurice Halbwachs explored the mechanisms by which the past is transmitted. He identified two contradictory methods: memory and history. Halbwachs argued that memory is a socially constructed and present-oriented mechanism, the main purpose of which is the reconfiguration and not the reclamation or retrieval of the past. Moreover, memory is never purely an individual endeavor. All memory reflects social influences:

> Collective frameworks...are the instruments used
> by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of
> the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the
> predominant thoughts of the society.[46]

Halbwachs acknowledged memory's value in the development and perpetuation of group identity. Every group develops the memory of its own past that highlights its unique identity. These reconstituted images provide the group with an account of its origin, allowing it to recognize itself through time. In particular, he analyzed the dynamic of religious collective memory. As changing social forces raise new issues, religious groups must adopt new beliefs without rupturing entirely their larger frameworks. A religious group will project into the past new conceptions while incorporating elements of old practices into a new framework. Thus, even at the moment that it is evolving, a religion returns to its past for authority and affirmation.

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[46] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. L. A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 40.

For Halbwachs, however, history, which he equated with nineteenth-century positivist historiography, was a science detached from the pressures of social reality. Whereas collective memory is an organic part of social life that is continuously changed in response to society's changing needs, he saw history as an objective instrument capable of revealing an originally archived idea or event. Further, he suggested that there is an inverse relationship between collective memory and history. When tradition weakens and social memory fades, history emerges as the primary mode of knowledge about the past. In this regard, Halbwachs viewed history and memory as historically situated modes of knowledge. The scholarly study of the past is an expression of the modern era, which has discredited memory as a way of relating to the past.

In his polarization of memory and history, Halbwachs favored the latter for its ability to be more detached from social influences in its search of the past. However, others who accept Halbwachs' notion of a fundamental split between memory and history bemoan the triumph of history over memory. Thus, Pierre Nora denigrates history as mere archival preservations of the past located in isolated sites, *les lieux de memoire*.[47] It is emblematic of a society which has become spiritually exhausted and culturally stagnant, which gazes upon the remains of its past.[48] In contrast, Nora celebrates memory, which is dynamic, spontaneous and fluid. It is "life, borne by

[47] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire," trans. Marc Roudebush, *Representations* 26 (1989), 7-24.
[48] Yosef Yerushalmi also critiques modern historiography as an attempt to destroy memory. Yerushalmi identifies modern Jewish historiography with assimilation, a displacement of sacred text by historicity as the arbiter of Judaism. Yosef Yerushalmi, *Zahor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982).

living societies founded in its name."[49]   Unlike history, which insists upon the recording, memorializing and archiving of every event, memory:

> remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of
> remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive
> deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation,
> susceptible to being long dormant and periodically
> revived....Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond
> tying us to the eternal present....[50]

Nora identifies history, in the form of *lieux de memoire*, with the deritualization of our world. By this he means the extent to which society externally constructs scaffolds to support monuments of its past because the internal foundations have crumbled. We rely on museums, archives, and decrees to remind us of our collective identity. He contrasts this with memory in a way that is similar to how Hayim Soloveitchik critiqued ultra-Orthodoxy for its displacement of mimesis with text as the source for sustaining Jewish life:

> ...we should be aware of the difference between true
> memory, which has taken refuge in gestures and habits,
> in skills passed down by unspoken traditions, in the body's
> inherent self-knowledge, in unstudied reflexes and ingrained
> memories, and memory transformed by its passage through
> history, which is nearly the opposite: voluntary and deliberate,
> experienced as a duty, no longer spontaneous....[51]

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[49] *Ibid.*, 8.
[50] *Ibid.*
[51] *Ibid.*, 13.

The distinction between memory and history articulated in the 1980's by Halbwachs has since been criticized by a number of scholars as being far too rigid.[52] Also, the privileging of memory over history by both Nora and Yerushalmi has been criticized as being overly nostalgic.[53] However, for our current purpose of exploring how the Rabbis received and transmitted the past, issues regarding the nature of modern historiography are not relevant. What is of value are insights, particularly those of Pierre Nora, into the dynamic of memory. As the constructivist anthropologists point out, cultural authenticity involves a creative reading of the past in the service of the present. This reactualization of the past, which Halbwachs calls memory, requires, according to Nora, not just recollection but also forgetting.

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[52] See, for example: Peter Burke, "History as Social Memory," in Thomas Butler, ed., *Memory: History, Culture and the Mind* (New York: B. Blackwell, 1989); Funkenstein, Amos, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993); and Zerubavel, Yael, *Recovered Roots* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

[53] See, Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); and Hess, Jonathan, "Memory, History, and the Jewish Question," *The Work of Memory: New Directions in the Study of German Society and Culture*, eds. Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

CHAPTER THREE: FORGETTING TORAH

An Integral Component of Memory

Tradition, though appearing to be a seamless web of transmission, actually consists of a constant dismantling and reconstructing of the past driven by present-day concerns. Scholars such as Yerushalmi and Nora who draw a sharp distinction between memory and history see the former as the preferred method for reflecting on the past. Memory is a project devoted to meaning, to the imaginative consecration of the past and its renaissance in a culture's living practices. History is not a participant but an observer and collector of documents and relics.

Despite the critiques that may be made of how rigidly Yerushalmi and Nora have drawn an incompatibility between history and memory, their notion of collective memory as constructed of both unities (the remembered) and discontinuities (the forgotten) is useful. In his study on the role of memory and forgetfulness in the construction of historical time according to the symbolic hermeneutics of the Zohar, Elliott Wolfson writes:

> The construction of history is dependent on the memory
> of the past but a memory that is always selective and malleable.
> Forgetfulness is thus itself an integral component of memory,
> for what is remembered is only remembered against the
> background of what is forgotten. Collective memory, no less,

than individual memory, is shaped as much by what is forgotten as by what is remembered.[54]

The theory of collective memory may value the role of forgetfulness; however, Jewish tradition appears to reject such an estimation. As Yerushalmi notes: "The Bible only knows the terror of forgetting. Forgetting, the obverse of memory, is always negative, the cardinal sin from which all others will flow."[55] The classic statement of this is found in chapter 8 of Deuteronomy:

> Take care lest you forget Adonoi your God and fail to
> keep His commandments and judgments and ordinances...
> lest your heart grow haughty and you forget Adonoi your
> God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt...And
> if indeed you do forget Adonoi your God...I bear witness
> against you this day that you shall surely perish.
> Deuteronomy 8:11, 14, 19

However, within Rabbinic literature we find some evidence of the value of forgetting as part of the process of the revelation of Torah.

An Everflowing Spring

Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach was a third generation tanna and, according to Rabbinic literature, a member of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai's inner circle. Only two of his halachic statements, both following the principles of the school of Shammai, are preserved (Tosefta Terumot 5:15; Y Yevamot 2:1). There are, however, a number

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[54] Elliot R. Wolfson, "Re/membering the Covenant: Memory, Forgetfulness, and the Construction of History in the Zohar," *Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, eds. Elisheva Carlebach, John M. Efron, and David N. Myers (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1998) 214.
[55] Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 108.

of tales about Rabbi Eleazar, which reveal some fundamental issues with which the Rabbis struggled. As Jeffrey Rubenstein has indicated in his study of Talmudic stories:

> The stories [the Rabbis] created express the tensions
> inherent in the Torah-centered worldview and the
> conflicts that arise between Torah study and other
> values. At the heart of each story is the enterprise
> of integrating aspects of rabbinic culture with the
> dominant value of Torah as a pattern of life and a path
> to the holy....They provide the sages a way to ponder
> the tensions inherent in their culture, not an easy means
> of resolving them.[56]

In the case of Rabbi Eleazar, the Rabbinic stories about him reveal an ongoing tension between the values of the preservation of tradition and innovation in the explication and transmission of Torah. In the dramatic interplay between these two values, preservation is represented by the behavior of "remembering" and innovation by that of "forgetting."

We meet Rabbi Eleazar as a member of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai's circle of disciples in Avot 2:8:

> Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai had five disciples, and they are:
> Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah,
> Rabbi Yose the Priest, Rabbi Simon ben Nathaniel, and Rabbi
> Eleazar ben Arach. He used to recount their praise thusly:
> Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus is a plastered cistern that loses not
> a drop; Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah, happy is she that bore

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[56] Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories: Narrative Art, Composition, and Culture* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999) 2-3.

him; Rabbi Yose is a pious man; Rabbi Simon ben Nathaniel is a fearer of sin; and Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach is an ever-flowing spring. He used to say, If all the Sages of Israel were in one scale of a balance, and Eliezer ben Hyrcanus in the other, he would outweigh them all. Abba Saul said in his name, If all the Sages of Israel were in one scale of a balance, and Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus was with them, and Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach was in the other, he would outweigh them all.

This mishnah sets up two conflicting models of a Torah scholar. Rabbi Eliezer is a plastered cistern that preserves all that has been poured into it. Rabbi Eleazar is a generative source of fresh sustenance. The mishnah in Avot also articulates conflicting traditions as to which of the two models Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai actually preferred. The preservation of these conflicting traditions may indicate only a historical uncertainty as to Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai's own position, or it may reflect the extent to which the two models represented an ongoing debate among the Rabbis generally.

Contrasting images of flowing water and plastered cisterns also appear in Jeremiah 2:13:

My people have committed two evils.
They have forsaken Me, the fountain
of living waters, and dug for themselves
cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

Here the verse summarizes the prophet's message about Israel's abandonment of its espoused relationship (v. 2:1) with God, Who is an unceasing flow of beneficence. But Israel rejected such a spring and chose to be its own source of life. Rabbinic

commentaries identify these cisterns of stored-up water as indicative of idol worship,[57] thus further ambiguating the Rabbis' views about the contrasting metaphors of cisterns and flowing waters. This identification of cisterns with idolatry supports a view of literalist preservation as a form of heresy, a severing of connection with "the fountain of living waters." By contrast, an "ever-flowing spring," understood as a continuous stream of, rather than recycled, waters presents innovation as a more faithful rendering of God's Torah. This apparent paradox between innovation and tradition will be explored more fully in Chapters Five and Six.

Rabbi Eliezer as a self-described representative of the preservation model appears again in the eighth century work Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer. In that version Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai clearly states his opinion about the preservation-innovation tension:

> Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai said to Eliezer: "Expound to us something from the teachings of the Torah." He answered: "Rabbi, I will tell you a parable. What am I like? I am like a cistern that is not able to draw forth more water than that which has been stored into it. Similarly, I cannot speak more words of Torah than I have received from you." Rabbi Yohanan said to him, "I shall tell you a parable. To what can this be likened? To a spring, which bubbles up and brings forth water, and which is able by its own force to bring forth more water than was stored in it. Similarly, you can speak more words of Torah than were received at Sinai.[58]

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[57] See Taanit 5b and Rashi's commentary on the verse.
[58] *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer*, Chapter 2.

In this version, Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai views Rabbi Eliezer's self-description of himself as a cistern not as a virtue but as a limitation. He is capable of being more than a well-sealed receptacle. He can be a source of new insights and knowledge. He can even "speak more words of Torah than were received at Sinai."

Alon Goshen-Gottstein equates Talmudic argumentation over the relative merits of being a cistern versus a well with that over the terms "Sinai" and "uprooter of mountains." These terms are used for contrasting methods of Torah learning in Sanhedrin 24a and Horayot 14a. In the former, Resh Lakish and Rabbi Meir are both described as "uprooting mountains" in the beit midrash, referring to the ingenuity of their minds. The text in Horayot 14a describes a difference of opinion between Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel and the Rabbis regarding the relative superiority of a scholar well versed in the law as communicated at Mount Sinai versus one who is a skilled dialectician. The text uses the term "Sinai" to refer to the former type of scholar and "one who uproots mountains" for the latter. A "Sinai" has absorbed and retained received teachings and is able to give reliable decisions based on a trustworthy tradition. Goshen-Gottstein describes "one who uproots mountains," by contrast, as one who "takes the mountain apart by force; this is an interpretive effort that leads to innovation and profundity...."[59]

It is not only as a character of effluent creativity that Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach appears in Rabbinic literature. In Shabbat 147b we read that Rabbi Eleazar ben

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[59] Alon Goshen-Gottstein, *The Sinner and the Amnesiac: The Rabbinic Invention of Elisha ben Abuya and Eleazar ben Arach* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000) 373 note 11.

Arach was drawn to visit a place in northern Israel famous for its wines. When he returns, he arises to read from the Torah but is incapable of doing so. He misreads certain of the Hebrew letters so as to render the phrase "This month shall be for you (the beginning of months)" from Exodus 12:2 into "Their hearts were silent." The Talmud continues that the scholars prayed for him, and his learning returned. The irony is that Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach, celebrated for his innovativeness and his capacity to be a source of renewal, obliterates a verse marking a moment of beginning – the first month of the year. His capacity to perform the fundamental task of deciphering the alphabet, of bringing words of Torah to his community has left him, albeit only momentarily.

A more desperate situation is described in Kohelet Rabbah 7:7. Upon the death of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, four of his five central disciples consolidate themselves at his academy in Yavneh. Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach alone among them does not. He joins his wife in Emmaus. As his master's most renowned disciple, he waits for the others to come to him. But they do not. At his wife's suggestion, he resists an urge to journey to them: "She said, 'Who needs whom?' He answered, 'They need me.'" His wife then says to him, "'In the case of a vessel [containing food] and mice, which goes to which? Do the mice go to the vessel or does the vessel come to the mice?' He listened to her and remained there until he forgot his learning."[60] Eventually, the other disciples do show up and pose to him a halachic problem: "'Which is better to eat with a relish, wheat bread or barley bread?' But he

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[60] Many commentators explained Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach's loss of Torah as a result of listening to his wife's advice. For an interesting discussion of issues of gender related to memory and forgetfulness and Rabbinic fear of oblivion, see Elliot Wolfson, *op. cit.*, especially 224-31.

was unable to answer." Here Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach has completely lost his learning. There is no indication that it returns. He is the rabbi who forgot his Torah.

By the composite of these stories, the Talmud presents us with a character who both innovates and forgets Torah. At least one particular school of Torah scholars appears to have held up Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach as a model sage: the academy of Rabbi Akiva.

Goshen-Gottstein devotes a substantial portion of his chapter on Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach to establishing an ideological link between him and the fourth generation tanna Rabbi Akiva. A homily in Sifre quotes Rabbi Akiva juxtaposing a cistern and a well in the context of comparing types of disciples.[61] Rabbi Akiva is associated with "springs of wisdom"[62] and is described as an "uprooter of mountains."[63] Both Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach and Rabbi Akiva emphasized the biblical basis for halachot. Stories about Rabbi Akiva share a similar structure and even content with those about Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach.[64] Both Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach and Rabbi Akiva are recorded as skilled in mystical practices.[65] Finally, in Avot D'Rabbi Natan there is a tradition attributed to Rabbi Akiva which identifies Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach as Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai's greatest disciple:

> He [i.e., Rabbi Yohanan] used to say: "If all the sages of
> Israel were in one scale of the balance and Eliezer ben

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[61] Sifre Deuteronomy 48.
[62] Y Sotah 9:18; Tosefta Sotah 15:3.
[63] Avot D'Rabbi Natan 6.
[64] Goshen-Gottstein, *op. cit.*, 241-3.
[65] Tosefta Hagigah 2:1-2; Y Hagigah 2:1.

Hyrcanos were in the other scale he would outweigh them all." Abba Shaul says in the name of Rabbi Akiva, that he used to say in [Yohanan's] name that [Yohanan] really used to say: "If all the sages of Israel were in one scale of the balance, and Eliezer ben Hyrcanos with them, the finger of Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach would outweigh them."[66]

Thus, this reported tradition eliminates any ambiguity in Avot 2:8 as to who was considered the superior sage. At least in the eyes of those in Rabbi Akiva's academy the role model of a Torah scholar was Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach: one who was both an effluent source of creativity and innovation and one who had forgotten his Torah.

Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach's forgetting Torah may represent more than an involuntary loss of learning. It may constitute a creative act on his part. In Sifre Deuteronomy Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach is recorded as commenting on the phrase "on a book" from Deuteronomy 17:18: "When he is seated on his royal throne, he shall have a copy of this teaching written for him on a book out of that which is before the levitical priests." Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach comments:

"On a book" – on the skin of a clean animal, and corrected against the scroll in the Temple Court by a court of seventy-one; "out of that which is before the levitical priests" – hence Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach taught that in the future the Torah will be forgotten.[67]

Here Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach associates the inscription of Torah into a book with its being forgotten. The rabbi whose own approach to Torah is that it must constantly

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[66] Avot D'Rabbi Natan 29.
[67] Sifre Deuteronomy 160.

flow and bubble up from within fears that the settlement of this teaching between the finite enclosures of a book will shut off the generative flow of meaning. Sharing in Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach's concern is his ideological heir Rabbi Akiva, who uses a verse from Proverbs to describe a young disciple:

> Rabbi Akiva says: Scripture says, "Drink waters out of your own cistern" (Proverbs 5:15). At the outset a cistern cannot bring forth a drop of water of its own, except that which is already in it; so also a disciple at the outset contains nothing but that which he has learned.[68]

Merely to contain tradition reflects only the earliest stages of a scholar's development. A scholar who remains but a cistern will ultimately not be a source of revival. Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach fears that reliance on writing, on archiving (in Nora's terminology), will only drain the teaching of its wisdom. It is preservation that is the true forgetting. Conversely, forgetting this preservation is an act of renewal.

The Rabbis and Interpretive Communities

Despite this apparent valorization of the Torah-forgetting rabbi by Rabbi Akiva's circle, the Talmud's overall judgment of Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach is severe: he is denied virtually any role in the construction of halacha, the Rabbinic foundation for Jewish communal life. In the Rabbinic world individual creativity which is achieved at the expense of communal discourse is denigrated.

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[68] Sifre Deuteronomy 48.

In Bava Metzia 85b we are told of an argument that Rabbi Chanina and Rabbi Chiya were having. Rabbi Chanina exclaims to Rabbi Chiya, "With me you argue? If Torah were forgotten from the Jewish people, I could restore it through my argumentations." Rabbi Chiya responds, "With me you argue? For I work so that Torah will not be forgotten. I sow flax from which I weave nets, which I use to trap deer and I feed their meat to orphans. Then I shape the deer skins into scrolls on which I write the five chumashim of Torah. Then I teach a different book of the Torah to five different children, and I teach to each of six other children one of the six orders of the Mishnah. Then I say to them: 'Each of you teach the others what you have learned.' Thus I make sure the Torah is never forgotten from the Jewish people." The gemara concludes: "This is what Rebbi meant when he said, 'How great are the deeds of Chiya!'" Rabbi Chanina's individual brilliance fades in comparison with Rabbi Chiya's work at preparing the next generation to teach one another. He does so not merely through academic instruction but through attention to the very basic chores of daily life: planting, hunting and feeding. Communal nourishment and survival are elements of teaching Torah. Ultimately, Torah survives not through individual insight but through mutual engagement.

For the Rabbis the transmission of meaning required a communal process. This is seen both in those Talmudic texts in which halacha is expressly developed and in the aggadic tales about juridical dynamics. In Berachot 27b-28a the Sages rise up and oust the head of the academy, Rabban Gamliel, for his overbearing, humiliating and overly restrictive conduct toward its members. The very first act of the new head

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of the academy, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, is to remove the gatekeepers from the front of the house of study. Hundreds of new students rush in to the hall, "and there was not a single law that had been left unresolved in the study hall which they did not then resolve." Singular knowledge, no matter how brilliant, cannot match the wisdom of a room full of students permitted open debate.

The contemporary literary theorist Stanley Fish has written about the essential function "interpretive communities" play in shaping the meaning of texts. In response to the debate within the field of literary criticism as to whether meaning resides primarily within the text itself or within the reader, Fish has argued that it is neither: "It is interpretive communities, rather than either the text or the reader, that produce meaning and are responsible for the emergence of formal features."[69] Interpretive communities consist of those who share purposes, goals and, most significantly, interpretive strategies. The reader does not approach a text and derive meaning from it as an individual. He or she, whether aware of it or not, is embedded in an institutional framework that provides access to socially constructed instruments of perception and expression. These instruments at once enable and limit the operations of consciousness and criticism. Thus, according to Fish, meaning's authority rests not in the subjective individual nor in the objective text but in the interpretive community, which involves both subjectivity and objectivity. The community's perspective is interested, but the meanings and texts produced by an interpretive community are not subjective because they proceed not from an isolated

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[69] Stanley Fish, *Is There A Text In This Class?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980) 14.

individual "but from a public and conventional point of view."[70] For the Rabbis the search for meaning requires the argumentation over possibilities. They are expressly aware that without their interpretive community their enterprise will fail.

Upon the death of his teacher Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach does not travel to Yavneh. He chooses not to join in the consolidation of the disciples in that "fortress against oblivion," as Yerushalmi characterizes it.[71] Instead, he journeys to Emmaus, "a beautiful place with beautiful and delightful waters."[72] At the moment that his school of tradition faces demise, he rejects the call for preservation of its interpretive community. He chooses to create outside of it. By his very judgment so is he judged. As he excluded himself from the interpretive world of Torah so does that world marginalize any creative contributions he may have made.

Forgetting, Creativity and Revelation

Pierre Nora distinguishes between *lieux de memoire* and *milieux de memoire*. The difference is between memory which is an object of study abstracted from its moment of generation and a memory which is lived: "integrated, dictatorial memory – unself-conscious, commanding, all-powerful, spontaneously actualizing, a memory without a past that ceaselessly reinvents tradition…"[73] *Lieu de memoire* imposes a false sense of continuity. It denies rupture and aspires toward immortality:

> …the most fundamental purpose of the *lieu de memoire*
> is to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish

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[70] *Ibid.*
[71] Yerushalmi, *op. cit.*, 110.
[72] Avot D'Rabbi Natan 77-78.
[73] Nora, "Between Memory and History," 8.

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a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial...[74]

For Nora, a *milieu de memoire* requires both remembering and forgetting: "It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting..."[75] In the absence of such a dialectic, remembering can become an obstacle to a people's ability to transform their collective experience into a living practice of meaning.

This dialectical necessity of both remembering and forgetting is dramatically rendered by Rashi in his concluding commentary on the Torah. Rashi's commentary picks up on a midrash cited in Menachot 99a-b, which reads: "Resh Lakish said, There are times when the suppression of the Torah may be the foundation of the Torah, for it is written, 'Which you shattered' (Exodus 34:1). The Holy One blessed be He said to Moses, 'You did well to shatter them.' In this midrash, God congratulates Moses for having obliterated the first set of tablets at Mount Sinai or, as Aviva Zornberg describes it, "for introducing the phenomenon of rupture, of forgetting, into the tradition."[76] Moses' dramatic act is in response to the creation of the golden calf, by which the Israelites have attempted, in Nora's terms, "to materialize the immaterial." The erasure of inscription is not necessarily a negative act: "The vocation of the *Talmid Hakham* is 'to save a text from its misfortune as a book.'"[77] This forgetting of a text's fixed enshrinement is periodically necessary in

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[74] *Ibid.*, 19.

[75] *Ibid.*

[76] Aviva Zornberg, *The Particulars of Rapture* (New York: Doubleday, 2001) 457.

[77] Marc-Alain Ouaknin, *The Burnt Book*, trans. Llewellyn Brown (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), quoting Emmanuel Levinas, 166.

order to restore its meaning: "For out of oblivion comes interpretation, reconstruction, the act of memory that re-creates the past."[78]

The Talmud tells us of two midrashim about the forgetting of Torah that follows upon the death of Moses. In the first, after he dies Moses visits Joshua and tells him to share with him any doubts that he might have. Joshua responds in a way that indicates he has no further need of Moses. At that point Moses' strength weakens and Joshua forgets three hundred laws, and seven hundred doubts about the law arise in his mind. The Israelites are about to kill Joshua. God then speaks to Joshua and says that it is not possible to tell him these laws. Instead, God tells Joshua to go to war.[79] The second midrash states that during the period of mourning for Moses one thousand seven hundred *kal vahomer* and *gezerah shavah* and specifications of scribes were forgotten. However, Othniel restores these forgotten teachings as a result of his dialectical skills. As a proof text, the midrash cites a verse from the Book of Joshua: "And Othniel the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb, took it [i.e., the city Kiryat Sefer]" Joshua 15:17.[80]

Both of these midrashim reflect the interrelationship of loss, forgetfulness and creativity. Moses' death induces doubt and a forgetting of Torah by his appointed successor. God's message to Joshua is that Torah is ultimately not purely transmitted and passively received. It must be pursued and seized as in a battle: "Go to war!"

There is no such thing as passive receiving of Tradition.

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[78] Zornberg, *op. cit.*, 457.
[79] Temura 16a.
[80] *Ibid.*

He who receives, the disciple, is always – must always be –
the scene of a creation. To receive is to create, to innovate![81]

Forgetting Torah and wresting it back through one's creative skills as necessary steps in the revitalization of its meaning is a process even more clearly stated in the second midrash. Not only does the midrash explicitly tell us that Othniel recovers the lost teachings by means of his ingenious interpretations but it also uses as proof a verse in which Othniel seizes in battle Kiryat Sefer, literally "the City of the Book." Ultimately, as Aviva Zornberg, writes: "forgetting, loss, mourning engender a surge of creativity, as the fixed forms of the 'already said' give way to the dynamic transformations of 'saying'."[82] Forgetting, in this sense, is essential to Revelation. The lesson of Othniel is that knowledge, tradition, is not given. It has to be conquered.

This process of learning and forgetting and reconstructing is one which, Talmud tells us, belongs to each one us. In tractate Niddah Rabbi Simlai provides an extraordinary image of a fetus. It is like a folded writing table. During gestation it looks and sees from one end of the world to the other. And it is taught all of Torah, from beginning to end. At the very moment of its crossing over into the world, as soon as it sees the light, an angel approaches, slaps it on the mouth and causes it to

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[81] Ouaknin, *op. cit.*, 15.
[82] *Op. cit.*, 457.

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forget all of Torah, completely.[83] Thus do we begin our journey as human beings, in the creative enterprise of constructing what we have forgotten.

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[83] Niddah 30b.

CHAPTER FOUR: STRONG POETRY

Strong Poets

The dynamic of seizing hold of tradition through a creative reconstruction of it finds reflection in the literary criticism of Harold Bloom. In *The Anxiety of Influence* Bloom explores the relationship that exists between poets and their literary precursors, those who have influenced their own writing. Bloom distinguishes between poets who idealize their influences and succumb to mere imitation and those who develop their own voices. The latter he calls "strong poets." Strong poets do not deny their literary ancestries, but in order to "clear imaginative space for themselves," to engender their own work, they misread their precursors. This misreading, what Bloom terms a "misprision," acknowledges literary influence; yet, what is acknowledged is actually a revised version of that tradition.

The strong poet appropriates a precursor's text and restates it in such a way as to allow her own work to be seen as an extension of that tradition while covertly manipulating how that tradition is now to be read. Bloom, after writing *The Anxiety of Influence*, expressly identified his interpretive paradigm with a Jewish hermeneutic: that of Kabbalah.[84] In particular, he views the Zohar as a model example of strong poetry. The Zohar presents itself as a commentary on the Torah, an explication of the Biblical world. However, the Zohar so comprehensively misreads and revises that tradition as to redirect the precursor text to be read in accordance with the Zohar's own catastrophic vision of creation and the world. A

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[84] Harold Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975).

strong poet is able not only to emerge out of a tradition but also to alter how that tradition is now perceived.

Canonical versus Creative Reading

As models for reading precursor texts, Bloom distinguishes between canonical reading and creative reading. Canonical reading is a mere replication of the text. The reader/writer succumbs to the sacrality of the text and is inhibited from writing anything which might transgress or destabilize it. In contrast is creative reading, by which the reader/writer introduces her own vision into the tradition in a way that alters but does not destroy it. The reader/writer engaged in creative reading lives amidst a tension between transmitting a tradition that is the source of her origins and revising it so that she might emerge as a differentiated individual responsible both for her heritage and her times. As Shaul Magid has characterized this tension explored by Bloom:

> The poet is caught between the past that binds her
> and the creative impulse that propels her. The past
> cannot be discarded as it serves as the foundation of
> the poet's vision of the world, but it cannot be repeated
> as its flaws become too acute to be reproduced.[85]

The strong poet writes out of the contending swells of obligation and independence. Her anxiety results from living with the desire to stabilize and uproot simultaneously. Bloom, like constructive anthropologists such as Handler and

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[85] Shaul Magid, "Associative Midrash," *God's Voice from the Void: Old and New Studies in Bratslav Hasidism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002) 43.

Linnekin and historians such as Hobsbawm and Nora, seeks to unmask smooth flowing continuity as an idealized illusory dream about tradition which only blocks creative sustenance, the development of the poet's authentic voice. For Bloom, too, tradition consists of both continuity and discontinuity, of stability and moments of creative rupture:

> The strong poet survives because he lives the discontinuity
> of an "undoing" and an "isolating" repetition, but he would
> cease to be a poet unless he kept living the continuity of
> "recollecting forwards," of breaking forth into a freshening
> that yet repeats his precursors' achievements.[86]

Susan Handelman finds Bloom's interpretive paradigm useful in explaining the fundamental shift in Judaism that occurred with the collapse of the Temple and its institutional repetitive acts and its replacement with Rabbinic culture and its emphasis on textual interpretation:

> Rabbinic Judaism's central movement is to change repetition to
> remembrance; that is, with the catastrophic loss of the Temple,
> the Rabbis instituted rules of remembering through study and
> interpretation of the Temple laws. From ritual repetition to
> excessive interpretation is Bloom's path for poetry and
> criticism as well.[87]

Adopting the characterization used by Simon Rawidowicz for Talmudic Judaism,[88] Handelman argues that "the Rabbis of the Second House" freely reshaped and

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[86] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) 83.

[87] Susan Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982) 193.

[88] Simon Rawidowicz, "Israel's Two Beginnings: The First and the Second 'Houses'," *Studies in Jewish Thought*, ed. Nathan Glatzer (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1974) 81-209.

recreated the materials they had inherited from written scriptures "in an interpretive battle born of the tension between continuation and rebellion, tradition and innovation, attachment to the text and alienation from it."[89]

Even apart from such a sweeping application, we can find in Bloom's distinction between canonical and creative readings the tensions raised in the Talmud's tales about Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach and in its arguments over the relative value of a "Sinai" and an "uprooter of mountains." Rabbi Eliezer represents a canonical reading, one devoted to the facticity of the past and its replication. Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach is the creative reader, for whom devotion to tradition is manifested in his re-creation of it in order to serve religious exigencies of the present.

The Dissemblance of Discontinuity

Eric Hobsbawm has written about the way in which cultures present recently crafted cultural practices as embedded in ancient tradition. Bloom's notion of a "recollecting forwards" articulates a similar orientation: a desire to reconfigure the past so that it is both useful for present concerns and reaffirming of the past's authority. As Maurice Halbwachs would state it, memory is presently constructed to serve the present and preserve the past. Through strong poetry, antiquity is not totally abandoned but neither does it remain totally unchanged. It influences our present even as we reshape its meaning upon us.

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[89] *Ibid.*, 42.

This dynamic of "recollecting forwards" serves to dissemble the rupture between past and present aspects of tradition. Charlotte Fonrobert has written about the way in which the Mishnah in particular conceals its innovative departures from received tradition. In "The Beginnings of Rabbinic Textuality: Women's Bodies and Paternal Knowledge," Fonrobert examines how the Mishnah projects continuity between the Rabbinic movement and Temple Judaism by obfuscating the Temple's destruction. By doing so, the Rabbis conceal their own beginning, their own point of radical departure, thereby deflecting any questions as to the discontinuity between Biblical and Rabbinic law.

Fonrobert identifies a number of constructive strategies the Rabbis used to obscure the new beginning that the Rabbinic movement represented in Jewish cultural history: "Such strategies benefit the projection of cultural continuity rather than rupture and new beginning."[90] In mounting their claim for authority over Jewish life, the Rabbis blurred the moment of Biblical endings and Rabbinical beginnings. The clearest example of this is in the first chapter of tractate Avot of the Mishnah, which traces the chain of transmission of the oral Torah back to Sinai. This retrojection of Rabbinic beginnings into the mythic past presents the Rabbis as the continuation of an unbroken line of communal leadership rather than as a party whose claim to authority was based primarily on a rupture with Judaism as it had been practiced for twelve centuries.

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[90] Charlotte Fonrobert, "The Beginnings of Rabbinic Textuality," *Beginning/Again:Toward A Hermeneutic of Jewish Texts*, eds. Aryeh Cohen and Shaul Magid (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2002) 50.

The Displacement of Authority

In Bloom's paradigm of an "anxiety of influence," poets engage in a struggle in which each seeks to make room for herself by manipulating the tradition she has received. The poet claims to be fortifying that tradition while in fact covertly overthrowing her predecessors, thereby reversing the roles of precursor and later poet: "the uncanny effect is that ...it seems to us...as though the later poet himself had written the precursor's characteristic work."[91] The later poet displaces the precursor as a tradition's authoritative, generative force.

In the Rabbinic enterprise this displacement of authority is driven by that aspect which values not mere recitation of past traditions but the questioning of their origins and meanings: the machloket, the point of rupture between mishnah and gemara. As the generation of the tannaim of the Mishnah asserted their own place of privilege in the transmission of Torah, so did the later generations of amoraim seek to overcome the shortcomings of their precursors and establish their own place of authority. The Rabbinic methodology of asking questions is designed not merely to clarify tradition but to revise it. Emmanuel Levinas observes that this asking of questions by students (Bloom's later poets) constitutes "a right reading of Torah," with its present-day concerns and future focus:

> The student will ask questions based on what the Torah
> will mean tomorrow. The Torah not only reproduces what
> was taught yesterday, it is read according to tomorrow; it
> does not stop at the representation of what yesterday and

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[91] Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, 16.

today goes by the name of the present.[92]

The strong poet is engaged in an audacious enterprise: the reshaping of tradition in accordance with her own present-day concerns and future-oriented resolve. Such a struggle for displacement of prior authority risks a heretical tack that would sever a connection with the past. We will examine that risk in Chapter Five. Before that, however, we will look at instances in the Talmud which demonstrate Rabbinic audacity in reshaping the past in order to preserve it.

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[92] Emmanuel Levinas, "Contempt for the Torah as Idolatry," *In the Time of the Nations*, 66.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE RABBIS AND STRONG POETRY

Talmudic Tales

Joseph Dan states that the primary function of a talmudic story is didactic: literary form and expression "were subordinate to [the stories'] didactic and moralistic purposes."[93]   Similarly, Norman Cohen writes that the Rabbinic story "comes to inculcate important values and theological principles and to highlight the Rabbinic worldview."[94]   However, Cohen argues that in order to understand talmudic tales accurately, it is helpful to analyze them additionally from a literary perspective: an examination of genre, character and structure.   Supplementing historical and theological analyses, these literary tools can disclose additional meaning conveyed by the form of the story.

Jeffrey Rubenstein in his application of literary analysis to talmudic stories focuses on the way the Rabbis used narrative not only to convey a moral lesson but also to grapple with fundamental tensions within their culture.   Just as with the more identifiably legal discourses in the Babylonian Talmud, the stories do not offer simple conclusions.   Part of Rubenstein's methodology is his insistence on locating every Rabbinic story within its halachic context.[95]   Rubenstein's approach helps us as readers to break down the classical distinction between halacha and aggadah. Engendering a flow between the two forms of Rabbinic speech enhances our

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[93] Joseph Dan, "Hebrew Fiction," *Encyclopedia Judaica* CD-ROM Edition (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd, 1997).

[94] Norman Cohen, "Structural Analysis of a Talmudic Story," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* LXXII (1982): 162.

[95] Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories*, 24.

understanding of each. Finding the aggadic dimension of a halachic discussion reveals the narrative thought within the legal prescriptions. Identifying the halachic dimension to an aggadic text grounds the tale in its desire to establish normative foundations for communal life. Through this interchange of different speech patterns we discern the special nature of the Rabbinic discursive dialectic, in which contending texts do not obliterate but illuminate one another.[96]

A Tale of Rabbinic Audacity

Often the desire within a halachic Talmudic text is not as much for legal conclusion as it is for meaning, an exercise in sustaining and sanctifying life through argumentation and imagination. Similarly, Rabbinic stories do not merely serve to present homiletic instruction. As Jeffrey Rubenstein indicates, they provide the Rabbis a way to ponder tensions inherent in their culture, tensions which those stories may only recognize and not resolve.

In Menahot 29b we encounter a story which reveals tensions within Rabbinic culture, a determination to act audaciously and the consequent anxieties attending such action. As an example of the Rabbis reshaping received tradition in order to preserve it, this story demonstrates the dynamics Harold Bloom associates with the exercise of strong poetry.

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[96] For an elegant essay on the mutuality of halacha and aggadah see Hayyim Nahman Bialik, "Halacha and Aggadah or Law and Lore," *Contemporary Jewish Record* VII (1944): 662-80.

<u>Summary of Story</u>

Moses ascends to the top of Mount Sinai to receive the Torah and finds God sitting and making little crowns for the letters. When Moses asks why God is delaying the Torah's transmission, God answers that far in the future there will be a man, Rabbi Akiva, who will draw out mounds of law from the very tips of the letters. Impressed, Moses asks to see this man. God tells Moses to turn around. He does so and finds himself sitting in the eighth row of Rabbi Akiva's academy. He listens to Rabbi Akiva explicate Torah but does not understand anything that he is saying. Moses feels ill at ease but is finally comforted when, in response to a question from a student about the authority for a certain matter, Rabbi Akiva says: "It is a law given to Moses at Sinai." Moses returns to God and says, "You have such a person and You are giving the Torah through me!" God silences Moses, "That is My decree." Moses then asks to see Rabbi Akiva's reward for such brilliance. God tells Moses to turn around. He does so and sees people weighing Rabbi Akiva's flesh in the market stalls. "That's his reward?" cries Moses. Again, God silences Moses, "That is My decree."

<u>Cultural Dimension</u>

In Chapter Three I reviewed the contrasting hermeneutics of the third generation tannaim Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Eleazar. Rabbi Eliezer is characterized as a cistern, one who received and preserved tradition. Rabbi Eleazar is a bubbling spring, a source of new insights. This contention between hermeneutic approaches was embodied in the following generation by Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha and Rabbi

Akiva, whose disputes on matters of both halacha and aggadah sharpened the differences between more and less restrictive approaches to textual interpretations.

Rabbi Ishmael followed his teacher Rabbi Nehunya ben HaKanah and evolved a system of exposition that adhered to a relatively literal reading of the Biblical text. For Rabbi Ishmael, the Torah speaks in the language of humans. Thus, just as humans sometimes use superfluous words to express a thought, so does the Torah. By contrast, Rabbi Akiva rejects the notion that the Torah should be read according to the principles of human language. For Rabbi Akiva every superfluous word, every repetition holds meaning. In the area of halachic midrash, Rabbi Ishmael consistently seeks the literal meaning of a verse, and where the halacha is incompatible with it he states so explicitly: "The halacha circumvents the biblical verse" (Sotah 16a). Following the teachings of Nahum of Gimzo, Rabbi Akiva expounds the rules of ribbui and mi'ut, which is more inclusive and less confined by the literal meaning of the text.

In the area of halacha, Rabbi Ishmael declares that a matter which is derived from Scripture by means of a hermeneutical principle cannot serve as a premise for the derivation of an additional conclusion through the operation of those principles. However, according to Rabbi Akiva one may learn from a matter which has been derived from Scripture (Zevachim 57a). In matters of aggadah, Rabbi Ishmael criticizes Rabbi Akiva for what he views as his flights of fancy and urges him to

cease his homiletical interpretations and devote himself to tending the halachic fields in such abstruse areas as those found in tractates Ohalot and Nega'im.

The portrayal of Rabbi Akiva in the Moses-Akiva story evokes this hermeneutical tension within Rabbinic culture. Moses, as the one who directly received Torah from God, should presumably know word for word what it contains. Yet, he fails to recognize what is characterized as having been given to him at Sinai. Rabbi Akiva, by contrast, is portrayed as one who literally goes beyond the simple orthography of each letter by pursuing meaning even in their aesthetic embellishments. While God's honoring of Rabbi Akiva's skill seems to serve as Rabbinic approval of his hermeneutical approach, the description of his gruesome fate expresses anxiety about it as well: "That's his reward?"

Literary and Halachic Context

The story of Moses and Rabbi Akiva appears in tractate Menahot, which is primarily concerned with matters related to the Temple cult: the various offerings; the use of incense and oil by the priests; and the Temple vessels such as the altar, the table for the shewbread, and the menorah. The sugya in which the story is contained opens with a question about the mishnah's statement on what constitutes a valid menorah. The gemara pursues associated lines of questions on this subject for two pages. At that point the gemara picks up on another issue covered in the mishnah: that a mezuzah can be invalid through the absence of one scriptural section or even through one imperfect letter. After a brief discussion on what might constitute a

sufficiently imperfect letter, the gemara introduces Rav Judah's story about Moses and Rabbi Akiva. The gemara then returns to a discussion of the proper construction of certain letters and proceeds to consider the consequences of various scribal errors in a Torah scroll.

The Moses-Akiva story appears at first to be a diversion from the halachic concerns of the sugya: the ritual purity of various religious objects. However, from a literary perspective, its placement in the middle of this discussion and its use of a key word indicates that the story is fundamentally related to the halachic concern about religious integrity. The mishnah uses the term m'akev ("to invalidate," especially by omission[97]) seven times. This is the mishnah's focus: What invalidates a menorah, a mezuzah, tefillin, tzitzit? What must be missing in order for the object to be ritually unfit? In the middle of the gemara's discussion of invalidation comes Rav Judah's story, the drama of which is initiated by Moses' question: mi m'akev al yad'cha? Here the word m'akev means "to restrain" or "to detain."[98] Thus, Moses' question is translated as: "Who stays Your hand?" Yet, by the use of this key term, the story can also be read as having Moses ask the same question that was raised by the mishnah: "What would invalidate, especially through omission, Your Torah?"

The mishnah's answer to the question of invalidation of the menorah, a mezuzah, tefillin or tzitzit is that the absence of any branch, any paragraph, any letter, any fringe would render them respectively unfit. This would seem to favor the Rabbi

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[97] Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Talmud* (New York: Title Publishing Co, 1943), 1077.
[98] *Ibid.*

Eliezer/Rabbi Ishmael position on the preeminence of literalism and preservation. In fact, the gemara introduces a baraita from the school of Rabbi Ishmael stating that God showed Moses with His finger the details of certain objects, among them the menorah. This would indicate that the objects must be reproduced exactly as God showed them to Moses. However, when the gemara repeats the portion of the mishnah dealing with writing, the validity of a mezuzah, it introduces Rav Judah's story of Moses and Rabbi Akiva. This may suggest that the integrity of a holy text results from something other than mere detailed reproduction. In fact, what invalidates God's holy word may be such slavish attention to the surface. It is Rabbi Akiva's creative exercises, his pursuit of God's aesthetic flourishes above the functional forms of the letters which reveals and preserves God's true meaning. Its absence would invalidate God's Torah.

Clearing Imaginative Space

Harold Bloom writes of the strong poet's need to "clear imaginative space" for herself. This is accomplished by an intentional misreading of a precursor's work, which is then claimed to be the literary tradition which one is inheriting. In the face of tradition's attempts to present an image of continuity, a critical reader's responsibility is to reveal such points of disruption, which are places of engendering.

Similarly, Maurice Blanchot addresses the value of fragments, the shattering of a prior whole. Discontinuity is not a lesser situation requiring emergency mending of the whole. It has its own particular integrity, which promises a new relationship

with what has come before. In *The Infinite Conversation* Blanchot writes that in inter-subjective situations this shattering creates a demand for language, for discourse. He addresses in particular the discursive nature of teaching as productive of an "inter-relational space" between master and disciple that is essential for differentiation, communication and development.[99] Truth is not a matter of content transmitted but of a relationship created by separation, an abyss which neither master nor disciple can traverse yet which is filled with desire. The master and disciple do not turn away from one another but face each other in unique alterity. Levinas also emphasizes the importance of the interval that exists in discourse. It is the ground where truth arises:

> Truth is sought in the other, but by him who lacks nothing.
> The distance is untraversable, and at the same time traversed.
> The separated being is satisfied, autonomous, and nonetheless searches after the other with a search that is not incited by the lack proper to need nor by the memory of a lost good. Such a situation is language. Truth arises where a being separated from the other is not engulfed in him, but speaks to him.[100]

For Levinas, this separation is vital not only for the individual's own human development. It is an ethical act which places the individual in touch with the divine. In the face of the differentiated other we recognize a trace of the infinite Other, "a memory of an always absent past."[101] It is a past that we as living human beings cannot have experienced. Yet, we recall it and make use of it in living ethically.

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[99] Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 4.
[100] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969) 62.
[101] Ira F. Stone, *Reading Levinas/Reading Talmud* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1998) 16.

In Bloom's paradigm, the strong poet not only differentiates herself from her precursor but also displaces her. And, paradoxically, this is how the past is preserved. Issues of the master-disciple relationship and of tradition transmission are raised in Sotah 13b. There Rabbi Levi considers Deuteronomy 3:26. The context of this verse is that Moses has asked God that he be allowed to continue leading the Israelites into the promised land, that he be permitted to cross over:

> But God was wrathful with me on your account and would
> not listen to me. God said to me, "Enough (*rav lach*)!
> Never speak to Me of this matter again!"

Rabbi Levi suggests rendering *rav lach* as "there is a master for you." In this sense, God says to Moses: "No! You have a master now." The completion of the journey relies not merely on a successor for Moses but on a reversal of roles. Joshua the disciple becomes Moses' master.

Elsewhere in the Talmud the Rabbis consider another dynamic associated with Joshua's displacement of Moses. In Makkot 11a Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Nehemiah disagree about the meaning of the verse, "And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the Law of God" (Joshua 24:26). One says this means that Joshua finished writing the last book of Moses. The other argues that it refers to a passage on the cities of refuge in the book of Joshua, similar language about which had already appeared in Moses' book in Numbers Chapter 35. Thus, we have two contradictory opinions about authorship. According to one, Joshua's book includes something written by Moses. According to the other, Moses' book contains something written by Joshua.

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As Bloom would put it, the displacement of a precursor by the strong poet effectively confounds who wrote what.

This sense of confounding is evident in the Moses-Akiva story. Rabbi Akiva is able to assure not only his students but Moses as well that his teaching is precisely what Moses received at Sinai. The literary technique the Talmud uses here to achieve both this reassurance and this confounding evokes Bloom's notion of "recollecting forwards." The gemara projects Moses as tradition into the future in order to endorse Rabbi Akiva's creative enterprise. That the scene of this dramatic encounter occurs in an academy filled with students only heightens the generative, future-oriented trajectory of the tale. That the story is embedded in a tractate focused on rites associated with the non-existent Temple serves both to cloak its message with a mantle of authenticity and to obfuscate its radically audacious implications.

Subversion of Tradition and Its Concealment

Levinas writes about the Moses-Akiva story as an example of the relationship between separation of text and reader and continuous revelation:

> The distance that separates the text from the reader is the
> space in which the very evolution of the spirit is lodged.
> Only this distance allows meaning to mean fully, and to
> be renewed. In the light of exegesis, then, one may speak
> of continuous Revelation....[102]

Some aspect of Revelation would remain unrevealed if Rabbi Akiva did not assert his singularity apart from Moses. The Moses-Akiva story affords us a glimpse into

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[102] Levinas, *Beyond the Verse*, 170.

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Rabbinic self-consciousness that their enterprise involved not merely transmission but also a confounding, a subversion of tradition in the interests of the present. As Levinas states: "That this process of renewal may be taken as alterations of the text is not ignored by the Talmudic scholars."[103]

In his work on the Talmud as literature, *Reading the Rabbis*, David Kraemer explores how the Rabbis simultaneously subverted received tradition and concealed that subversion. He analyzes the dynamic of the Talmudic deliberation at Bava Kamma 83b-84a on the principle of lex talionis as derived from Exodus 21:24, "an eye for an eye." Despite this clear statement in the Torah, the Mishnah requires monetary compensation for a personal injury. The drama of the Talmudic deliberation is how to reconcile these two statements. The gemara provides nearly twice as many proofs that fail to reconcile the Mishnah and the Torah as it does ones that succeed in doing so. Earlier scripture-based apologia are subjected to intense critical analysis in the gemara. Ultimately, the gemara asserts that the Mishnah's position is what the Torah intended all along. As Kraemer concludes, the gemara has gone out of its way to show how difficult it is to prove that the Mishnah's law is consistent with the written law because "the gemara has an interest in demonstrating its ultimate distance from scripture."[104] The gemara's rhetorical maneuvers subtly constitute an act of independence from scripture by the Rabbis. Yet, this displacement can succeed only if it is concealed as such. This the gemara does by endorsing the Mishnah's position as consistent with the Torah. However, a close

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[103] *Ibid.*, 171.
[104] David Kraemer, *Reading the Rabbis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 48.

reading of the deliberation discloses that it communicates discontinuity with received tradition in spite of its formal affirmation of continuity with it.

An even clearer example of Rabbinic audacity dissembled as submission to received tradition is found in Hagigah 10a-11b. There the gemara confronts a direct statement by the Mishnah on the relationship between Rabbinic law and written scripture. According to the mishnah, there are three categories of laws in terms of their derivation from scripture: (1) those which have nothing in scripture on which to support themselves; (2) those which have minute scriptural basis; and (3) those which do have a substantial basis in scripture. The gemara is thus faced with a statement by its ideological forebears that at least some Rabbinic law has no basis in the Torah. The drama is set: Will the tannaim's ephebes (to use Bloom's term for successor poets) join in this apparent declaration of Rabbinic independence or assert the continuity between the Rabbinic enterprise and the written Torah?

The gemara opens with a baraita that seems clearly to challenge the mishnah's first category, i.e., laws for which there is no scriptural basis, such as dissolution of vows: "It is taught, Rabbi Eliezer said they do have something on which to support themselves [in scripture]." Rabbi Eliezer then cites verses from Leviticus and Numbers on the dissolution of vows. There follow three additional tannaitic proofs along the same lines. However, this portion of the sugya concludes with a statement from the amora Shmuel that he has an even better scriptural proof text than the tannaim that the mishnah's position seems wrong. The later generation amora Rava

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then says that not only is Shmuel's proof better but also those of the tannaim may even be refuted. Thus, the dynamic of the argument initially presents both the cited tannaim and amoraim as defenders of the written Torah in the face of the mishnah's position. However, the amoraim establish themselves in this position by displacing the tannaim as adequate defenders of received tradition.

Having questioned the mishnah's position on the lack of scriptural basis for some Rabbinic law and having established itself as a more loyal defender of the Torah than the tannaim, the gemara then maneuvers to rescue the credibility of the mishnah. The gemara responds to each of the mishnah's examples of laws within its second category by stating: "But they are surely written [in scripture]!" The gemara follows this rejection of the mishnah by identifying limited applications for each example which would make the mishnah's statement accurate. For example, the mishnah had specified laws concerning the Sabbath as ones having little basis in the Torah. The gemara seeks to rehabilitate the mishnah by stating that it is accurate as applied to the limited case of labor produced for its own sake. However, this "minor" exception constitutes a major principle behind Rabbinic law regarding work on the Sabbath. Consequently, the gemara effectively, if subtly, announces that the foundation of these laws originate in the Rabbinic enterprise while simultaneously appearing as defenders of the written tradition. The gemara repeats this same maneuver with the mishnah's other examples of laws falling within its second category.

The gemara's simultaneous affirmation of Rabbinic innovation and defense of received tradition, written scripture, is even more extraordinary in its response to the mishnah's proposed third category of laws. To the mishnah's statement that these laws do have a substantial basis in scripture, the gemara responds exactly as it did to those in the mishnah's second category: "But they are surely written [in scripture]!" Thus, the gemara even here seems to fault the mishnah for not acknowledging the extent of connection between Rabbinic law and scripture. Again, the gemara seeks to rehabilitate the mishnah by identifying exceptions to which the mishnah's position would be applicable. For example, concerning judgments it is *only* with regard to monetary compensation that there is something less than a direct scriptural authority. The gemara's other exceptions are similarly "minor." Yet, these exceptions are far from minor. As with the relationship of monetary compensation to civil judgments, they involve matters quite fundamental to their respective areas of Jewish law. Thus, even where the mishnah has acknowledged a substantial nexus between Rabbinic law and the Torah, the gemara critiques it for insufficiently defending the authority of tradition while subtly highlighting important areas of the law that originate more with the Rabbis than with scripture. Consistent with Bloom's paradigm of strong poets and that of Hobsbawm regarding the invention of tradition, the gemara subverts received tradition while simultaneously concealing that subversion and presenting itself as the true defender of tradition.

Risking Heresy

The consequence of strong poetry is, according to Bloom, an "anxiety of influence." The urge to engender oneself amidst a tradition sends a trembling through the foundations upon which one stands. The strong poet's work may reverberate with themes of subversion and interpretive reversal. A haunting sense of belatedness produces a desire to be not merely progeny but parent. Thus, the Rabbis recalled a past in which their ancestors were created in their own image: Shem and Eber as heads of academies; Abraham, David and Solomon as Pharisaic teachers of laws and enactors of ordinances.

In religious terminology, strong poetry at its most audacious constitutes a conflict with God, a desire to be one's own creator. Thus, Bloom identifies Milton's Satan as "the modern poet, at his strongest."[105] The Rabbis' drive to interpret in order to renew Revelation exposes them to this extreme danger: that which Milton's Satan ultimately embraced – the temptation to become a rival to God-as-creator. The Rabbinic displacement of precursor texts risks a displacement of the Precursor Poet. God learns Torah, becomes a student of Rabbinic interpretations. Rav Judah in Avodah Zarah 3b describes God as spending the first three hours of the day studying Torah. In Bava Metzia 86a we are witness to a debate in the Metivta d'Rakia, the Heavenly Academy, between God and the heavenly host regarding the laws of purity. Rabbah bar Nachmani is brought up to the Heavenly Court as an expert to resolve the

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[105] Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, 20.

matter. Moses is astonished when he encounters God in heaven studying the law of the red heifer as stated by Rabbi Eliezer.[106]

Simon Rawidowicz characterizes this notion of God studying the Torah of the Rabbis as "a holy and creative impudence."[107] The Rabbinic dynamic of interpretation asserts authority "not only over its source (the Written Law), but also over the Source of its source, the Source of every source."[108] The Moses-Akiva story reflects what this Rabbinic audacity risks. Immediately preceding it the gemara tells of Rami bar Tamre, who noticed that the letter vav in the word "vayaharog" ("and he slew") appeared to be defective. The word is from a verse which is one of the Torah portions included in a tefillin: "God slew every first-born in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 13:15). Rami bar Tamre consults Rabbi Zera, who advises him that if a child can read the word as "vayaharog," it is valid. However, if he reads it as "yehareg," it is invalid. The latter reading would render the phrase as: "God will be killed." The structural relationship between this story and that of Moses and Akiva encourages an identification between the excess of strong poetry and deicide. Rabbi Akiva's interpretive creativity is valorized. However, care must be taken lest too much of a departure from literal received tradition rend the connection with God.

Susan Handelman terms Rabbinic hermeneutics which seeks to displace, to re-write origins as "heretic hermeneutics."[109] Bloom, too, she identifies as a "heretic

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[106] Midrash Tanhuma, Numbers, *Hukkat*, 8; Numbers Rabbah, *Hukkat* 19:7.
[107] Rawidowicz, "Israel's Two Beginnings," 132.
[108] *Ibid.*, 135.
[109] Handelman, *Slayers of Moses*, 137 et seq.

hermeneutician" for his opposition to canonical readings. A writer/reader brings herself into the world by appropriating a precursor text in such a way that the later commentary somehow gains power over the initial text, thereby reversing the roles. The Rabbis engaged in such a struggle, seeking to elevate their interpretations to the same status as the text they interpreted. In the course of this battle they reconstructed origins (identifying Rabbi Akiva's laws with those given to Moses) and their ancestors (Shem and Eber as roshei yeshivot). Their struggle for emergence, authority and authenticity as inheritors of a tradition was characterized by tensions between continuity and discontinuity, tradition and innovation, and attachment to text and alienation from it. Though they risk irreparable breaks with the past, such audacious eruptions are necessary for the preservation of tradition and its ongoing authenticity. In the next chapter we will explore a model of this tension between continuity and discontinuity as articulated by a twentieth century Hasidic rabbi: Kalonymus Kalman Shapira.

CHAPTER SIX: INNOVATION AND AUTHENTICITY

Nostomania and the Eternal Return of the Same

Chapter Five concluded with a warning about the dangers risked by strong poets. Their creative works may become so attenuated from the traditions they purport to interpret as to rupture any links with their respective canonical texts. This is a form of heresy: a subversion which does not preserve a tradition but which originates a new one. The reverse of this radical departure from tradition is the conservative retreat towards the imagined past: nostomania.

In her article "Burying the Dead," Miriam Peskowitz challenges the exercise of telling stories about the early rabbis as a "studious group of men, whose rise to power was slow, secure, and pacific, and who provided continuity for Jews after the fiery turmoil of Jerusalem's destruction."[110] Such an exercise is motivated by a desire for identity, for "reunions with ancestors" and "returns to homes we never knew."[111] Peskowitz's critique of this narrative enterprise is that by excluding the voices of women it has produced a pathologically essentialist view of the past. Absent are ambiguities and contradictions to challenge the meta-narrative about Jewish origins. As a result, our view of the present, of ourselves, becomes similarly flat and constrictive.

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[110] Miraim Peskowitz, "Burying the Dead," *Beginning/Again*, eds. Aryeh Cohen and Shaul Magid, 113..

[111] *Ibid.*, 114.

Peskowitz terms such a yearning for a connection to the past "nostomania," which is defined as "an irresistible compulsion to return home." It is "a desire that can never be met," because the home imagined, one unburdened by ambiguity and uncertainty, never existed. The conservative imagination is compelled to create a past to which one can return. This constitutes a syndrome of the eternal return of the same, where everything that is already has been. There is no generativity, only an ever increasingly rigid reading of the past. This is the paradoxical dynamic analyzed by Haym Soloveitchik in his study of contemporary Ultra-Orthodoxy: a professed authenticity to tradition which actually betrays that tradition by its regressive orientation. By contrast, the strong poet's faithfulness to the past is effected by his transformation of that past. The apparent paradox demonstrated by the strong poet, and, as we have seen, by the Rabbis, is that faithfulness to the past is oriented to the future.

The work of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira exemplifies this form of faithfulness to tradition. Faced with a world and a religious community in crisis, he embraced creativity and innovation not as a means to separate from that tradition but as a way to honor and promote it.

Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira

Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, born in 1889 in Grodzisk, Poland, was the inheritor of a rich Hasidic tradition. His father, Rabbi Elemelekh was one of the great masters of Polish Hasidism and was himself the descendant of other eminent Hasidic

figures: Rabbi Yisrael Hofstein, the Maggid of Kozhnitz; Rabbi Elimelekh of Lizhensk, the Seer of Lublin; and Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Epstein of Karkow, his grandfather and author of the Hasidic Torah commentary *Ma'or Va'Shemesh*. At the age of twenty Kalonymus Kalman became rebbe and, four years later, community rabbi of Piaseczno. In 1923 he moved to Warsaw, where he established one of the largest Hasidic yeshivot in the prewar period.

In Warsaw Rabbi Shapira encountered a very different environment than the slow paced rural life of his youth. The Hasidic lifestyle and values prevalent in the countryside were challenged in cosmopolitan Warsaw by a variety of opportunities for young people. Socialist, Zionist and secular Yiddishist movements thrived in addition to the allures of cafes, theaters and music halls. Much of Rabbi Shapira's work, especially during his Warsaw period, reflects both his commitment to the purer, simpler form of Hasidism of his youth and his negotiation of modern ideas. With the outbreak of war in September 1939, Rabbi Shapira became a source of relief and inspiration, especially for refugees who crowded into Warsaw from the countryside. He established a public kitchen in his own home and supervised religious ceremonies even in the face of Nazi prohibitions. During the Ghetto revolt in 1943 Rabbi Shapira, along with other rabbis, risked his life to bake matzot in accordance with halachic provisions. At the same time, he convened a rabbinic court to adopt an emergency measure suspending the Ashkenazi prohibition against the consumption of legumes in order to mitigate the shortage of food suffered by the community under siege.

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With the final collapse of the revolt, Rabbi Shapira was deported to the labor camp in Trawniki. According to reports from Simhah Rotem, a member of the Polish Jewish resistance movement who infiltrated the labor camp in order to rescue selected prisoners, Rabbi Shapira had consecrated a pact with a group of about twenty individuals, artists, physicians and officials of various political parties, that none would leave unless all could do so.[112] When offered the chance to escape, all the members of this group rejected it because the logistics limited their departure to one or two at a time. In November 1943, shocked by the Jewish uprisings in Treblinka and Sobibor, the Nazis surrounded the Trawniki labor camp and shot all the workers.

Even during the darkest days of the Warsaw Ghetto Rabbi Shapira continued to develop his theological thinking, integrating traditional images with new concepts, which he presented to his followers in the form of weekly derashot. Rabbi Shapira buried these homilies in 1943 shortly before the revolt and final destruction of the Ghetto. They were unearthed sometime after the end of World War II and were published in 1960 in Israel under the title *Esh Kodesh* with an appended biographical sketch by Aharon Suraski.[113] Rabbi Shapira's commitment to both tradition and its constant renewal is evident in a sermon he delivered on Succot in 1930. In it he explores themes I have examined in the preceding chapters: strong poetry;

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[112] As reported in Nehemiah Polen, *The Holy Fire: The Teachings of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto* (Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc, 1999) 154-155.

[113] An unabridged English translation has been published under the title *Sacred Fire: Torah from the Years of Fury 1939-1942*, translated by J. Hershy Worch and edited by Deborah Miller (Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc, 2000). Highly recommended is the translation of selected derashot with commentary by Nehemiah Polen, *op. cit.*

innovations serving the preservation of tradition; and the ongoing construction of authenticity.

Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira's Sermon on Succot, 1930[114]

<u>"Firsts:" An Embodiment of What Has Always Existed and What Has Never Been</u>
<u>Seen Before</u>

Rabbi Shapira opens his sermon by referring to a midrash which comments on a verse from the Torah portion for Succot: "And you shall take for yourselves on the first day..." (Leviticus 23:40). The midrash, from which Rabbi Shapira excerpts, explores various associations with the word "first:"

> Rabbi Berekiah in the name of Rabbi Levi said: For the
> merit of the performance of the commandment, "You shall
> take for yourselves on the first day," God says, Behold I
> shall reveal [Myself] to you first and punish you upon the
> first, namely Esau the wicked, of whom it is written, "The
> first came forth" (Genesis 25:25); I shall build for you the
> first, namely the Temple, of which it is written. "Your throne
> of glory, on high from the first, Your place of our sanctuary"
> (Jeremiah 17:12); and I shall bring to you the first, namely the
> Messiah, of whom it is written, "The First unto Zion will   I
> give; behold, behold them and to Jerusalem a messenger of
> good tidings" (Isaiah 41:27). Leviticus Rabbah 30:16

Rabbi Shapira begins his own commentary on the notion of "first" by stating that no thing is essentially first. Something is first only due to its relationship with

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[114] I am indebted to Shaul Magid for highlighting this sermon in his introduction to *Beginning/Again: Toward a Hermeneutics of Jewish Texts*, eds. Cohen and Magid. The translation and commentary are my own.

something else. Even though there had been many human beings before him, Esau is called "harishon" relative to Jacob's birth. Similarly, Adam, though referred to as "Adam Harishon," was not the first creation but was the first human being. Thus, "first" does not indicate the absence of any preceding related phenomena. In fact, "first" implies some degree of continuity. The status of an object's "firstness" rests on what follows it. God, unlike everything else in the universe, was not preceded by anything. If God had not initiated creation, God would have been "without beginning" (bli reishit). However, having done so, God became the "First of all firsts in the world."

The term Rabbi Shapira uses in connection with God's creative power is "mehadesh," the One Who renews. This divine attribute of renewal as creation is a sign of an object's being "first:" "For in every first there is the power of renewal (hithadshut)." As Rabbi Shapira, a student of the Jewish mystical tradition, uses the term, "hithadshut" refers to both innovation (a new construct) and renewal or revelation (the exposure of a hidden, pre-existing aspect of divine reality). All "firsts" share this aspect of innovation/revelation with God: "All beginnings and renewals (kol hareshayut v'hahithadshut) in the world are a spark (nitzotz) from the Beginning, which is God."[115] While a "first" may imply a degree of continuity, it can never be a mere replication of what preceded it. In Rabbi Shapira's construct, "first" embodies both what has always existed and what has never been seen before.

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[115] Rabbi Shapira continues his evocation of traditional Jewish mystical images by using the term "nitzotz," which refers to the divine vitality that infused every object at Creation at the time of the shevirat hakeilim (the breaking of the vessels). See, for example, *Tzava'at HaRivash*, trans. Jacob Immanuel Schochet (Brooklyn: Kehot Publication Society, 1998) nos. 109 and 141.

<u>Authentic and Inauthentic "Firsts"</u>

Having established that "firsts" share with God the attribute of innovation/renewal, Rabbi Shapira states that there is a distinction to be made: between those beginnings that truly have innovation/renewal (hithadshut) and those that do not. Some objects are mistakenly called "a beginning" based solely on, for example, their chronological order rather than on their attribute of hithadshut. Rabbi Shapira explains that such objects are denominated "first" only because people have agreed to call them so. In this sense, people have responded to surface appearances, to their forms rather than to their effect on the world. Rabbi Shapira's primary example of such a mistaken "first" is Esau. It is, Rabbi Shapira writes, only because he preceded Jacob in time that Esau is referred to as "first." Esau provided no innovation/renewal. Although Rabbi Shapira does not expressly reflect on Esau's counterpart, Jacob, it is instructive to do so. Jacob's life is characterized by divisions: departures; disguises; deceits; and ruptures within the ranks of his children. On the eve of his confrontation with his estranged brother his cry may be literally rendered as, "I have become two camps!" (Genesis 32:11). Yet, it is he who represents maintenance of the covenant. A life consisting of departures and fracturing does not necessarily conflict with one that ensures preservation of tradition.

The result of objects that are not truly "firsts" is chaos. Such false "firsts," according to Rabbi Shapira, steal words from Torah and twist them. They deceive people into thinking that they are providing an innovation. Instead, they serve only as a source of confusion. To describe this misleading, Rabbi Shapira uses the word

"sevach," which is the term for the thicket in which the ram was entangled on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22:13). There is even a lack of benefit if one merely "gazes" at the words in sacred scripture or hears from a spiritually underdeveloped individual words that may in themselves be "a little bit uplifting." By only reading the surface meaning of words in a text or hearing a morally instructive lesson mediated through one who contributes nothing new there is no "expansion of holiness," no "purification of the spirit." All one has received are the words as they have been transmitted before. Implied by Rabbi Shapira is that the nature of a false "first" is, by the absence of generativity and innovation, mere replication.

By contrast, true innovation (hidush b'emet) creates a "new light" (or hadash). Such a new light affects all who experience it by infusing them with additional holiness. As we will see below, Rabbi Shapira's distinction between true and false "firsts" reflects, as he himself will indicate, the difference between authenticity and inauthenticity.

Personal Rectification and Hidush

For Rabbi Shapira the Hasid, hidush is not limited to the classical rabbinic arena of textual insight: "It is also available to every single Israelite who repairs (m'taken) in himself a particular character flaw or who further develops a particular positive moral attribute." Anyone who does so "brings forth innovation/renewal with this insight and is a first with regards to it. This is so even if this correction (tikun) has already been taught in the sacred texts."

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By extending the notion of hidush beyond its traditional focus on innovative interpretations of Torah to the realm of character, Rabbi Shapira proclaims that the essence of hithadshut is not intellectual cleverness but the spiritual evolution of the individual. He uses as a metaphor one who builds a house modeled after his friend's. The second builder has not introduced any innovation to the external structure. However, regarding the internal material (hahomer) and the final product, the building as a whole, the builder may have achieved an innovation, brought something new in the world. That Rabbi Shapira intends for the building to be a metaphor for a transformed individual is made clear by his next sentence: "Similarly with sacred text in which there are plans for character improvement...." Even though one did not create those plans, one's application of them can produce innovation: a rectified, more spiritually developed individual.

Rabbi Shapira's focus on the individual's internal development reflects the greater value Hasidism placed on the interior life. Especially during its first one hundred years, Hasidism was criticized for its deviations in the practice of the external forms of religious observance: study and prayer. As Arthur Green has observed, some of the earliest Hasidic leaders even questioned the necessity of observing mitzvot to achieve the goal of attaching oneself to God.[116] Hasidism also overturned some basic principles of Jewish mysticism. It transferred the focus on revelation of the divine from the theosophical realm to the psychological. The human being rather than the Godhead became the locus of hidden divine reality and, thus, the

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[116] Arthur Green, "Hasidism: Discovery and Retreat," *The Other Side of God: A Polarity in World Religions*, ed. Peter Berger (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1981) 104-30.

battleground for its liberation. In this view, the struggle for the manifestation of God's presence in the world primarily takes the form of stripping away layers of artifice to uncover the divine vitality within. This process engenders, for Rabbi Shapira, an ongoing innovation that is at least spiritual and psychological if not also ideological and behavioral. The objective is to reveal a self that is simultaneously a unique "first" (an individual unlike any other that has ever existed) and a self that has become merged with the "Firsts of all firsts" (an existence that precedes and unites all creation).

This identification of personal rectification and hidush sets the stage for Rabbi Shapira's concluding section, in which he seeks to stir his listeners to give birth to themselves. The alternative is merely to adopt what others have said and done. That way leads into the thicket. In the final section he uses language shared by early twentieth century existentialists. However, his peroration is not in the service of a radical autonomy but for the preservation of a covenantal tradition.

Personal Authenticity

Rabbi Shapira begins the final section of his sermon by stating that hithadshut concerns:

> sovereignty over oneself (hamemshalah al atzmo).
> Israel must be sovereign and not passively allow
> another to possess control over it (lo yehiyeh hefker).
> The opinions and interests of the rest of the world
> should not rule over it.

Although the historical context might suggest that Rabbi Shapira is referring to the influence of modern secular ideas on Judaism, his Hasidic orientation indicates that he is also addressing the timeless need for every individual to engender him/herself. He clarifies this by switching in his very next sentence from the national to the individual level:

> Whoever brings forth an innovation within his deepest core is
> called a "first." These innovations are exemplified by the verse:
> "These are the generations of Noah." *Noah gave birth to himself.*
> Thus did he become a master over and rule over himself. (Emphasis
> mine.)

One who does not engage in such a struggle for self-definition has difficulty in achieving a "sovereign personality" (limshol al atzmo). For Rabbi Shapira, hithadshut is not merely an innovative insight into Torah achieved by one gifted at analytical thought and argumentation. It is an essential pathway to spiritual development for each and every person.

Individuation as a way to honor and preserve inherited tradition is a theme throughout Rabbi Shapira's recorded works. Between the years 1928 and 1935 Rabbi Shapira maintained a journal in which he recorded his own progress toward spiritual development. In one of his earliest entries he wrote:

> A person must individuate himself with the essence of who
> he really is: not only must he not remain imprisoned by social
> rules, cultural customs, or accepted thought without the ability
> to see beyond them but he must also have a mind of his own.

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Without this, not only is he not a Jew but he is also not even a person.[117]

In his book on Jewish education, *Chovat HaTalmidim*, Rabbi Shapira warns teachers that rote instruction, an insistence that students only replicate their lessons, leads to rebellion and a rejection of Judaism: "A person whose educational strategy is one of commands and even habituation cannot be so sure that the child will continue to practice as he becomes independent."[118] A teacher who commands, "do this or do that," Rabbi Shapira continues, is only concerned about his position of power not about the continuation of Judaism. Later he writes that the most important educational principle is that a child "must know that he himself is his most basic and important educator."[119]

Rabbi Shapira's value of self-generation evokes the comments by constructivist anthropologists Richard Handler and William Saxton quoted below in Chapter One on Heidegger's notion of existential authenticity as "a life individuated in its authorship, integrated through its emplotment, and creative by dint of its invention." In accordance with the findings of these anthropologists, Rabbi Shapira sees innovation as contributing to, not undermining, authenticity both personal and communal. The difference between innovation and mere replication that he illuminates in his Succot sermon suggests comparison with Harold Bloom's

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[117] Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, *To Heal the Soul*, trans. and ed., Yehoshua Starrett (Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc, 1995) 26.
[118] Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, *Hovat HaTalmidim*, translated as *A Student's Obligation* by Micha Odenheimer (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1991) 5.
[119] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

distinction between canonical and creative readings. Whereas the canonical writer merely reassembles her precursor's words, the creative writer introduces her own vision into the tradition.

There is for the strong poet, the one who would give birth to herself (as Rabbi Shapira says of Noah), great risk. She lives amidst the tension of independence and obligation. In addition to the personal anxiety the strong poet brings upon herself, she poses a danger to the very tradition which she has committed herself to preserving. As Edward Said writes in his essay on "beginnings," one must "accept thereby the risks of rupture and discontinuity."[120] In the religious context such "rupture and discontinuity" may constitute heresy, a fundamental severing from sacred roots. Rabbi Shapira urges us to look deeper than surface appearances in distinguishing between what is heretical and what is sacredly renewing.

Risking Heresy

One who presumes to innovate rather than merely replicate religious tradition risks introducing a heretical beginning. Yet, as the story of Moses and Rabbi Akiva indicates, the failure to displace received tradition with creative constructions that are more presently meaningful endangers that tradition even more. Faithfulness to the past requires creativity, innovation – hidush. This, as Rabbi Shapira tells us, is a human reflection of the divine generative attribute. To be human requires a struggle for an authenticity that simultaneously reveals a present truthfulness and a reflection of the eternal.

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[120] Edward Said, *Beginnings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975) 34.

Rabbi Shapira's sermon on the necessity of innovation in order to achieve

sovereignty, authenticity, is a call to each and every Jew and to the nation as a whole.

It is significant that he issued this summons on Succot. In another midrash on the

same verse on which Rabbi Shapira expounds we read:

> On the first feast-day of Succot all Israel stands in
> the presence of the Holy One, blessed be He, with
> their palm branches and citrons in honor of the name
> of the Holy One, blessed be He, and He says to them:
> "Let bygones be bygones; from now on we shall begin
> a new account." Leviticus Rabbah 30:7

Succot marks the beginning of a new year for an accounting of both sinful and

righteous deeds. The struggle to create authenticity through innovation is indeed

perilous; but what is at stake is precious; the task is urgent; and the time to begin truly

is now.

CHAPTER SEVEN: RABBIS AND POETS

The Ongoing Reinvention of Tradition

Authenticity is frequently invoked within the Jewish community, Stuart Charme reminds us, as the ultimate legitimizer or de-legitimizer of various positions. The use of the term assumes that tradition is a settled phenomenon. It also assumes that continuity across time is the best guarantor of a culture's authenticity. The works of the anthropologists, sociologists, historians, literary theorists, philosophers and Jewish scholars considered in this thesis challenge both of those assumptions.

Anthropologists Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin conclude from their cultural studies that tradition is not handed down from the past. It is symbolically reinvented in an ongoing present. Historian Eric Hobsbawm reaches a similar conclusion through his historical analyses. Many of the traditions most cherished by various cultures do not in fact reflect a continuity with an ancient past. They are often recent responses to contemporary situations "which take the form of reference to old situations." Michael Silber and Haym Soloveitchik have each written about ways in which ultra-Orthodox Judaism radically reconstructed Jewish tradition in order to respond to modern conditions but presented those reconstructions as rooted in an age-old form of Judaism.

This ongoing reinvention of tradition includes not only additions to but also effacements of a people's heritage. Maurice Halbwachs writes about the dynamic of

collective memory, the main purpose of which is not the retrieval of the past but its reconfiguration. Cultures reconstruct their images of the past to accord with their present-day concerns. Ideas, events and symbols that are not useful to such recollections are not recalled. They are forgotten. Pierre Nora celebrates this "dialectic of remembering and forgetting." For him, it is evidence of a culture's vibrancy. A society which exercises its collective memory, as contrasted with merely studying its history, is organically living and regularly redefining its identity.

Yosef Yerushalmi distinguishes between memory and recollection. For the latter he uses the term anamnesis. Memory refers to "that which is essentially unbroken, continuous."[121] Anamnesis describes "the recollection of that which has been forgotten."[122] Such recollection is inspired by a contemporary need for meaning and involves a creative reformulation of the past:

> Every "renaissance," every "reformation," reaches back into
> an often distant past to recover forgotten or neglected elements
> with which there is a sudden sympathetic vibration, a sense of
> empathy, of recognition. Inevitably, every such anamnesis also
> transforms the recovered past into something new; inexorably,
> it denigrates the immediate past as something that deserves to
> be forgotten. In any case, if the achievement is not to be
> ephemeral, it must itself become a tradition, with all that this
> entails.[123]

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[121] Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 107.
[122] *Ibid.*
[123] *Ibid.*, 113.

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This present-day reformulation of the past which is then recognized as tradition lies at the heart of what the constructivists mean by "authenticity:" the symbolic reinvention of tradition in an ongoing present.

The Quest for Fire

The dynamic reformulation of the past for the sake of the present which Yerushalmi the historian terms anamnesis emerges in the work of literary critic Harold Bloom as the concept "strong poetry." Impelled to give birth to herself amidst the nurturing structure of tradition, the strong poet both embraces and breaks with those precursor texts which sustained her. Bloom describes the strong poet's world as consisting of the cool, familiar element of water and the creative, dangerous element of fire. The poet's first realm is water, Bloom writes. Her instinct for preservation seeks to hold her there, but her impulse for emergence sends her questing for the fire of her own voice: "Most of what we call poetry...is this questing for fire, that is, for discontinuity. Repetition belongs to the watery shore."[124]

Yet, as Bloom notes, the strong poet does not completely abandon the waters of tradition for the fires of creativity. Even as she pursues the engendering heat of misprision, she returns to the cooling streams of tradition: "The strong poet survives because he lives the discontinuity of an 'undoing'...but he would cease to be a poet unless he kept living the continuity of 'recollecting forwards.'"[125]

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[124] Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, 79.
[125] *Ibid.*, 83.

Emmanuel Levinas finds for us a figure in Talmud both whose occupation and whose hermeneutics demonstrate a skillful negotiation of the elements of fire and water. In Bava Kama 60b we read of Rav Ami and Rav Assi sitting before Rabbi Isaac. One of them asks Rabbi Isaac to teach a matter of halacha. The other asks him to teach a matter of aggadah. When Rabbi Isaac starts to provide an aggadic instruction, he is stopped by the first disciple. When he starts to provide a halachic instruction, he is stopped by the other. In response to their polarized perspectives, Rabbi Isaac tells them a parable: "There was a man with two wives, one young and one old. The young one would pluck out his white hair, and the old one would pluck out his black hair. Eventually he became bald." Levinas understands the young wife to represent those who are contemptuous of traditional forms. They would "interpret to the point of uprooting the roots of terms."[126] The old wife represents the traditional point of view, those who read the texts literally: "For her, there is no text to rejuvenate."[127] By each pursuing her own inclination of how to correct her husband's appearance, the two wives end up destroying his growth.[128]

Having caught their attention with this tale, Rabbi Isaac proceeds to tell his students "something that will quench both your thirsts." He begins with the lesson that one whose fire accidentally destroys another's property must pay compensation. This is halacha. Rabbi Isaac's lesson does not stop with the legal ruling. He concludes with verses from Lamentations 4:11 ("He kindled a fire in Zion which

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[126] Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 194.
[127] *Ibid.*
[128] From a feminist perspective it is evident that even in the imagining of the Rabbis the wives are relegated to a grooming role, to a plucking out of what the male has grown. In this story they have no generative contribution of their own to Torah.

consumed its foundations") and Zechariah 2:9 ("And I Myself will be a wall of fire all around it and I will be a glory inside it") to convey a moral instruction: there is also a need to repair the shame and anguish one has caused. This is aggadah.

Levinas reads the gemara as condemning the artificial division of halacha and aggadah and, by way of the parable, between revolutionaries and traditionalists. It is no accident, writes Levinas, that this lesson is conveyed by Rabbi Isaac, who is a blacksmith skilled in the interplay of fire and water for the forging of instruments. In this instance he teaches his disciples the value of working with both the expanding heat of aggadah and the contracting claims of halacha.

Innovation and the Return to Tradition

There is the danger that some quests for creative fire will produce an estrangement from the sources of one's tradition. This is the risk that Edward Said warns must be accepted by those seeking to usher in a new beginning. Authority attaches to a new beginning not because of its inherent worth but because of its responsiveness to contemporary questions: "Thus one beginning is permissible; another one like it, at a different time or place, is not permissible."[129] The Talmud recognizes the exceptional creativity of Rabbi Eleazar ben Arach. Yet its ultimate judgment is to marginalize his significance because he violated a fundamental value within Rabbinic culture: communal study and discourse. The nature of the decree is one that Rabbi Eleazar issued upon himself by refusing to join his companions in Yavneh.

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[129] Said, *Beginnings*, 34.

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The struggle to engender oneself, to create a beginning, does not necessarily have to result in a separation from one's community of meaning. It can, in fact, constitute a return to and affirmation of origins. Halbwachs describes the dynamic by which religious groups return to their traditions for authority and affirmation as they simultaneously project new conceptions into the past and incorporate elements of old practices into new frameworks. Similarly Levinas writes about how "the borrower links what he is borrowing to a tradition and formulates...the meaning he is giving to what he is borrowing."[130] For Bloom a poet's continued attachment to a literary tradition is a condition for her creative clearing of imaginative space for herself. The objective is not to rend one's connection to tradition but to read that tradition "more strenuously and more audaciously."[131]

The Rabbis exercised a profound vigor and audacity in reading for the sake of their times the tradition they inherited. We are the beneficiaries of that creative reading with its paradox trope. The Rabbis shaped a discourse that is both determinative and ambiguating. It simultaneously subverts and reinforces foundations of faith. From within that rabbinic tradition, Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira provides us with an example of audacity and imagination in returning to Jewish tradition, not for its replication but for its renewal. This methodology is essential, teaches Rabbi Shapira, for the ongoing project of authenticity: the revelation of an essence that is at once profoundly new and profoundly eternal.

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[130] *Op. cit.*, 75.
[131] Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism*, 91.

Rabbis and Poets

Jacques Derrida, responding to questions raised by Edmund Jabes about the antithetical relationship between writing and conclusion,[132] writes of the necessity to return to an original book in order to write beyond it:

> And yet did we not know that the closure of the book
> was not a simple limit among others? And that only in
> the book, coming back to it unceasingly, drawing all our
> resources from it, could we indefinitely designate the
> writing beyond the book.[133]

This return to the book is a writing which at once finds its home within the book and will not be contained by it. It:

> does not reissue the book but describes its origins from the
> vantage of a writing which does not yet belong to it, or no
> longer belongs to it, a writing which feigns, by repeating the
> book, inclusion in the book. Far from letting itself be
> oppressed or enveloped within the volume, this repetition is the
> first writing. The writing of the origin that retraces the origin,
> tracking down the signs of its disappearance, the lost writing of
> the origin. *To write is to have passion of the origin.*[134]

Though he makes no mention of it in this essay, Derrida is describing the Talmudic enterprise: the Rabbinic "passion of the origin;" a reclamation of words uttered but never recorded; a return to the book which produces not its replication but a new text which yet existed in the original.

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[132] See, Edmund Jabes, *The Book of Questions Volume I* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1963) and *The Book of Questions Volumes II and III* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press,1964).
[133] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 294.
[134] *Ibid.*, 295 (emphasis in the original).

In an essay written three years earlier, "Edmund Jabes and the Question of the Book," Derrida does touch upon the nature of Rabbinic writing. For Derrida writing and the Jew are exceptionally identified with each other. Writing is emblematic of exile. It is born of God's silence. The human being writes to understand and to overcome this separation from her origins. The Jews are the people of exile, who have intensely embraced writing as an instrument of return. However, Derrida argues that there exists an irreconcilable conflict: between poetic autonomy and Judaic heteronomy. Poetical interpretation does not seek a subjugating truth. It affirms the play of possibility: "The wisdom of the poet thus culminates its freedom in the passion of translating obedience to the law of the word into autonomy."[135] By contrast, "the rabbinical interpretation...is the one which seeks a final truth, which sees interpretation as an unfortunately necessary road back to an original truth."[136] As a result of this difference:

> The shared necessity of exegesis, the interpretive
> imperative, is interpreted differently by the rabbi
> and the poet. The difference between the horizon
> of the original text and exegetic writing makes the
> difference between the rabbi and the poet irreducible.
> Forever unable to reunite with each other, yet so close
> to each other, how could they ever regain the realm?
> The original opening of interpretation essentially
> signifies that there will always be rabbis and poets.
> And two interpretations of interpretation.[137]

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[135] *Ibid.*, 66.
[136] *Ibid.*, 311 note 3.
[137] *Ibid.*, 67.

In this essay Derrida quotes from Jabes' *The Book of Questions:*

> "And Reb Lima: Freedom, at first, was engraved ten
> times in the Tables of the Law, but we deserve it so
> little that the Prophet broke them in his anger."[138]

Derrida embraces the image of the broken Tablets as representing freedom for the poet from heteronomy: "Poetic autonomy, comparable to none other, presupposes broken Tables."[139] By contrast, Rabbinic tradition reads the breaking of the Tablets as both an act of submission and a declaration of human creativity.   In the midrash recorded in Shabbat 87a God congratulates Moses for having smashed the Tablets containing God's commandments. This is perhaps the ultimate example of Rabbinic audacity – Moshe Rabbeinu shattering God's written words, necessitating their human reconstruction. His shattering is a "first." It marks the beginning for the Rabbinic enterprise of interpretation and renewal.

For Derrida the breaking of the Tablets constitutes a splitting of the religious experience into two camps: the rabbi constrained by the heteronomy of legal literalism and the poet free to play with words and their possibilities. His insistent focus on deconstruction of the text impedes him from seeing the shattered Tablets as empowering the exegete to traverse back and forth between tradition and innovation. This is how Rabbi Shapira made use of the words he received. This is the way by which we become both rabbi and poet.

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[138] *Ibid.*
[139] *Ibid.*

The Rabbinic enterprise, confronted with the necessity of rebuilding a religion decentered from its origins, crafted a discourse that embraced both innovation and tradition, audacity and restriction, fanciful exaggeration and practical legislation. It was fire amidst hail, the elements of authenticity.

Menahot 28a

הא דקאי מזרח ומערב ואדי, הא דקאי צפון ודרום ואדי. אמר מר: ושבפנים ושבמצורע,
שלא לשמן ־ פסולות, שלא מכוונות ־ כשרות. והתניא: בין שלא לשמן בין שלא מכוונות ־
כשרות אמר רב יוסף, לא קשיא: הא רבי אליעזר והא רבנן, רבי אליעזר דמקיש אשם
לחטאת, מקיש נמי לוג לאשם, רבנן לא מקשי. ולרבי אליעזר, וכי דבר הלמד בהיקש חוזר
ומלמד בהיקש? אלא אמר רבא: הא והא רבנן, כאן להכשיר (הקרבן), כאן להרצות (שלא
עלו לבעלים לשום חובה). **מתני'**. שבעה קני מנורה מעכבין זה את זה. שבעה נרותיה מעכבין
זה את זה. שתי פרשיות שבמזוזה מעכבות זו את זו, אפילו כתב אחד מעכבן. ד' פרשיות
שבתפילין מעכבין זו את זו, אפילו כתב אחד מעכבן. ד' ציציות מעכבות זו את זו, שארבעתן
מצוה אחת: רבי ישמעאל אומר: ארבעתן ארבע מצות. **גמ'**. מ"ט? הויה כתיב בהו. תנו רבנן:
מנורה היתה באה מן העשת ומן הזהב, עשאה מן הגרוטאות ־ פסולה, משאר מיני מתכות ־
כשרה. מאי שנא מן הגרוטאות פסולה? דכתיב: (שמות כ"ה) מקשה והויה, שאר מיני מתכות
נמי זהב והויה אמר קרא: תיעשה, לרבות שאר מיני מתכות. ואימא: לרבות גרוטאות לא
ס"ד, דאמקשה כתיבה הויה. תיעשה נמי אמקשה מקשה מקשה לעכב. זהב זהב נמי
לעכב האי מאי? אי אמרת בשלמא: מן הגרוטאות פסולה, משאר מיני מתכות כשרה, היינו
זהב זהב מקשה מקשה לדרשא, אלא אי אמרת: מן הגרוטאות כשרה, משאר מיני מתכות
פסולה זהב זהב מקשה מקשה מאי דרשת ביה? מאי דרשא? דתניא! כבר זהב
טהור יעשה אותה את כל הכלים האלה, באה זהב ־ באה ככר, אינה באה זהב ־ אינה באה
ככר (שמות כה) גביעיה כפתוריה ופרחיה, באה זהב ־ באה גביעים כפתורים ופרחים, אינה
באה זהב ־ אינה באה גביעים כפתורים ופרחים. ואימא נמי: באה זהב ־ באה קנים, אינה
באה זהב ־ אינה באה קנים ההוא פמוט מיקרי. (במדבר ח') וזה מעשה המנורה מקשה זהב,
באה זהב ־ באה מקשה, אינה באה זהב ־ אינה באה מקשה. מקשה דסיפא למאי אתא?
למעוטי חצוצרות, דתניא! חצוצרות היו באים מן העשת מן הכסף, עשאם מן הגרוטאות ־
כשרים, משאר מיני מתכות ־ פסולים! ומאי שנא משאר מיני מתכות פסולים? דכתיב! כסף
והויה, מן הגרוטאות נמי מקשה והויה מיעט רחמנא גבי מנורה מקשה היא היא ־ ולא
חצוצרות. תנו רבנן: כל הכלים

28b

שעשה משה, כשרים לו וכשרים לדורות, חצוצרות ־ כשרות לו ופסולות לדורות. חצוצרות ־
מ"ט? אילימא דאמר קרא: (במדבר י') עשה לך, לך ־ ולא לדורות, אלא מעתה, (דברים י')
ועשית לך ארון עץ, הכי נמי דלך ־ ולא לדורות אלא, אי למאן דאמר: לך ־ משלך, אי למ"ד:
כביכול, בשלך אני רוצה יותר משלהם, האי נמי מיבעי ליה להכי שאני התם, דאמר קרא לך
לך תרי זימני: עשה לך והיו לך. תני רב פפא בריה דרב חנין קמיה דרב יוסף: מנורה היתה
באה מן העשת מן הזהב, עשאה של כסף ־ כשרה, של בעץ ושל אבר ושל גיסטרון ־ רבי
פוסל, ור' יוסי ברבי יהודה מכשיר, של עץ ושל עצם ושל זכוכית ־ דברי הכל פסולה. א"ל:
מאי דעתך? א"ל: בין מר ובין מר כללי ופרטי דרשי, מיהו מר סבר: מה הפרט מפורש של
מתכת, אף כל של מתכת, ומר סבר: מה הפרט מפורש דבר חשוב, אף כל דבר חשוב. אמר
ליה: סמי דידך מקמי דידי, דתניא: כלי שרת שעשאן של עץ ־ רבי פוסל, ורבי יוסי ברבי

Hagigah 10a

משנה. היתר נדרים פורחין באויר ואין להם על מה שיסמכו. הלכות שבת חגיגות והמעילות
– הרי הם כהררים התלוין בשערה, שהן מקרא מועט והלכות מרובות. הדינין והעבודות,
הטהרות והטמאות, ועריות – יש להן על מה שיסמכו, והן הן גופי תורה. גמרא. תניא, רבי
אליעזר אומר: יש להם על מה שיסמכו, שנאמר (ויקרא כ"ז) כי יפלא (במדבר ו') כי יפלא
שתי פעמים, אחת הפלאה לאיסור ואחת הפלאה להיתר. רבי יהושע אומר: יש להם על מה
שיסמכו, שנאמר (תהלים צ"ה) אשר נשבעתי באפי – באפי נשבעתי, וחזרתי בי. רבי יצחק
אומר: יש להם על מה שיסמכו, שנאמר (שמות ל"ה) כל נדיב לבו. חנניה בן אחי רבי יהושע
אומר: יש להם על מה שיסמכו שנאמר (תהלים קי"ט) נשבעתי ואקימה לשמר משפטי
צדקך. אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל: אי הואי התם אמרי להו: דידי עדיפא מדידכו, שנאמר
(במדבר ל') לא יחל דברו הוא אינו מוחל, אבל אחרים מוחלין לו. אמר רבא: לכולהו אית
להו פירכא, לבר מדשמואל דלית ליה פירכא. דאי מדרבי אליעזר – דלמא כדרבי יהודה
שאמר משום רבי טרפון. דתניא, רבי יהודה אומר משום רבי טרפון: לעולם אין אחד מהם
נזיר, שלא ניתנה נזירות אלא להפלאה. אי מדרבי יהושע – דלמא הכי קאמר: באפי נשבעתי
ולא הדרנא בי. אי מדרבי יצחק – דלמא לאפוקי מדשמואל. דאמר שמואל: גמר בלבו – צריך
שיוציא בשפתיו, והא קמשמע לן: דאף על גב דלא הוציא בשפתיו. אי מדחנניה בן אחי רבי
יהושע – דלמא כרב גידל אמר רב. דאמר רב גידל אמר רב: מנין שנשבעין לקיים את המצוה
– שנאמר נשבעתי ואקימה לשמור משפטי צדקך. אלא דשמואל לית ליה פירכא. אמר רבא
ואיתימא רב נחמן בר יצחק: היינו דאמרי אינשי: טבא חדא פלפלתא חריפתא ממלי צנא
דקרי. הלכות שבת – מיכתב כתיבן – לא צריכא, לכדרבי אבא. דאמר רבי אבא: החופר גומא
בשבת ואין צריך אלא לעפרה – פטור עליה – כמאן, כרבי שמעון, דאמר: מלאכה שאינה
צריכה לגופה פטור עליה. – אפילו תימא לרבי יהודה, התם – מתקן, הכא – מקלקל הוא.
מאי כהררין התלויין בשערה?

10b

מלאכת מחשבת אסרה תורה, ומלאכת מחשבת לא כתיבא. חגיגות מיכתב כתיבן – לא
צריכא, לכדאמר ליה רב פפא לאביי: ממאי דהאי וחגתם אתו חג לה' זביחה? דלמא חוגו
חגא קאמר רחמנא – אלא מעתה, דכתיב (שמות ה') ויחגו לי במדבר הכי נמי דחוגו חגא
הוא! וכי תימא הכי נמי – והכתיב (שמות י') ויאמר משה גם אתה תתן בידנו זבחים ועלת –
דלמא הכי קאמר רחמנא: אכלו ושתו וחוגו חגא קמאי. – לא סלקא דעתך, דכתיב (שמות
כ"ג) ולא ילין חלב חגי עד בקר, ואי סלקא דעתך דחוגא הוא – תרבא לחגא אית ליה? –
ודלמא הכי קאמר רחמנא: חלב הבא בזמן חג – לא ילין? – אלא מעתה: הבא בזמן חג – הוא
דלא ילין, הא דכל השנה כולה ילין? (ויקרא ו') כל הלילה עד הבקר כתיב – דלמא, אי
מההוא הוה אמינא: ההוא לעשה, כתב רחמנא האי ללאו – ללאו כתב קרא אחרינא: (דברים
ט"ז) ולא ילין מן הבשר אשר תזבח בערב ביום הראשון לבקר. – ודלמא לעבור עליו בשני
לאוין ועשה? – אלא: אתיא מדבר מדבר. כתיב הכא ויחגו לי במדבר, וכתיב התם (עמוס ה')
הזבחים ומנחה הגשתם לי במדבר, מה להלן זבחים – אף כאן זבחים, ומאי כהררין התלויין
בשערה – דברי תורה מדברי קבלה לא ילפינן. מעילות. מיכתב כתיבן אמר רמי בר חמא: לא

נצרכא אלא לכדתנן: השליח שעשה שליחותו - בעל הבית מעל, לא עשה שליחותו - שליח
מעל. וכי עשה שליחותו אמאי מעל? וכי זה חוטא וזה מתחייב? היינו כהררין התלויין
בשערה. אמר רבא: ומאי קושיא? דלמא שאני מעילה, דילפא חטא חטא מתרומה, מה התם
שלוחו של אדם כמותו - אף כאן שלוחו של אדם כמותו? אלא אמר רבא: לא נצרכא אלא
לכדתניא: נזכר בעל הבית ולא נזכר שליח - שליח מעל. שליח עניא מאי קא עביד? היינו
כהררין התלויין בשערה. אמר רב אשי: מאי קושיא, דלמא מידי דהוה אמוציא מעות הקדש
לחולין? אלא אמר רב אשי: לא נצרכא אלא לכדתנן: נטל אבן או קורה של הקדש - הרי זה
לא מעל, נתנה לחבירו - הוא מעל, וחבירו לא מעל. מכדי מישקל שקלה, מה לי הוא ומה לי
חבירו? היינו כהררין התלויין בשערה. - ומאי קושיא, דלמא כדשמואל, דאמר שמואל: הכא

11a

בגזבר המסורות לו אבני בנין עסקינן, דכל היכא דמנחה - ברשותא דידיה מנחה. אלא
מסיפא: בנאה בתוך ביתו - הרי זה לא מעל, עד שידור תחתיה בשוה פרוטה. מכדי, שנויי
שנייה, מה לי דר ומה לי לא דר? היינו כהררין התלויין בשערה. - ומאי קושיא, דלמא
לכדרב, דאמר רב: כגון שהניחה על פי ארובה, אי דר ביה - אין, לא דר ביה - לא? אלא
לעולם כדרבא, ודקא קשיא לך מידי דהוה אמוציא מעות הקדש לחולין - התם מידע ידע
דאיכא זוזי דהקדש, איבעיא ליה לעיוני. הכא - מי ידע? היינו כהררין התלויין בשערה. מקרא
מועט והלכות מרובות. תנא: נגעים ואהלות - מקרא מועט והלכות מרובות. נגעים מקרא
מועט? נגעים מקרא מרובה הוא - אמר רב פפא, הכי קאמר: נגעים - מקרא מרובה והלכות
מועטות, אהלות - מקרא מועט והלכות מרובות. ומאי נפקא מינה? - אי מסתפקא לך
מילתא בנגעים - עיין בקראי, ואי מסתפקא לך מילתא באהלות - עיין במתניתין. דינין.
מיכתב כתיבן - לא נצרכא אלא לכדרבי. דתניא, רבי אומר: (שמות כ"א) נפש תחת נפש -
ממון. אתה אומר ממון, או אינו אלא נפש ממש? נאמרה נתינה למטה ונאמרה נתינה
למעלה, מה להלן ממון - אף כאן ממון. עבודות. מיכתב כתיבן - לא נצרכא אלא להולכת
הדם. דתניא: (ויקרא א') והקריבו - זו קבלת הדם. ואפקה רחמנא בלשון הולכה, דכתיב
(ויקרא א') והקריב הכהן את הכל והקטיר המזבחה. ואמר מר: זו הולכת אברים לכבש.
למימרא דהולכה לא תפקה מכלל קבלה. טהרות. מיכתב כתיבן - לא נצרכא אלא לשיעור
מקוה, דלא כתיבא. דתניא: (ויקרא ט"ו) ורחץ (את בשרו) במים - במי מקוה. את כל בשרו -
מים שכל גופו עולה בהן, וכמה הן - אמה על אמה ברום שלש אמות. ושיערו חכמים: מי
מקוה ארבעים סאה. טמאות. מיכתב כתיבן - לא נצרכא אלא לכעדשה מן השרץ, דלא
כתיבא. דתניא: (ויקרא י"א) בהם, יכול בכולן - תלמוד לומר מהם. יכול במקצתן - תלמוד
לומר בהם, הא כיצד? עד שיגיע במקצתו שהוא ככולו. שיערו חכמים בכעדשה, שכן חומט
תחלתו בכעדשה. רבי יוסי ברבי יהודה אומר: כזנב הלטאה. עריות. מיכתב כתיבן - לא
נצרכא

11b

לבתו מאנוסתו דלא כתיבא. דאמר רבא אמר לי רבי יצחק בר אבדימי: אתיא הנה הנה,
אתיא זימה זימה. הן הן גופי תורה הני אין, הנך לא? אלא, אימא: הן והן גופי תורה. הדרן
עלך הכל חייבין. משנה. אין דורשין בעריות בשלשה, ולא במעשה בראשית בשנים, ולא
במרכבה - ביחיד, אלא אם כן היה חכם ומבין מדעתו. כל המסתכל בארבעה דברים רתוי לו
כאילו לא בא לעולם: מה למעלה, מה למטה, מה לפנים, ומה לאחור. וכל שלא חס על כבוד

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קונו - רתוי לו שלא בא לעולם. גמרא. אמרת ברישא ולא במרכבה ביחיד והדר אמרת: אלא אם כן היה חכם ומבין מדעתו - הכי קאמר: אין דורשין בעריות לשלשה, ולא במעשה בראשית לשנים, ולא במרכבה ליחיד, אלא אם כן היה חכם ומבין מדעתו. אין דורשין בעריות בשלשה, מאי טעמא? אילימא משום דכתיב (ויקרא י"ח) איש איש אל כל שאר בשרו איש איש - תרי, שאר בשרו - חד, ואמר רחמנא לא תקרבו לגלות ערוה, - אלא מעתה, דכתיב (ויקרא כ"ד) איש איש כי יקלל אלהיו, (ויקרא כ') איש איש אשר יתן מזרעו למלך, הכי נמי? אלא, הנהו מיבעי ליה לרבות את הנכרים, שמוזהרין על ברכת השם ועל עבודה זרה כישראל, - האי נמי מיבעי ליה לרבות את הנכרים, שמוזהרין על העריות כישראל אלא מדכתיב (ויקרא י"ח) ושמרתם את משמרתי, ושמרתם - תרי, משמרתי - חד, ואמר רחמנא לבלתי עשות מחקות התועבת. אלא מעתה, דכתיב (שמות ל"א) ושמרתם את השבת, (שמות י"ב) ושמרתם את המצות, ושמרתם את משמרת הקדש, הכי נמי? אלא אמר רב אשי: מאי אין דורשין בעריות בשלשה - אין דורשין בסתרי עריות (בשלשה) (מסורת הש"ס: [לשלשה]). מאי טעמא - סברא הוא - בי תרי כי יתבי קמי רבייהו, חד שקיל וטרי בהדי רביה, ואידך מצלי אודניה לגמרא. תלתא, חד שקיל וטרי בהדי רביה, והנך תרי - שקלו וטרו בהדי הדדי, ולא ידעי מאי קאמר רבייהו, ואתו למישרי איסורא בעריות. - אי הכי כל התורה נמי? - עריות שאני, דאמר מר: גזל ועריות נפשו מחמדתן, ומתאוה להם. - אי הכי גזל נמי? - עריות, בין בפניו בין שלא בפניו נפיש יצריה. גזל, בפניו נפיש יצריה, שלא בפניו - לא נפיש יצריה. ולא במעשה בראשית בשנים מנא הני מילי? דתנו רבנן: (דברים ד') כי שאל נא לימים ראשנים - יחיד שואל, ואין שנים שואלין. יכול ישאל אדם קודם שנברא העולם - תלמוד לומר (דברים ד') למן היום אשר ברא אלהים אדם על הארץ. יכול לא ישאל אדם מששת ימי בראשית - תלמוד לומר לימים ראשנים אשר היו לפניך. יכול ישאל אדם מה למעלה ומה למטה, מה לפנים ומה לאחור - תלמוד לומר (דברים ד') ולמקצה השמים ועד קצה השמים - מלמקצה השמים ועד קצה השמים אתה שואל, ואין אתה שואל מה למעלה מה למטה, מה לפנים מה לאחור.

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רעח   דרך   חג הסוכות   המלך

עילאה תשובת ד' ששב כביכול מדין לרחמים כי על זה היתה הכונה כנ"ל, וזה ענין תשובה ומעש"ט התשובה לא מחטא רק תשובה עילאה ממעש"ט, משא"כ כששב על עונות היא תשובה קטנה שאת תשובתו הרמה תשובה עילאה הוא משתמש לשוב מחטא וכונת ד' ית' שעשה מקודם דין ואח"כ רחמים היתה שיהיה חטא בעולם.

וזה שמרמז הפסוק אם עומת תשמור, ולא תמחל ותהיה עבודתנו גם הלאה לשוב מחטא, יי"ה ארני"י מי יעמוד, כי יי"ה היא הוי' כנודע ואדנ"י הוא אלקים אתה עשית הוי' אלקים כדי שנוכל להתעלות מעבודה לעבודה ואם עונות תשמר, יי"ה אדנ' מי יעמוד, ואם תאמר שעל זה בעצמו עשה ד' הוי' אלקים, תשובה עילאה כדי שנשוב, לא, כי עמך הסליחה מה שעמך בעצמך כביכול סליחה תשובה עילאה, היתה למען תורא, למען נוסיף בעבודה ויראת ד', לא למען נחטא, לכן אנו מבקשים שד' ימחל לנו ואז נוכל ע"י תשובת ד' ללכת הלאה בעבודה ויראה ויהיה יחוד הוי' אלקים במלואה.

אבל מי גבר יוכל לאמור על עצמו שהוא נקי מכל מום וחטא ואינו צריך לשוב על חטא, ואם אומר כן אין לך חטא גדול מזה כי מתגאה הוא, ולפי הנ"ל אף אם שב נשאר פגם מזה בעצמו על שתשובת ד' שהיתה עיקר כונת ד' עליה לא שב, היינו שילך מחיל אל חיל רק תשובת עצמו על חטאים. כי לפי הנ"ל שעיקר תשובת ד' היתה על עבודה, נמצא·מי שהולך כך בעבודה, אז עושה תשובת ד' לתשובה ומתקנה, כי נשלם כונתו ית', משא"כ מי ששב רק על חטאים, אז כונת ד' בתשובה עילאה פונם.

לכן אומר הפסוק כי ביום הזה יכפר עליכם, על איזה חטא לכפר עליכם, מכל חטאתיכם, מה שטהרתם רק על חטאתיכם, אשר באמת היה צריך להיות לפני ד' תטהרו, שתשובתכם תהיה מושלמת ולא עשיתם כן רק תשובה נמוכה עשיתם, ע"י עיצומו של יום מכפר שמעתה תהיו מנוקים מכל עון ופגם, ותוכלו לעבוד את ד' בבחינת ילכו מחיל אל חיל ע"י תשובה עילאה כנ"ל.

חג הסוכות (תר"ץ)

איתא במדרש פ' אמור רב ברכיה בשם ר' לוי אמר, בזכות ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון הרי אני נגלה לכם ראשון ופורע לכם מן הראשון עשו הרשע שנקרא ראשון ויצא הראשון ובונה לכם בהמ"ק שנקרא ראשון ומביא לכם הראשון זה המשיח וכו'.

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כי בכל ראשון יש התחדשות, ואם לאו לא היה נקרא ראשון, אבל אינו ראשון
בהחלט רק ראשון לדבר זה, כמו ויצא הראשון, אף שהיו הרבה נולדים מקודם
מ״מ בלידה זו היה הוא הראשון ראשון ליעקב, ואדם הראשון אף שהיה כבר הרבה
ברואים מקודם מ״מ לבני אדם הוא היה הראשון. משא״כ ד׳ ית׳ ראשון לכל,
כלומר ד׳ ית׳ בעצמו אם לא ברא את העולם הוא בלי ראשית. ותואר הראשון
שמתארים אותו ית׳ הוא כמו כל התוארים שאין מתארים אותו ית׳ לעצמו כי אינו
מצומצם חי״ו בתואר וגם לא ישיגוהו משיגי הגוף, רק לפי מעשי אני נקרא, ובערך
העולם שהאציל הוא ית׳ הוא ראשון להם, והמחדש אותם ראשון לראשונים לכל
הראשונים שבעולם הוא ית׳ הראשון והמחדש, לכן כל הראשיות וההתחדשות
בעולם ניצוץ מן ראשיתו ית׳ הוא.

אבל חילוק יש, בראשיות שבעולם יש ראשית עם התחדשות ויש ראשית
שאינו ראשית מפני שהוא בלא התחדשות ורק להעולם נראה שהוא ראשית ובני
האדם מכנים אותם לראשית, למשל מי שמחדש דבר בתורה, הוא הראשון לו
באמת כי הוא חידושה, הן אמת שאינו ראשון בהחלט רק לדבר הזה שחידש, מ״מ
לדבר הזה הוא הראשון והמחדש, ועליו יכולים לאמר שניצוץ מן הראשון
לראשונים והמחדש האמיתי שחידש את הכל נמשך בו. משא״כ הראשית של עשו
שיצא ראשון לא היה הוא הראשון המחדש, רק שכיון שהוקדם בזמן לצאת קודם
יעקב מנוהו בני אדם לראשון, ואף אם מן ב׳ נשים היו נולדים והאחד הקדים
לחבירו בזמן ג״כ קראוהו ראשון, ואם היו נולדים בזמן אחד וברגע אחת ולא
חלקם הזמן לא היה נמנה זה לראשון.

נמצא שאין עשו הראשון ולא המחדש את יעקב, רק שכיון שא״א לשניהם
בזמן אחד וזה הוקדם בזמן וזה אחריו לכן בני האדם מנו אחת ושתים לאמר זה
יצא ראשונה בזמן. ובכלל כל ראשיותיו של עשו וכל חדושיו שמחדש אינם באמת
חידוש רק טעות והסכמת בני האדם שחושבים אותם לראשית וחידוש, וכמו
שאיתא בזוה״ק אל אחר אסתרס ולא עביד פרין, (זוהר ב׳ קג) ואין מחדשין שום
דבר באמת רק גונבים איזה דבר מהתורה ומעקלים אותם שיטעו בני האדם לאמר
חידוש הוא. ואפילו מה שמחדשים בעניני גשמיות כמו המכונות לא חידשו שום
כח בעולם רק סככו כח בכח, למשל לקחו את האד ועשו ממנו מכונה למסילת
הברזל וכדומה, ומכש״כ בענינים רוחנים שכל דבריהם הם רק לרמות בהם את
בני האדם שידמו שחדשו ואין חידוש ולא ראשית. משא״כ התורה נקראת ראשית
שהיא עיקר הראשית והמחדשת בעולם וכן ישראל הדבקים בתורה נקראים
ראשית, ניצוץ הראשון והמחדש האמיתי נמשך בהם.

והגמרא אומרת בראשית נמי מאמר הוא. כי בעשרה מאמרות נברא העולם,
וכיון שהתורה אומרת בראשית, אין זה ראשית שבני אדם חשבוהו לראשית רק

ראשית אמיתית המחדש, א״כ היא הבחי׳ שבה חידש ד׳ את העולם והיא ג״כ מאמר
של עשרה מאמרות שבהם נברא הצולם. לכן בתורה מי שמחדש דבר, צריך הוא
לדעת אם חידושו רק סבך שנראה לאדם שחידש, או חירוש באמת, ואם חידש
באמת אז נברא אור חדש, ואם נברא אור חדש צדיך הוא וכל השומע אותו להרגיש
אח״כ בקרבו אור חדש ותוספת קדושה.

לכן כשלומדים גמרא או ספר מאיזה קדוש אף שלומדים דיני שור שנגח את
הפרה, ג״כ מרגישים אח״כ תוספת קדושה, משא״כ כשמביטים בספר או שומעים
דבר מאיש נמוך אף שהם דברי מוסר ובשעת מעשה מתעוררים קצת, מ״מ כיון
שלא חידש דבר באמת ולא המשיך תוספת קדושה ונשמה יתירה, אין מרגישים
אח״כ רוח טהרה, ולא בלבד מי שבידרו לחדש חידוש בתורה הוא יכול לחדש, רק
גם האיש ישראל שמתקן בעצמו איזה תיקון או מרה טובה ומכש״כ כשמקדש
ומעלה את המרה, אהבה או יראה, שתעלה למדה עלאה להתלהב באהבה ויראה
לד׳, אז כבר חידש בזה חירוש והוא הראשון לה, אף שכבר איתא בספ״ק ענין
תיקון המדות ואופן תקוניהן. כי למשל מי שבנה בית בצורה חדשה ויפה, ובא
חבירו ובנה ג״כ בית בצורה זו שקדמו הראשון האם לא חידש חבירו מאומה, הן
אמת שאת הצורה לעצמה לא חידש כי כבר חידשו הראשון, אבל את החומר ואת
הבית בעצמו חירש גם השני ושוב עומד בית חרש שלא היה בעולם. כן בספ״ק
איתא תיקון המדות ואופן עשייתם שהם הצדיקים מחברי הספרים הקדושים תקנו
והעלו אותם למדות עלאות, מ״מ האיש הזה חידש חומר חדש שגם את מדותיו
תיקן, אף שאת הצורה איך ובאיזה אופן לא חידש מפני שכבר קדמוהו הצדיקים
ורק באיזה צורה מצורתם הוא בא לתקן.

וזה גם ענין הממשלה על עצמו שצריך הישראל למשול ולא יהיה הפקר
שהעולם מחשבותיו ותאותיו ימשלו בו יכנסו בו ויפעלו עליו. מי שחידש בקרבו
איזה דבר והוא הראשון והמחדש בקרבו, בחי׳ אלה תולדות נח נח, שהוליד א״ע,
אז הוא אדון ומושל ע״ע, משא״כ מי שלא חידש בקרבו ולא תיקן עוד בקרבו
מאומה אינו ראשון מחדש וארון ע״ע וקשה שיוכל למשול ע״ע. וגם לעיין בתורה
מועיל הדבר, כי ידע איניש בנפשיה שהרבה פעמים קשה לו לרדת לענין עמוק
אף שבזמן אחר יכול להבינו, לא מפני שנחלש מוחו עתה קשה לו להבין, רק מפני
שאינו מתחזק ומתגבר לכפות את שכלו שבכח יכריח א״ע להעמיק בדבר. משל
למי שיש בידו קורנס גדול שבכחו להרוס חומה בצורה, מ״מ תלוי באיזה כח הוא
שולח את הקורנס ומכהו בחומה, ואם בהתרשלות בלא גבורה שולחו לא יועיל.

כן צריכים להיות אדון ומושל על השכל לכפותו ולגער בו לך העמק והבין,
ומי שאינו מושל ע״ע מפני שלא חידש בקרבו דבר אינו יכול להעמיק ולהבין
אף אם חכם הוא. ובכלל כל האדם תלוי בזה, מי שהוא אדון לעצמו גם מחשבות

זרות וכל שמץ לא יכנס כ"כ במהרה בקרבו כנ"ל, ואם יכנס יגורש תיכף, וממילא גם רוח של קדושה ממרום יכול להאיר בו, ומי שאינו אדון לעצמו הפקר הוא לכל, ואיך יאיר בו אור ממרום.

וזה שאומר המדרש על ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון וכו' ראשון הוא וכו' אלא ראשון לחשבון עונות וכו'. חוץ מזה שמתחילין למעלה לחשב, גם בהאיש נרמז, כי המשנה אומרת והוי מחשב הפסד מצוה וכו' ושכר עבירה כנגד הפסדיה, ולמה אין האדם חושב את החשבון הפשוט הידוע הזה, מפני שאינו אדון לעצמו ואין מחשבותיו בידו, הוא רוצה לחשב את חשבון הזה ובאה לו מחשבה אחרת של שטות וכדומה, אבל כ"י ה' יוה"כ שהאיש ישראל סב ותיקן א"ע ונעשה ראשון לעצמו אז ראשון לחשבון עונות הוא מתחיל לחשב שכר עבירה למה מפני שהוא ראשון מחדש ואדון לעצמו.

ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון אמר הקב"ה בשכר וכו' אני נגלה לכם ראשון, סימשך בכם ניצוץ של ראשון לראשונים שתהיה בחי' מחדש, ואפרע לכם מן עשו הראשון, שלא תהיה כראשיתו של עשו שהוא רק טעות לרמות בנ"א רק ראשית אמיתי וכו' כנ"ל ואבנה לכם בהמ"ק ואביא לכם את המשיח שהוא ראשון ב"ב.

אושפיזת יצחק

מכל אושפיזא נמשך אור של בעל האושפיזא ומעבודתו. לכן נבין נא מה שאמר יצחק אבינו לעשו צא השדה וצודה לי ציד, ולא שיקח מצאנו כמו שאמרה רבקה ליעקב, כי טעם הגדי כטעם הצבי. ועשה לי מטעמים כאשר אהבתי. האם לברך צריך לאכול מטעמים מקודם. וכן כאשר אהבתי נראה כאילו חיו היה יצחק להוט אחרי מטעמים ושכבר היה מפורסם שאוהבם. וכשנודע לו שהיה יעקב אמר גם ברוך יהיה ולא ברוך יהיה. כי גם משמע שברוך עוד אחר ובאמת רק אותו בירך. וכל ענין סברות יצחק ורבקה שזה חפץ לברך את עשו וזו חפצה לברך את יעקב כי בטח איזה ענין היה בזה.

אבל איתא בספה"ק שכל עבודת איש ישראלי להעלות ניצוצות שנפלו מנפשו מנפש הקדושה שלו בעולם, כי מסיבת חטא אדה"ר נפלו ממנו נצוצות לכל העולם, וכל נפשות ישראל היו כלולות בנפש אדה"ר, לכן מכל נפש נפלו חלקים ועבודת האיש הישראלי לקבצם כנודע. והקיבוץ הוא ע"י שעובד עמהם את ד', ולתכלית זה היה צריך האדם להיות על המקומות שנמצאים חלקי נפשו, אבל כשגבל ד' את גוף אדה"ר צבר עפרו מכל קצוות העולם כנודע ממדרש, ועי"ז יכול בעבודתו

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