

ASK THE RABBI: A TRADITIONAL APPROACH TO MODERN
ADVICE GIVING

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination

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Graduate Rabbinical Program
New York, New York

February 1, 2016
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The goal of this thesis was to begin the process of creating an online advice column that would respond to questions for interfaith families with a response based on Jewish tradition and texts. I intended to create a column that would speak specifically to a liberal millennial audience by blending a style typical for modern advice columns with a rabbinic voice and response. While there are many online resources for asking a rabbi halakhic questions and there are several websites that allow Jewish people to ask broader life-style questions, there are currently no advice columns specifically for interfaith relationship questions and advice, nor are there lifestyle advice forums that refer directly to Jewish sources in their answers.

My thesis includes three chapters. In the first chapter, “Rabbinic Authority to Advice ”I attempt to find a basis for my own advice giving authority by analyzing Talmudic sources for an understanding of authority. I then compare the goals of my endeavor to the goals of advice givers in Talmud, Shulchan Aruch, Avot D’ Rabbi Natan as well as the response of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein. In chapter two, “Modern Advice Columnists” I study the history of modern advice giving through the biographies of four famous Jewish advice givers and one advice column, written by three Jewish people over the course of its publication. In chapter two I compare the types and process of gaining authority in traditional sources to the experiences of modern Jewish advice givers and use their columns as a model for my own. In chapter three, “Putting It All Together,” I analyze chapters the lessons of chapters one and two, offer a sample column and an explanation of the process of creating the sample.

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Ask The Rabbi: A Traditional Approach to Modern Advice Giving

But Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing you are doing is not right; you will surely wear yourself out, and these people as well. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You represent the people before God: you bring the disputes before God, and enjoin upon them the laws and the teachings, and make known to them the way they are to go and the practices they are to follow. You shall also seek out from among all the people capable men who fear God, trustworthy men who spurn ill-gotten gain. Set these over them as chiefs of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, and let them judge the people at all times. Have them bring every major dispute to you, but let them decide every minor dispute themselves. Make it easier for yourself by letting them share the burden with you. If you do this — and God so commands you — you will be able to bear up; and all these people too will go home unwearied¹."

Jewish tradition teaches that wise judgment neither inheres in nor is passed down through a single authority. Rather, a group of capable individuals is called to the task. In the biblical period Israelites turn to the judges, later Jews turn to Rabbis (of the Talmudic era), and rabbis (of the modern era), these men and women guide their people in decisions, large and small. By the Tannaitic period, it became common practice for Jewish people around the world to write to local or distant authorities seeking answers to questions not only of Jewish practice, but of general concern, such as how to live as a minority among non-Jewish neighbors. Over time this practice has evolved from advice-giving within a halakhic framework to the Reform tradition of

¹ Exodus 18:17-23. English translation for this and all Biblical texts in this paper come from The Jewish Study Bible: Jewish Publication Society Tanakh Translation. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004. Print.

responsa (e.g. Freehof's collection²) to contemporary counsel provided by rabbis around the globe in Jewish communities large and small.

While in the Jewish world advice was offered through response, in the secular world a new mode of advice giving began in Early Modern Europe eventually blossoming in America. Many credit London bookseller John Dunton with the invention of the modern advice column.³ In 1691, he began publishing a semi-weekly magazine, *The Athenian Mercury*, and assembled what he called "a society of experts" to respond to readers' questions on any topic of concern. He published both questions and answers, and the format became so popular that other newspapers and journals quickly began to publish their own versions.

With modernity, enlightenment and emancipation Jews for the first time were able to make choices about their identity. A person's religious affiliation no longer fully defined a way of life. Jews were able to mingle more freely with the dominant society and could choose, in many ways, how Judaism would impact their daily life. This led to assimilation and to the rise of secularism—along with the concomitant waning of Rabbinic authority. With religion and religious authority less important to many Jews, they began to look beyond traditional Jewish

² The Central Conference of American Rabbis established the Responsa Committee in 1906 to produce halakhic explanations of contemporary issues and concerns to advise the Reform Jewish community. Twelve books of responsa have been published since 1906, nine by Rabbi Dr. Solomon Bennett Freehof (August 1892 – 1990) Rabbi Freehof served as president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the World Union for Progressive Judaism. In 1955 he led the CCAR responsa committee and between 1955 and 1990 including The Responsa Literature (1955), Reform Responsa (1960), Contemporary Reform Responsa (1974) and Today's Reform Responsa (1990). According to the Union for Reform Judaism Website, these response "provide guidance, not governance. As a body of literature, the responsa published by the Reform Movement reveals a broad consensus as to mainstream Reform Jewish thinking on important issues facing contemporary Judaism. Individual rabbis and communities retain responsibility, however, to make their own determinations as to the stance they will take on individual issues."

³ Gudelunas, David, Confidential to America: Newspaper Advice Columns and Sexual Education, Aldine Transaction, 2007 p 21

sources for wisdom on questions they did not perceive as Jewish legal issues. In 1906, Abraham Cahan, the editor of *Der Forverts* created “A Bintel Brief” [a bundle of letters] an advice column to help Jewish immigrants acculturate and navigate the particular challenges of life in America.

In today’s information age, the practice of writing to a distant authority for advice has only become more popular and accessible. In addition to syndicated columns in newspapers, online magazines, written and video blogs and podcasts devoted to answering questions and offering advice have exploded on the internet. At the same time, technology has opened up new possibilities for the halakhically-observant around the world to seek a rabbi’s expertise on legal rulings as well as pastoral advice from near and far.

However, for liberal Jew there remains a void. Rabbinical sources offer halakhic advice and secular sources offer ethical and pastoral advice. There have even been columns like the short-lived Seesaw in today’s *Forward*, which offers advice on questions specific to the interfaith Jewish family and written by rabbis, Jewish educators and other Jewish writers, yet the advice is never grounded in Jewish text or tradition. Websites like ReformJudaism.org offer “Ask a Rabbi” pages which offers advice on a plethora of subjects from lifecycle to bioethics, yet the vast majority of questions and responses are pseudo-halakhic. By this I mean that though Reform Jews do not seek binding legal answers, they are asking whether certain ideas or actions are permissible in Judaism. For example Reform Judaism.org responds to, “Can a Jew with tattoos be buried in a Jewish cemetery?” and “What is the Jewish perspective on abortion?”

I seek to fill the cyber void by launching an advice column rooted in Jewish wisdom and responsive to contemporary challenges. I will offer a forum for young liberal Jews to explore

everyday life issues and concerns within a Jewish framework and to receive counsel and support from within a specifically Jewish and liberal milieu.

Chapter 1: Rabbinic Authority to Advise

*What has been will be again,
what has been done will be done again;
there is nothing new under the sun.
-Ecclesiastes 1:9*

This poetic verse from Ecclesiastes might well be a mantra for traditional Judaism.

Historically, Jews held the ancient sacred and the Bible as supremely authoritative. Even ancient Rabbis saw the need to adapt to new circumstances. By medieval period they maintained an ethos of “older is better.” My aim in this chapter is to draw on classical Rabbinic literature to inform the philosophical underpinnings of my future Jewish advice column. My research led me to several texts with recurring questions, including:

- Who has authority to advise others?
- On what is that authority based?
- What type of agency does the inquirer have?
- What is the relationship between the authority and the questioner?
- What roles/service do those with authority provide to the community?

The works of contemporary scholars of Rabbinic literature guided me toward the relevant halakhic sources on the question of authority. Those scholars’ works are delineated below, followed by my translation and analysis of the sources themselves.

BACKGROUND READING

Issue #1: Achieving and maintaining authority

I began by reading Michael S. Berger's⁴ Rabbinic Authority (Oxford University Press, 1998). His research and teaching focus on issues of religious authority, Rabbinic literature, and the development of Jewish law. In this work, Berger uses the theories of educational philosopher R.S. Peters⁵ as a basis for understanding Rabbinic authority. Peters differentiates between a person "in" authority" and "an" authority. According to Berger's reading of Peters, the former is one who holds an office or rank that allows that person to demand compliance from others. It is the position, not the individual that carries authority. Thus, when one leaves the position or when the standing of the position changes within the culture, the degree of authority changes as well.

In contrast, having personal authority or being "an authority" according to Peters, "is based on an individual's personal qualities: a doctor is "an authority" for a patient, and a professor is "an authority" for her students in a particular field." (Berger, 10) Knowledge or expertise in a specific area affords status rather than merely title or role. Furthermore, Peters notes, "the ground of the authority is relational: it is one person's assessment of another's qualities." (Berger, 10) Finally, according to Peters the relational element of personal authority means that, "personal authority is inherently provisional in nature. As long as the trust of the subordinate party remains intact, the authority relationship exists and is justified." (Berger, 10) Thus, if the authority fails to offer helpful advice, personal authority erodes. The relational quality of this type of authority also means that it is "evaluated by external standards. Since

⁴ Berger is currently an Associate Professor and Director of Undergraduate Studies in the Department of Religion at Emory University.

⁵ Richard Stanley Peters (1919 –2011) was a British philosopher of political theory, psychology, and education.

assessment is the ground of personal authority, independent criteria must exist by which to conduct the evaluation.” (Berger, 11)

Berger argues that the Rabbinic sages of the Talmudic period are both “in authority” and “an authority” at different points in history. He argues that one way that the Rabbis assert their own authority is by relating their position to that of the Sanhedrin, a legal court system that had existed during the Second Temple period in Israel. This led me to an exploration of Sanhedrin 5, which asserts that authority derives from both expertise as well as a form of smikha [ordination] or authorization and a system of licensing.

Berger is not the only scholar of Rabbinics to use Peters’ ideas as a basis of understanding traditional Jewish authority. In Stories of the Law, Narrative Discourse and the Construction of Authority in the Mishnah (Oxford University Press, 1998), Moshe Simon-Shoshan⁶ examines the sages of classical texts as “an” or “in” authority. Simon-Shoshan points out that the Sages have been understood as being “in” authority, but this convention is based on the very texts created and edited by the Rabbis. He argues that if we are to take the texts as historically accurate, then we must understand that “it was the position of being a patriarch, a member of the Sanhedrin, or an official judge that gave many of the rabbis their power.” (Simon-Shoshan, 131) In other words, if we take the Rabbis at their word, they are certainly “in” authority. However, as Simon-Shoshan points out, scholars today generally doubt that the rabbis held broad and formal power like they say they do. At the same time, he does agree that each rabbi’s authority was likely based on his expertise. (Simon-Shoshan, 131- 132) Simon-Shoshan led me once again to the Sanhedrin text, as well as to Sota 21b which includes debates about how

⁶ Moshe Simon-Shoshan is currently on the faculty of the Rothberg School at the Hebrew University and the Virtual Beit Midrash at Yeshivat Har Etzion. He earned a PhD in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures at the University of Pennsylvania and studied at the Hebrew University as a Fulbright Scholar.

to identify expertise, in which cases expertise alone is sufficient to make legal rulings, or whether formal licensing from an authority is necessary.

Ultimately, much of my research centered on discussions about the roles of those who have traditionally been left out of authoritative positions, specifically women. I read a collection of contemporary responsa (Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, 2009), which argues that the title of “Raba” is appropriate for a woman and goes on to define the role of women in leadership.⁷ The writers of this collection largely quote Talmudic conversations from the tractate Niddah, which focuses on menstruation and its ritual and legal implications in minute detail. Issues of authority frequently arise, both in terms of women’s roles in determining and providing witness on issues particular to women as well as the expertise necessary to judge on such personal matters.

Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert’s⁸ Menstrual Purity : Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender (Stanford University Press, 2000) was extremely helpful in this regard. Fonrobert uses Niddah 20b, like Simon-Shoshan, to show that Rabbinic authority is chiefly a product of their advisees’ perspective (in this case women). She argues that the Yalta narrative demonstrates how women aggregate authority to the Rabbis by asking them for legal decisions. The system, she adds, “works only if women play along and accept the authority to define. The woman is the one who has to make the decision to seek the rabbi’s advice and submit herself to his expert authority, the woman is the one who has to observe her own blood-

⁷ It should be noted that this collection of responsa were issued at the conferral ceremony of Sara Hurwitz, the first Orthodox woman to receive this title, serving as support for the ceremony and are thus biased.

⁸ Dr. Fonrobert earned both an MA and PhD from Graduate Theological Union, in Berkeley California and serves as associate professor of Religious Studies at Stanford University.

flow, and the woman is the one who has to regard a stain as a problematic or indicative of something.” (Fonrobert, 117-118)

Issue #2: For what purpose is authority used?

With a clearer understanding of how the classical texts treat authority, I turned to exploring the types of services those in authority provide. My goal was to find a basis for my own advice-giving authority by drawing on a precedent for such work.

Again Berger’s Rabbinic Authority formed the basis of my research. According to Berger, the sages’ activity falls into one of five categories: (1) clarification of Biblical law, (2) resolution of disputes, (3) legislation, (4) non-halakhic Biblical exegesis and (5) advice on non-legal matters.

Berger directed me to C.G. Montefiore and H. Loewe’s A Rabbinic Anthology, (Schocken, 1974), a collection of Talmudic quotes organized by subject, which includes examples of advice on appropriate behavior outside of a legal framework. In an attempt to represent the gamut of this type of advice, I include a short example in my discussion of primary sources below.

The last primary source I have included in the chapter is described in Michael Pitkowsky’s article, “‘Dear Rabbi, I am a Woman Who . . .’: Women Asking Rabbis Questions, From Rabbi Moshe Feinstein to the Internet.” (*Nashim: A Journal of Women’s Studies and Gender*, Women in the Responsa Literature, No. 21 Spring 2011.) Pitkowsky argues that stories of women interacting with Rabbinic authorities are both common and often emphasize a Rabbi’s compassion. According to these stories, the authority figure uses every tool at his disposal to rule in the most lenient way possible. Pitkowsky also draws on several of Rabbi Feinstein’s responsa

to demonstrate that leniency is not the goal but rather, what he characterizes as, “pastoral care.” Using four examples of questions asked by women, he shows that Feinstein’s responses were on average shorter, quoted fewer classical texts, and included prayers and support. According to Pitkowsky, these uncharacteristic attributes show, at the very least, that Feinstein had in mind a different goal and audience for the responsa he addressed to women; he concludes that these stylistic changes point to the rabbi playing a pastoral role. Although Pitkowsky does not explicitly say so. I infer that, on some level, Feinstein wrote to these women in a style and tone that he deemed appropriate for this audience. Of the four examples, I include one below that does not request a legal ruling.

A note on the use of primary source material: In reading classical texts, I was less interested in the minutiae of each argument than in the larger questions around advice-giving. For this reason, I have chosen only a few of the sources – among the many which could be used to explore the topic – that seem most likely to lead toward a discussion on contemporary advice columns. For this reason too, in many cases I have abbreviated primary sources, summarizing portions of long texts, when the discussion led away from the topic at hand. I have included English translations of the Mishnah (Soncino) only in those cases where: 1) a Talmudic text has referred to Mishnah directly; or 2) a Mishnah is necessary to understand the context of the conversation in the Gemara. Finally, because translation is interpretation, I have begun the discussion of each primary source with the Hebrew text, followed by my translation and an explanation of issues that might not be obvious from translation. Because the texts often overlap vis-a-vis the relevant issues, I have inserted a discussion as to how sources relate to advice columns after each translation.

BT Sota 21b: Authority Derived from Social Status

MISHNAH (Sota 20a)

If, before the scroll had been blotted out, she said, “I refuse to drink,” her scroll is stored away and her meal-offering is scattered over the ashes. Her scroll is not valid to be used in giving another suspected woman to drink. If the scroll has been blotted out and she said, “I am impure,” then the water is poured away and her meal-offering is scattered in the place of the ashes. If the scroll had been blotted out and she said, “I refuse to drink” they exert influence upon her and force her to drink.

She has recently finished drinking when her face turns green, her eyes protrude and her veins swell. Then it is exclaimed, remove her so that the court not be defiled. If she possessed a merit, it is suspended (the impact of the water) upon her. Some merit suspends the effect for one year, another for two years, and another for three years. Because of these Ben Azzai declared, “A man is under the obligation to teach his daughter Torah so that if she has to drink she may know that the merit suspends its effect.”

R. Eliezer says: Whoever teaches his daughter Torah, teaches her obscenity. R. Joshua says, “A woman prefers one kav⁹ and sexual indulgence to nine kab and continence.” He used to say, a foolish pietist, a cunning rogue, a female pharisee and the plague of pharisees erode the world.

GEMARA:

Abaye said: [A cunning rogue is] he who gives advice to sell property in accordance with the view of Rabban Simeon b. Gamaliel; for it has been taught (in a baraita): [If someone said], 'My property is for you and after you for So-and-so', and the first person went and sold it and ate up [the proceeds], the second man can recover from the purchaser. Such is the statement of Rabbi; Rabban Simeon b. Gamaliel says: The second only receives what the first left. R. Joseph b. Hama said in the name of R. Sheshet: He who induces others to follow in his ways. R. Zerika said in the name of R. Huna: He who is lenient with himself and strict with others. 'Ulla said: He who learned Scripture and Mishnah but did not attend upon Rabbinical scholars. It has been said (by an Amora): If one has learned Scripture and Mishnah but did not serve Rabbinical Scholars, R. Eleazar says, “This is an *am ha'aretz*.”¹⁰ R. Samuel b. Nahmani says he is a *bur*¹¹; R. Jannai

⁹ Kav is a biblical and Talmudic measurement for dry goods. According to Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, here kav references an amount of food equal to a kav in measurement.

¹⁰ Literally, “people of the earth.” This term is often translated as “common people,” alluding to the hierarchical distaste and distinct “otherness” by which the Talmudic Rabbis regarded them. Am ha-aretz are accused of slack observance and ignorance of Torah learning and thus the term is often synonymous with “boor.” However, according to Sacha Stern (Stern, Sacha. *Jewish Identity in Early Rabbinic Writings*. Leiden: Brill, 1994. P 119), the Rabbis held a more ambiguous attitude toward this group. At once they are seen as “indispensable members of the people of Israel; whilst in other sources, their affinity with non-Jews is given much the same emphasis albeit not to the same extent as with apostates and heretics.”

says he is a *kuti*.¹² R. Aha b. Jacob says he is a magician. R. Nahman b. Isaac said: The definition of R. Aha b. Jacob appears the most probable; because there is a popular saying: The magician mumbles and knows not what he says; the Tanna recites and knows not what he says.

Our Rabbis taught: Who is an *am haaretz*? Whoever does not recite the Shema morning and evening with its prayers, this is the statement of R. Meir. The Sages say: Whoever does not put on the phylacteries. Ben Azzai says: Whoever does not wear the fringe upon his clothes. R. Yonatan b. Joseph says: Whoever has sons and does not rear them to study Torah.

Others say: even if he learned Scripture and Mishnah but did not serve Rabbinical scholars, he is an *am ha-aretz*. If he learned Scripture but not Mishnah, he is a boor; if he learned neither Scripture nor Mishnah, concerning him Scripture says, “I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and with the seed of beast.”¹³

EXPLANATION:

In this pericope the Rabbis differentiate between the status of a sage, on the one hand, and that of “*am haaretz*,” on the other. They make the differentiation based on one’s knowledge of Talmudic learning: study of both scripture and Mishnah is essential for being considered a learned person. Yet education alone is not sufficient to be counted among the elite and authoritative. In addition to a mastery of texts, one must be a disciple of a sage. Jacob Neusner describes the passage in this way:

If the master is a living Torah, source of revelation of the oral tradition given at Sinai and embodied now in the master himself, then the disciple had best humbly imitate each and every gesture of that living Torah and so prepare himself as the nexus of the transmission of this same oral tradition to the coming generation.¹⁴

11 Often translated as “boor.” The Hebrew root of the word is bet-ayin-raysh and it shares a similar definition, meaning an ignoramus, or one who has been uncultivated.

12 This term refers to the ancient city of Kutha (modern-day, Iraq). In Talmudic literature, it refers to the Samaritans, who were the rivals of the Rabbis, whom they praised for strict adherence to biblical law, yet criticized for not adhering to the Oral Law.

13 Jeremiah 21:27

14 Neusner, Jacob. Talmudic Judaism in Sasanian Babylonia: Essays and Studies. Leiden: Brill, 1976. Print. P74

Thus, in order to be considered a sage, a man must not only prove his academic prowess but be in close relationship with other sages. According to this passage then, authority comes from a combination of expertise and communal affiliation – from *whom* one knows as much as *what* one knows.

Sota 21b: Authority from Maturity

GEMARA:

Our Rabbis taught, an abstinent woman, a neighborly widow, and a minor whose months are not completed, these erode the world.

(The conversation then turns to defining this young woman and explaining why she might erode the world.)

What does it mean, “a minor whose months are not completed”? Here they explained it in this way: It refers to a disciple who rebels against the authority of his teachers. R. Abba said: It refers to a disciple who has not attained the qualification to decide questions of law and yet decides them. R. Abbahu declared that R. Huna said in the name of Rav, It means that which is written: For she has cast down many wounded, all her slain are a mighty host. 'For she has cast down many wounded'¹⁵ — this refers to a disciple who has not attained the qualification to decide questions of law and yet decides them. 'Yea, all her slain are a mighty host' — this refers to a disciple who has attained the qualification to decide questions of law and does not decide them.

At what age [is he qualified]? — At forty. But it is not so, for Rabbah decided questions of Law! — [He did so only in a town where the Rabbis] were his equals.

EXPLANATION:

In this continuation of the previous discussion on authority, the Rabbis continue to emphasize the importance of discipleship. In addition, they refer to the fact that there is a particular qualification that allows one to decide questions of law, though the qualification as

14 Proverbs 7:26

such is not defined until the end of the pericope, where the age of forty is given. According to the Tosafist explanation, this means forty years of study, whereas the Soncino translation defines forty as the age of understanding¹⁶. Rabbah, who died before turning forty, but was known to make legal rulings, is raised as an exception to the age requirement or length of study requirement. As the Tosafist explains, Rabbah was a talented scholar who surpassed others and so the restrictions apply only in situations in which other scholars are equal in learning. Finally, this discussion introduces one more valuable idea related to authority, what happens when one has authority but doesn't use it. It is as if they have "slain the host" which is presumably much worse than simply "wounding".

Sanhedrin 5a: Authority Given Down By Authority vs Authority Given Up by Community

GEMARA:

Our Rabbis taught: Monetary cases are decided by three, but if he is a *mumcheh*¹⁷ to the Rabbis he may judge even alone. R. Nahman said: for example, one like myself may adjudicate monetary cases alone.

And so R. Hiyya responded, This example, one like myself may adjudicate monetary cases alone, this poses the problem, does the statement 'one like myself' mean that as I have learned traditions and am able to reason them out, and have also obtained authorization; but that if he has not obtained authorization, his judgment is invalid; or is his judgment valid without authorization?

Come and hear [introduction to resolution of problem]: Mar Zutra, the son of R. Nahman, judged a case alone and gave a wrong ruling. Going before R. Joseph, he was told: If both parties accepted you as their judge, you are not liable to make restitution. Otherwise, go and indemnify the injured party. From this we know that the judgment of one, though not authorized, is valid.

Rav said, He that wants to decide monetary cases alone and be free from liability in case of a wrong decision, he should obtain authorization¹⁸ from the Resh Galuta¹⁹. Also Samuel said, He should obtain authorization from the Resh Galuta.

¹⁶ Pirkei Avot 5:21 lists the age of 40 as the age of understanding

¹⁷ Defined by Jastrow as a tried, skilled expert

It is obvious that authorization from here is [legally] effective here [in Babylonia]. And one from the there [in Palestine] is effective there. Even [authorization] from here is effective there, for here is a scepter and there is lawgiver. As it is taught in scripture, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah.”²⁰ This refers to the Rashei Galuta in Babylonia that rule Israel by scepter. “Lawgiver from between his feet,”²¹ these are the descendants of Hillel, who taught Torah to the many.

However, is permission given there effective here?

Come and hear (the resolution): Rabbah b. Huna gave a wrong judgment (in Babylonia). He then went before R. Hiyya who said to him, if both parties accepted you as the their judge, you are not liable to make restitution. If not, then you must compensate them.

Rabbah b. Huna did hold permission (but from the Palestinian authority), and so we can infer that the Palestinian authority is not effective in Babylon.

It is not valid here?

Rabbah, son of R. Huna, when arguing with the members of the household of the Resh Galutha, said, I do not hold my authorization from you. I hold authorization from my father who had it from Rav, and Rav had it from R. Hiyya, and R. Hiyya had it from Rabbi [in Palestine]’. He was trying to put them in their place with words.²²

Is this authorization invalid here? If it is, what good is a license to Rabba B. Huna? [It is good] For cities that stand on the border.

EXPLANATION:

This long passage, lays out several avenues for attaining authority: (1) through expertise (*mumheh*); (2) from those asking for judgment; and (3) from another authority (the Exhilararch or other Sages). Though the discussion begins with the statement that an expert has the authority to

¹⁸ Literally translated, “consideration of authority”

¹⁹ Also known as the Exilarch, the term translates to head of the Diaspora. The position held different levels of authority at different points in history.

²⁰ In Genesis 49:10

²¹ *ibid.*

²² This translation comes from the Soncino English translation. Literally the line reads, “By the words of others he explains to them.”

judge alone, rather than as a member of a tribunal (*beit din*), it quickly becomes clear that an additional type of authority is required to allow the authority indemnity. Interestingly, there are two ways to achieve this sort of security, which I understand as a “higher level of authority.” One achieves the “higher level of authority” by being recognized by those below, namely, those being judged or by those from “above,” namely, the secular (external to the Jewish community) authority in the region. Both seem to hold equal weight.

In the second part of the discussion, the text presents a specific (and subtle) issue within the Babylonian community. According to Berger, *semikhah* (ordination) was the original form of handing down authority within the Rabbinic community and “ordination was performed only by those scholars residing in the Land of Israel.” (Berger, 53) However, recipients of *semikhah* could exercise “full authority outside of Palestine.” The title “Rabbi,” conferred at ordination, was used commonly by Palestinian scholars. Later Amoraic scholars of Babylonia used the title *Rav*. The position of *Exilarch* was specific to Babylonia.

Rabbah’s insistence that his authorization comes from former Palestinian Rabbis and not the *Exilarch* is as much a statement on where authority derives as it is an assertion that Palestinian authority is as valid as Babylonian. Authority through *semikhah* comes from God and is passed down by the religious authority, rather than a secular ruler. In the end insistence that a license is needed by Rabbah B. Huna in order to make rulings on the border points to the fact that authority is regionally/culturally defined. Thus, because it is the people in any given region who define who the authority is (be it the secular or religious) on this other level authority comes up from the community as well.

Sanhedrin 5a (continued): How is Authority Conferred?

What is “authorization?” When Rabbah b. Huna went down to Babylonia [from Palestine], R. Hiyya said to Rabbi: “My brother’s son is going down to Babylonia. Can he rule on [matters of] ritual? He may. May he decide on [monetary] cases? He may. May he declare first born animals permissible? He may.

When Rav went to Babylonia [from Palestine], R. Hiyya said to Rabbi: “My sister’s son is going to Babylon. May he rule on matters of ritual? He may. May he decide [monetary] cases? He may. May he declare firstborn animals permissible [for slaughter]? No he may not.

(After relaying this story, the conversation turns to matters of genealogy and the difference between referring to a nephew as the son of one’s brother or one’s sister. Though this part of the discussion elucidates one difference between Raba b. Huna and Rav, and is certainly interesting is not relevant to the question of authority and has been omitted from the translation.)

[returning to the difference in what each scholar is allowed to make rulings on,] May he [Rav] declare firstborn animals permissible? No he may not. What is the reason for this? Was he not wise enough? Our words teach that he was very wise. Rather was it that he was not an expert in blemishes? But surely Rav said, Eighteen months I grew with a shepherd to learn which defects are permanent and which are passing.

Rather, he did not authorize him out of respect to Rabbah b. Hana. (According to the Tosafist explanation, “out of respect to Rabbah” meant to say that this action was to give Rabbah b. Hana a special privilege to establish Rabbah as authority to the Babylonians, as Rav’s standing was already high even without that special authority.)

Or, if you prefer, one might say because Rav was a special expert in judging blemishes, he might in consequence declare permissible, with a view to slaughter, [permanent] defects which to others might not be known as permanent. These [permissions] might be used (erroneously by others) to maintain that Rav had passed cases of such a kind and so to declare permissible transitory blemishes (because Rav can tell the subtle differences and they cannot.)

[Above it says] May he rule on ritual? He may rule on ritual. Since he is learned in law, what is the value of permission? Because of the incident that happened as it was taught:

One time, Rabbi went to a certain place and saw people kneading their dough in an improper way.²³ He said to them, Explain to me why you knead your bread improperly. They said to him, A scholar came here and taught to us that a **בצעים** (pond) water does not make something impure. But he (the scholar) had said **ביצים** (egg) water, and they did not understand.²⁴

²³ literally “ritually impure way”

²⁴ Tosafist commentary explains further that the defect must have been in the scholar who did not speak well.

They made another mistake from Mishnah, The waters of Kramion and Pigah are unfit for purification because they are ponds.²⁵ They thought that because this water was unfit for purification, it similarly could not make something impure. But this conclusion is incorrect because there (in the situation of making something pure) running water is required but water from any source can make something impure. That hour they declared, A disciple must not give decisions unless he is granted permission by his teacher.

(The conversation shifts to another two baraitot that give an examples of authority breaking the law due to misunderstanding, these laws and conversation is tangential to the issue above and relate more to the issue of misunderstanding and so it has been left out of the translation.)

It is obvious that a partial authorization is valid as it has been said [above in the story of Rav] But how is it with a conditional authorization? Come and hear [the resolution to the issue]

R. Yohanan said to R. Shaman, you have our authorization until you return to us.

EXPLANATION:

Though the question presented is “What is authority,” the underlying question at hand might be characterized more precisely as, “Can authority be limited?” The text begins by reaffirming that authority can be conferred from master to student, an established higher authority to a newer lower positions. This time however, we read that authority can be partially given. Just because one is given authority in one area does not mean that they are in another. Furthermore, Rav’s example shows that authority conferred is more valuable than authority earned by knowledge. Though Rav clearly knows enough to make decisions about the purity of animals, he is not given the power and thus cannot make these decisions.

By introducing the story of the misunderstood scholar, readers are given a clear picture of the consequences of poor leadership. The declaration that a disciple cannot make rulings without the permission of his teacher not only sets up a system of checks and balances, presuming the teacher would not grant authority to one undeserving, but it adds one more layer to our understanding of authorization. Not only must it be bestowed from above, it must come from an

²⁵ Mishnah Para 8.10 refers to Numbers 19:17, “And for the impure, they shall take of the ashes of the burning of the purification from sin, and running water shall be put thereto in a vessel.”

intimate relationship, from master to disciple. Thus, we can assume that the disciple must prove oneself worthy in some way.

Finally, the last line of the translation clearly states that authorization can be conditional based on time or space. Though it is not clear whether Rav Shemen was only able to rule for the period of time he was gone, or while he was in Babylonia, it is clear that he is granted legal authority that will eventually be revoked.

Niddah 20a: Authority from Expertise

MISHNAH:

Five kinds of blood in a woman are considered impure. They are red, black, a color like bright crocus, or like earthy water, or like diluted wine. The House of Shammai ruled also a color like that of fenugreek water or the juice of roasted meat, but the House of Hillel declared these all pure. Akabia ben Mahalalel declares impure one that is yellow, and the sages declare it clean. R. Meir said, “Even if it does not convey impurity as a bloodstain, it conveys impurity as a liquid. R. Jose ruled, “It does neither this way or that way.” What color is regarded as red? One like the blood of a wound. Black? Like the sediment of ink. If it is darker it is impure and if it is lighter it is clean. Bright crocus? It is like the brightest shade in it. A color like earthy water? Earth from the valley of Beth Kerem over which water is made to float. One like diluted wine? Two parts of water and one of wine, of the wine of Sharon.

GEMARA:

Amemar and Mar Zutra and R. Ashi once sat before an “artisan,”²⁶ and when the first cupping-horn was taken off, Amemar saw it and said to the others, “The red we learned about is a shade like this.” When the second one was taken off of him, he said to them, “This has a different

²⁶ This is a literal translation; though, most English translations use “cupper.” According to Rahel Wasserfall this word designates a “bloodletter and sometimes a circumciser.” (Wasserfall, Rahel R. Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law. Hanover: U of New England, 1999. p 77)

shade.” R. Ashi said, “One like myself, who does not know the difference between the one and the other, must not act as an examiner of blood.”

(The conversation then returns to the Mishnah passage and the discussion of color. First, they discuss the Mishnaic statement that black is like the sediment of ink. Why does the Mishnah say black, rather than simply saying “ink” the Rabbis ask? Is the reference to liquid or to dry ink, they debate. The Rabbis then use other black objects to debate the exact shade of black. For R. Eleazar ruled that a discharge that has a color like that of a black olive, pitch or a raven is pure, which is what is meant by the statement in Mishnah that if it is lighter than ink it is pure.

The conversation moves from the particular shades of black, to the appropriate way to test the color. They debate the color of cloth for the blood to be collected on as well as the relationship between black blood and red blood, before moving to similar conversations about how one might define the other “impure colors.”)

EXPLANATION:

This text, which may sound foreign to our contemporary ears, juxtaposes the expertise of one sage against another to determine the basis of authority. The text begins by offering Amemar as an example of one who has the authority to make rulings about menstrual blood by virtue of his expertise. Rav Ashi, who cannot tell the difference between types of blood by examining their color, serves as the counter example. He does not give himself (and those after him) the authority to make rulings on blood, though he is considered a prominent sage and the head of the academy in Sura. Thus we see that authority derives from specific expertise, even if the sage in question holds enormous influence, and we see that standards of expertise exist.

Niddah 20a (continued): Claiming One’s Own Authority

GEMARA:

R. Hanina used to break up a piece of potter’s clay and performed the examination in that way. R. Ishmael son of R. Yose cursed with illness any other person who adopts such a method. For R. Hanina was wise. In all the world there are none so wise. R. Yohanan said, “The wisdom of Rabbi Hanina caused me not to rule about blood. I declared it impure and he declared it pure. I declared it pure, he declared it impure.

R. Eleazar said, “R. Hanina’s modesty caused me to examine blood. If R. Hanina who was modest allowed himself to be involved in doubt and examined blood, can I not?”

R. Zera said, “The coins of Babylonia cause me not to examine blood. I do not know about the coins of Babylonia. Do I know about blood?”

This statement might lead one to say that (the ability to judge blood) is based on coinage. However, did not Rabbah understand coins and still did not understand blood? All the more so then he said, Rabbah who understood the coin system refused to examine blood, and I should examine it?

Ulla visited Pumbeditha and when blood was brought to him to examine, he refused to examine it. If he said, R. Eleazar who was the “master of the four”²⁷ in the Land of Israel refused to examine blood when he visited the place of R. Judah, should I see it?

Why was he called the “master of the four” in the Land of Israel? Because a woman once brought some blood before R. Eleazar when R. Ammi sat in his presence. He smelled it and he said to her, “This blood is the blood of one who covets (the blood of lust).” After she went out, R. Ammi joined her and she said to him, “My husband was away on a journey and I yearned for him.” He quoted from Scripture to her, “The secret of Adonai is with those who are in awe of him.”²⁸

EXPLANATION:

In this second section of the conversation, R. Eliezer serves as the model for one allowed to make rules on the purity and impurity of menstrual blood. The text opens by explaining that R. Hanina was allowed to make judgments because he was exceptionally wise. Several sages then explain that because their knowledge cannot compare to his, they are not qualified to make rulings.

²⁷ According to Eugene Borowitz (Borowitz, Eugene B. The Talmud's Theological Language-game: A Philosophical Discourse Analysis. Albany: State U of New York, 2006. P 113), this refers to the four gifts of God: Bible, halakhot, tosefot (non-Mishnaic sources) and Mishna collections. The opposite is someone who is “master of aggadah” and such a person is not allowed to make halakhic decisions. Thus the “master of four of the Land of Israel” in reference to R. Eleazar means his abilities to make halakhic decisions. In most English translations, this phrase is translated to mean, “supreme authority.”

²⁸ Psalm 25:14 “The counsel of the LORD is with them that fear Him; and His covenant, to make them know it.”

It seems to me that R. Eliezer then steps in to offer a counter argument. He explains that since R. Hanina was so humble and presumably admitted that he was not always right, yet tried to make decisions about blood anyway, this gives Eliezer permission to engage in the difficult task of ruling on blood as well.

R. Zera then articulates what may initially be seen as an unrelated argument. He says he cannot rule because he doesn't know about the monetary system in Babylonia. Lest we be confused by the argument, the text explains further that Rabbah, who understood the coin system, refused to examine and judge menstrual blood. He seems to be differentiating between general experts, like Rabbah, and those who understand specific, intricate issues; general experts cannot rule on matters that need specific expertise.

Finally, we may understand Ulla's and Eliezer's refusal to rule on blood out of respect for other sages of the land they visit as a declaration of jurisdiction. Just like the city police can not get involved in a Federal investigation, Ulla can not make a ruling in Babylonia (as a Palestinian authority). However we might also read deeper and understand these examples as further emphasizing the importance of knowledge in making decisions; authority should be left to the regional leaders not visitors.

Niddah 20a cont: Defining Skill

Ifra Hormiz, mother of King Shapur²⁹, sent blood to Raba while R. Obadia was sitting before him. He smelled it and he said to her, this is the blood of one who covets. She [then] said to her son, "Come and see how wise the Jews are."

²⁹ According to Jacob Neusner, (Neusner, Jacob. A History of the Jews in Babylonia. Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2008.) there are five stories in Talmud about Ifra Hormiz, reportedly the mother of the King Shapur II. However, this is the only place in which she is called by this name.

He replied, “Perhaps it was an accident.³⁰” (meaning perhaps Raba guessed correctly rather than deduced correctly.)

So she sent him [Raba] sixty types of blood, and he identified them. But the last of them was the blood of lice, and he did not know it; luckily³¹ he sent to her a killing comb [anyway].³² She exclaimed, “Jews, inside one’s heart you make a home!”

EXPLANATION:

In this case skill comes from knowledge and can be replicated. However, Raba proves that even the highly skilled may not be one hundred percent accurate all of the time. Of the sixty types of blood, Raba the highest authority on the matter, made what we might assume is an educated guess, and though he was correct the text emphasizes that he himself was not sure. Thus while the previous section showed that knowledge is the basis of skill, we see here that perfection is not the standard, that one cannot be knowledgeable about absolutely everything always.

Niddah 20b continued: Role of Questioner

Rav Yehudah said, At first I examined blood, until the mother of my son Isaac said to me, We do not bring the first drop to the Rabbis, because it is filthy. Now I do not examine it. Between pure and impure I certainly do distinguish.

EXPLANATION:

³⁰ Literally translated, “perhaps his is like a blind person in a window.”

³¹ Literal translation is “the matter was aided by,” however most English translations substitute “luckily.”

³² How crazy is it that we still have a special comb for killing lice?

Tosefta explains that behind Rav Judah's remark is the concept that the color of the blood changes over time, and thus should be examined at a different stage in the process. Most important here, for our purposes, is the recognition of the agency of the questioner. Rav Yehudah allows his wife to guide him in providing evidence. The questioner thus plays a role in the process of decision-making.

In the second part of the statement, Rav Yehudah distinguishes between the types of rulings he allows himself to make. While he no longer rules on types of blood and the purity or impurity of it, he is still willing to rule on the purity status of women after childbirth. Presumably because that is a time-bound issue for purity rather than a question of one of blood type.³³ No matter the reason, Rav Yehudah decides for himself, based on his own comfort level with the subject, which areas he will rule on and which he will not. Again we see conditional authority, only this time there is not an external force imposing the condition, rather the authority himself.

Niddah 20b: More about Questioner's Agency

Yalta³⁴ brought blood to Rabbah b. Bar Hana who declared it to her impure. She then took it to R. Isaac the son of Rav Judah who declared to her that it was pure. How could this be, for it was

³³Leviticus. 12:1-5 "And the LORD said to Moses: Speak to the children of Israel, tell them, 'If a woman gives birth to a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as in the days of the impurity of her sickness she will be unclean. And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. And she shall continue in the blood of purification thirty three days; she shall touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purification be fulfilled. But if she gives birth to a female child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her impurity; and she shall continue in the blood of purification threescore and six days.

³⁴ Other stories about Yalta can be found in Berakhot 51b; Beitzah 25b; Kiddushin 70b; Hullin 109b. R. Adler described Yalta as "legal guerrilla," in "Feminist Folktales of Justice: Robert Cover as a Source for the Renewal of Halakhah", *Conservative Judaism* 45,3 (1993), 53, See also Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert "Yalta's Ruse: Resistance Against Rabbinic Menstrual Authority in Talmudic Literature", in Women and Water: Female Rituals of Purification in

taught (in a baraita), “A sage cannot declare something impure that another sage first ruled pure; if he forbade anything his colleague may not permit it.”

At first he declared it unclean to her, however she said to him, “Every other day he would have declared blood of this color clean, but on this occasion he had pressure on his eye.” So he (R. Isaac) ruled it pure.

But are women believed in such circumstances? Yes, and so it was taught (in a baraita): A woman is believed when she says, “I saw blood like this but I have lost it.”

They might ask: What is the law [where a woman says], “A kind of blood like this has been declared pure by such and such a Sage? Come and hear: A woman is believed when she says, 'I saw a kind of blood like this one but I have lost it.

But is that case not different, since the blood is not available?

Come and hear the case of Yalta: She brought some blood to Rabbah b. Bar Hana who informed her that it was impure. She then took it to R. Isaac the son of R. Judah, who told her that it was pure. But how could he act in this manner, seeing that it was taught: If a Sage declared impure no other Sage may declare it pure. We explained that at first he informed her indeed that it was impure, but when she told him that on every other occasion he declared such blood as pure but that on that day he had a pain in his eye, he changed his view and gave her his ruling that it was pure. Now this proves quite clearly, does it not, that a woman is believed? — R. Isaac b. Judah may have relied on his own traditions and experience.

EXPLANATION:

The question for the rabbis at the heart of this sugya is whether or not Yalta is to be believed, and thus whether women, in general, should be counted as witnesses to their own legal rulings. Initially, the editor brings in a parallel example from a baraita. In that case a woman is to be believed when she brings in a blood sample, which she asserts is similar to the one in

Jewish History and Culture , ed. by Rachel Wasserfall (University Press of New England, 1999), 60-82. See also the discussion by S. Waller on the outstanding elements of her character, as she summarizes them: assertiveness and forcefulness, in Women in Jewish Society in the Talmudic Period (Hebrew; Tel Aviv, 2001), 186-87 and 211, n. 33. S. Margaliyot, On the Study of Names (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1989), 40-41, believes that R. Nahman married Yalta her after her former husband had died.

question. In both the case of the baraita and Yalta, a blood sample that the rabbi can see is compared to a past sample that only the woman has seen.

The discussion then turns to a similar situation. What is the law when a woman says that a blood sample under question is similar to a past sample that an authority has previously declared pure? According to Fonrobert, “In this abstract case the woman would almost be fulfilling the function of the rabbinic expert eye. That is, in effect it is she who judges the blood in question.”³⁵ While the woman’s authority is supported by the sage she claims previously ruled the blood non-menstrual, she is essentially declaring the blood pure without any male rabbinic source.³⁶

The sugiya goes on to explain that in the first case, the blood on which a ruling is sought is absent (i.e. the woman has a different specimen she claims is similar to the one to be ruled on); while in the second case, the woman herself is in possession of the sample (and says in the past, it has been declared pure). In the latter case, the Rabbi need not trust the woman since the blood is available for examination, and the Rabbi, “can rely on his own experience.” In both cases, however, the woman is believed.

As Mieke Ball says, “The narrative functions . . . [as] a symptom, an involuntary sign, which betrays an awareness that in order for the system to work women need to play along and submit to the rabbinic readings of women’s bodies.”³⁷ Yalta points out to us not only that the Rabbis recognize women’s authority in determining their state of ritual purity, but more importantly that that authority relies on women allowing them authority in the first place.

³⁵ Fonrobert, 123

³⁶ Rashi’s commentary on this passage assumes that the conversation in this case is one between two women. In his version, this is a situation in which one woman comes to another to help determine the type of blood.

³⁷ Fonrobert, 118

Avot de Rabbi Nathan³⁸ V. II 21: Not All Rabbinic Advice is Legal

R. Eleazar b. Azariah said: Great is work, for every craftsman walks out with the implements of his craft, and boasts of them. Thus the weaver walks out with a shuttle in his ear. The dyer walks out with the wool in his ear. The scribe walks out with his pen behind his ear. All are proud of their craft. God speaks of His work (Gen. 2:2); how much more should people speak of that which they do.

EXPLANATION:

As this statement shows, the Rabbis were not only focused on advising on halakha and issues of ritual purity. While not exactly in the form of advice, this passage reflects on what we would later consider to be the “psychology” behind an action. Work is good for people because it fills them with pride and makes them feel good. The rabbinic authority is a source for how to live a good life.

Shulchan Aruch³⁹ Yoreh De’ah 335: Social Advice

We do not visit a sick person during the first three hours of the day because the illness is less pronounced in the morning and one might be tempted not to pray for him; nor during the last three hours of the day because the illness is more severe then and one might despair of praying for mercy.

³⁸ There are two versions of Avot de Rabbi Nathan. While the style is consistent between the two they contain very different material. This statement, in the name of Rabbi Elazar b. Azariah, is only found in the “B” version, which exists in the 1887 Solomon Schechter edition, not the version that is generally printed in the Talmud as a minor tractate. Though named for Rabbi Nathan, this work was likely written a generation later, as Rabbi Nathan lived during the 2nd century CE, and this work contains references to Mishnah, which had not yet been redacted.

³⁹ The Shulkhan Arukh, is a legal code compiled by Joseph Caro in the mid-1500s. Since its early publishing, it has included commentary by Moses Isserles that helps to preserve Ashkenazic customs and law along with Caro’s Sephardic rulings. For Orthodox Jews it is still the primary source for making halakhic rulings.

(The text then specifies when Hebrew is required in prayer and the exact wording that should be uttered in prayer for one's health)

...We tell the patient about business affairs; if he owes or is owed money. He should not think that he is dying and become afraid.

We do not visit those ill with stomach issues, nor illness of the eye, nor illness of the mind, nor those who have difficulty speaking. We do not visit in these patients' presence, rather, we enter the outer courtyard of their house and ask after their welfare, inquiring whether they need anything in particular, and we listen to learn about the suffering and we pray for the patient

We visit the sick non-Jews because of the "ways of peace" (*mipnei darkei shalom*)

EXPLANATION:

While the Shulchan Aruch is known primarily as a source for halakha, hidden among the explanations of mitzvot is general advice for the welfare of the community. This passage begins by stating that visiting the sick is a mitzvah. After laying out how exactly to perform the mitzvah, the text turns to the psychological issues at hand. In the first instance, the advice about when to visit is directed at the visitor, who is, after all, commanded to do so. The timing of the visit (mid-day is optimal) will prevent the urge not to pray at all for the patient (if visiting occurs in the morning when the patient may seem perfectly healthy or in the evening, when the patient might seem at death's door and beyond hope). But at the same time, the advice may bear in mind the patient's needs. What time might be best for him/her?

The next section, on the content to be discussed during the visit (i.e. business affairs), is ambiguous in its reasoning. It is unclear whether one discusses business to distract the patient from pain or to send a signal that the illness is not life-threatening and thus inspire the patient to heal. Either way, the discussion goes beyond the halakha by advising how best to behave in the world; it is a reminder of how actions impact others. Besides bearing in mind the needs of the

patient, the statement acknowledges the challenges of being a visitor: a loss of words, a fear of death.

The halakha specifies which illnesses are to keep visitors away (i.e. ailments of the stomach, eye, mind, speech) but doesn't explain why those illnesses in particular. While stomach or eye illness might be contagious, mental illness and the inability to speak might be embarrassing or uncomfortable for the sufferer and visitor alike. Again, hidden within the halakha is practical advice for the care of both parties.

The last statement, which seems like a bit of a non-sequitur, shows the concern Caro had (and the Tur and Maimonides, both of whom he borrowed from extensively) with how Jews should interact with their neighbors so as to promote peace and harmony within the community.

Iggerot Moshe, Orah Hayim 4:47 – Pastoral Care in Advice

Maharat Klara,

I usually write responsa only on topics related to Torah, in cases that are challenging for a someone but he thinks that I can answer, with the mercy of God [and so he writes to me]. However, in cases such as this one, I am obligated to respond what I think and to clarify the matter to you.

When it comes to prayers and blessings for a sick person, there are many God-fearing people in the Land of Israel whose prayers are surely more acceptable to God than mine. How can I compare? However, on account of your great pain I am responding, because I think that, as is

clear from your letter, you are unable to behave properly with your daughter. You always need to relate to her in a manner that she will feel her mother's affection and love and to speak calmly to her without demands and criticism until she has trust in you. Then you will know what is troubling her, and you will not see her in tears and pain, but rather in joy. I bless your daughter that God should make her well, heal her, give her strength and send her an appropriate mate. I also bless you and your entire family that you should have pride and joy from her and her sisters. The most important thing is that you trust in God and accept God's love. On this merit he will send to you all of the good and peace forever.

One who blesses you from the depths of his heart and prays to God,
Moshe Feinstein

EXPLANATION:

Though he usually responds to legal questions, in this case it is the woman's pain to which he responds. Because the original letter is not included, the exact nature of the daughter's "condition" is unknown; however the way he refers to the daughter in question (*ba'alat marah shehorah* – literally owner or sufferer of melancholy) alludes to possible mental illness. Rather than advising her on legal issues related to the daughter's illness, Rabbi Feinstein first mirrors back Maharat Klara's message, commenting on her great pain, which one might read as an attempt to make her feel heard and to validate her feelings. He advises her on how to interact with her daughter, in order to help both mother and daughter, and he offers a blessing—a hope for change. Though Rabbi Feinstein is certainly not telling this mother to send her daughter to therapy, and the advice to listen to her in order to find the root of her mental illness shows that he lacks a contemporary understanding of what might be clinical depression, his advice treats her with care and compassion and the advice to listen to her daughter does seem helpful.

Chapter 2: Modern American Advice Columns

“The editor who answers the letters is far removed from the role of the rebbe (who gave people not only advice but blessings and amulets too). But, in his answers to the letters, the editor is more than just an adviser who gives perfunctory counsel. He is also the teacher and the preacher, and often his answer to a letter turns into an instructive lecture.”

Isaac Metzker, A Bintel Brief

Abraham Cahan – A Bintel Brief from *Der Forverts*

*I had always wished that the Forverts would receive stories from “daily life” – dramas, comedies or truly curious events that weren’t written at a desk but rather in the tenements and factories and cafes – everywhere that life was the author of the drama. . . How to do this? Not an easy task – much harder than writing an interesting drama or comedy. . .*⁴⁰

Translated by Chana Pollack.

Abraham Cahan was born in 1860 to a family of well-educated Jews, in Pabrade Lithuania, a small village near Vilna. His grandfather was a rabbi, his father a Talmud teacher and his mother taught reading and writing to young local girls. Just before his sixth birthday, the Cahan family moved to Vilna to join his maternal uncles in their successful distillery business. In Vilna, young Abraham continued with a traditional yeshiva education but was also exposed to the Haskala and Yiddish literary culture.

In his memoir, “The Education of Abraham Cahan,” he described the spiritual and intellectual influence of his father. Cahan explained that his father’s upbringing led him to be “passionately devout in the traditional manner,” and yet, “he had a great thirst for knowledge of the modern secular world and deep in his heart he was disturbed.” (Cahan, 33) He believed that had his father had friends with secular education he would have become a “freethinker.” This

40 'A Bintel Brief' Is Born." The Forward. N.p., 19 May 2010. Web. 07 Jan. 2016.

balance between secular culture, learning, and Orthodoxy would come to characterize his life and eventually his art.

At ten years old, Cahan enrolled in the local government public school without his parents' permission. When his father found out, he was supportive and even hired a Russian language tutor and Hebrew grammar teacher to support his son's learning. Cahan described the many tutors and schools he attended between the time he was ten and when he eventually passed the examinations and enrolled in the Teacher Training Institute at age fourteen. Eventually his father suggested that he enroll in the Vilna Rabiner Insititute, (one of two schools in Russia at the time) which trained Jewish public school teachers to be what Cahan described as "kazione rabiners. These individuals were not real rabbis but performed some official rabbinic functions."⁴¹ (Cahan, 31).

Cahan studied at the Institute for four years. During that time he made two important discoveries. First, he explored the public library. As an adult, he described in great detail his first trip to that "sacred place." Embarrassed by his clothing, he quickly left and didn't return until he owned an overcoat. Having overcome that challenge, he wrote that he spent five hours a day in the library exploring Russian literature. Looking back as an adult, he wrote that, "The Vilna Public Library became for me a temple of learning and inspiration." (Cahan, 95)

The other great discovery of Cahan's teenage years was politics. Throughout his youth Cahan explored both socialism and anarchy. In his memoir, he describes the first underground pamphlet he read as a "turning point" in his life. He quickly found friends and mentorship

41 The term Kanzione Rabiner, is the Yiddish name for the position of Russian crown rabbi. Crown rabbis served as record keepers, administrative representatives and secular leaders of the Jewish community in late Imperial Russia. Kaplan Appel, Tamar. "Crown Rabbi." YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe 3 August 2010. 24 January 2016 <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Crown_Rabbi>.

within a community of socialist and anarchist revolutionaries. In remembering his early days in the group, Cahan's writing is filled with exclamation points. "They talked to me as to an equal!" he wrote. "No distinction between Jew and gentile!" "In the spirit of true equality and brotherhood!" "All could be brothers!" (Cahan, 145)

After graduating from The Teachers Institute, Cahan was hired to teach in Vitebsk near Lubavitch and the seat of Hasidism. Biographer Seth Lipsky wrote that, "Vilna had not prepared him for the lifestyle of the community of Hasidic Jews."⁴² Homesick for Vilna, he found community briefly with other young socialists. However, shortly after his arrival he began to hear that his comrades from Vilna were being arrested one by one. His own home was soon searched and a few days later he was "marched out of school, held in custody while his apartment was searched again." (Lipsky, 37) After another interrogation he was put under surveillance and the family he lived with put under house arrest. Cahan decided he had to escape before he was arrested. He disguised himself in Hasidic garb and bribed his way through Europe by train and on foot with other Jews fleeing pogroms and poverty in Russia, and eventually found himself on a boat to Philadelphia. In 1882, at the age of twenty-two, Abraham Cahan arrived in New York City.

Once in New York, Cahan was welcomed by socialist friends from Vilna who had emigrated the year before. The group from Vilna joined young intellectuals from Germany and from Russia's metropolitan areas in meetings and marches. At one such event, Cahan wrote that he asked the leader why the speeches were always in Russian and German. When the organizer seemed surprised by the question, Cahan explained that while cosmopolitan Jews spoke Russian, Orthodox Jews from the country spoke Yiddish. At the next meeting Cahan addressed 400

42 Lipsky, Seth. The Rise of Abraham Cahan. New York: Schocken, 2013. Print.

people on Karl Marx's theory of surplus value, class struggle and socialism in what he would later call, "the first socialist speech in Yiddish to be delivered in America." (Cahan, 237)

In an effort to learn English and to acculturate to American society, Cahan convinced the principal of the local public school near his house to allow him to sit in on classes. For three months the twenty-two year-old sat behind his thirteen year-old classmates and studied not only reading, writing and geography, but also English pronunciation and idioms. (Lipsky, 52). A year later he was hired to teach English in the evening at the Young Men's Hebrew Association and he spent his days at socialist meetings and writing and preparing for his more and more popular lectures. Two years after arriving in America, Cahan sold his first newspaper article, about life on the Lower East Side, to *The New York Sun*.

In 1886, Cahan and a friend created a socialist weekly in Yiddish, called *Di Neie Tzeit* (The New Era). Cahan's intellectual friends criticized the paper for its simple writing and colloquial tone. He insisted that the language was appropriate and accessible for his audience, poorly educated immigrant factory workers. Unfortunately, Cahan's business acumen was nothing like his skill for language and the pair ran out of funding for their paper.

The 1890s were an exciting time for the newspaper men of New York. Not only was the city itself booming, but a "record-breaking number of press rooms were set up to cover local, national, and international news. Some fifty-eight dailies in New York alone jostled for attention." (Lipsky, 83) Two newspapers, the *New York Journal* and the *New York World*, were in the process of changing the world of journalism through their war for readers. Papers became platforms for activism. They printed pictures for the first time, lowered their prices, and engaged in what would later be deemed "yellow journalism," a journalism based on sensationalism,

exaggeration and even outright lies. This was the culture of news that the *Forward* sailed into in the spring of 1897 with Abraham Cahan at the helm. (Lipsky, 84)

Though Cahan would eventually spend fifty-years as editor of the *Forward*, he originally lasted less than a year in the position. Encouraged by his wife to devote himself to his fiction writing and frustrated by fighting within the leadership of Socialist Labor Party who funded the paper, Cahan quit after only a few months. He continued to write articles for other New York newspapers and to work on fiction writing in his spare time. His first novel, “Yekl” was published in 1896 with critical praise but tepid sales, but by 1901 he had published six stories in popular magazines (Lipsky, 301). “Yekl” and most of his other stories took place on the Lower East Side and told of Jewish immigrants finding their way in America torn between the old world and the new.

Between 1897 and 1902, Cahan covered the downtown jail beat for the *Commercial Advertiser*, New York City’s oldest newspaper. According to Seth Lipsky, “Cahan’s five years at the *Commercial Advertiser*, from 1897 to 1902 are sometimes overlooked. This brief period was overshadowed by his fifty years at the *Forward*. But it was there at the *Commercial Advertiser* that the young socialist ideologue and labor activist became a newspaper man.” (Lipsky, 301)

In 1902, Cahan took over the editorship of the *Forward* again. This time he demanded full editorial control, as well as an eight page paper instead of six. In the first edition he replaced the “usual leading essay on socialist theory,” with a human interest story about young Gentile people who had fallen in love and married Jews. (Lipsky, 106) He changed the language of the writing from formal Yiddish with German and Russian academic vocabulary, that only the educated could read, to the informal Yiddish of everyday immigrant conversation. This issue was

also markedly friendlier toward religion than the paper had previously been. Over the next few years he added photos, banner headlines, and reader contests and even opened the paper to non-socialist writers. His editorials, too, became less and less about socialist ideals and more often about American values and relatable issues for his audience. Readers began to send in questions about American life and these soon became the topics for Cahan's editorials.

In 1906 Cahan turned these letters into a separate column called, A Bintel Brief (A Bundle of Letters). In 2010, today's English-language *Forward* published Cahan's explanation of the columns inception.⁴³

One day in January 1906, [my secretary, Leon] Gottlieb told me about three letters that had arrived which didn't seem suited for any particular department... All three letters were of a personal nature rather than a communal one, and each told an individual story. I considered the three letters and my response was: Let's print them together and call it "A Bintel Brief."

The first letter published was from a woman who suspected her neighbor had stolen her watch and pawned it. The woman understood the circumstance that led her neighbor to steal from her and only asked that it would be returned. Cahan wrote an introduction explaining the events and printed the letter itself. While other papers included romantic advice columns, "A Bintel Brief" stood out as the only one to publish full letters and long detailed responses about topics that spoke to the Jewish immigrant experience. "A Bintel Brief" was also the only advice column at the time to publish advice from the editor rather than other readers or a panel of "experts." (Lipsky, 116)

After the first set of letters were published, more poured in. "A Bintel Brief" quickly became a regular daily feature. Cahan explained, "There was no end to public interest in this feature." As more and more letters arrived, "many were poorly written, and to make them print-

43 "'A Bintel Brief' Is Born." *The Forward*. Trans. Chana Pollak. N.p., n.d. Web. 08 Jan. 2016.

worthy, we had to re-write them.” Eventually the work-load was too much for Cahan. After three years, B. Feigenbaum took over the responses and eventually a series of anonymous teams of readers and writers were hired to sort and respond to letters.

After printing “A Bintel Brief”, the *Forward*’s circulation soared. The letters, too, “gave the paper an organic life, a collaborative interactivity that anticipated by just about a century the phenomenon of social media. In the world of social media new content is created by people who started out as readers of existing content.” (Lipsky, 116) In remembering the founding of “A Bintel Brief”, Cahan wrote that “many mothers found their lost children whom they hadn’t seen for more than 20 or 25 years. On two occasions engaged couples discovered, through the ‘Bintel Brief’, that they were, in fact, sister and brother...” (Pollack) Often family reunions or reconciliations, made possible by “A Bintel Brief”, happened at the *Forward* offices with a surrounding crowd.

“A Bintel Brief” was printed in the *Forward* for sixty-five years. Its title became a part of the Yiddish lexicon, used to refer to an interesting event or dramatic piece of gossip. For a time a cottage industry developed around writing these letters. For anywhere between twenty-five and fifty cents one could hire a professional to turn their story into “A Bintel Brief”.⁴⁴ Cahan wrote that he was proud that the column taught many illiterate immigrants to read.

Over time the letters and their responses naturally shifted. By the early 1970s, the final years of the column in its original format, letters were no longer written by recent immigrants, as this no longer represented the majority of the Jewish community. They no longer spoke about poverty and the plight of the workers, though they did continue to describe personal family matters, “. . . mothers-in-law complaining about daughters-in-law; daughters-in-law complaining

44 Metzker, Isaac. A Bintel Brief. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971. Print.

about mothers-in-law. . . .” (Metzker, 16), The did continue to describe the challenges in navigating between the old world and the new. Whereas letters from the early columns often told of rifts over whether it was acceptable to speak English at home rather than Yiddish and shared arguments between parents in Europe and children in America, later letters were written by mothers concerned that their 20-something daughters no longer seeing the value in marriage and by grandmothers offended by their grandchildren’s disrespect for Jewish tradition and Yiddish culture.

Cahan wrote in his memoirs that,

“People often needed the opportunity to be able to pour out their heavy laden hearts. Among our immigrant masses this need was very marked. Hundreds of thousands of people, torn from their homes and their dear ones, were lonely souls who thirsted for expression, who wanted to hear an opinion, who wanted advice in solving their weighty problems. The ‘Bintel Brief’ created just this opportunity for them.”

Without question, this was much of “A Bintel Brief’s” success. Cahan also believed that its success, its “essence,” was in its truth. (Pollack) Not only did the letters express a literal truth from the lives of its writers, but each letter, chosen for print, spoke to a human truth.

Certainly “A Bintel Brief” filled a need and spoke a truth. However, “A Bintel Brief’s” other strength was the style of advice it offered. Its editors’ responses to readers usually affirmed readers’ feelings and positions, acknowledged multiple perspectives and gave reasonable and generally easy to follow advice. Furthermore the advice was grounded in the socialist ideology which served as a backbone for the paper. It fit the ideals of its readership. For example, in 1908 Cahan responded to a writer who asked him to settle a dispute as to whether “a Socialist and a freethinker should observe *yahrzeit*?” (Metzker, 75) Cahan responded that,

Honoring a departed one who was cherished and loved is a gracious sentiment and a requisite for the living. And everyone wants to be remembered after his

death. Socialists and freethinkers observe the anniversaries of their great leaders – just recently they commemorated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the death of Karl Marx. Saying kaddish is certainly a religious rite, and to pay someone to say kiddish is not the act of a freethinker. But, we can understand the psychology of a freethinker who feels that hiring someone else is not as much against his own convictions as to say kaddish himself.”

Cahan gave similarly sensitive advice to a man who had married a Christian woman who was becoming increasingly Christian and seemed increasingly emotional about the Jewish elements of her life and her distance from Christianity at home. “Dear Editor,” he wrote, “advise me what to do now. I could never convert, and there’s no hope for me to keep her from going to church. What can we do now?” Cahan’s response refers to their situation as a tragedy, but comments that it was a common one, often written about in “A Bintel Brief”. The writer was not alone. Cahan suggested that the couple might move to a Jewish neighborhood, where the writer’s wife might have more positive interactions with Jewish community and culture and the husband’s Jewish needs might be better met outside of the home.

Long after Cahan’s tenure with “A Bintel Brief” was over, the advice continued to follow this similar pattern. Though the advice lost its characteristic socialist ideology, even in the 1960’s a grandmother who wrote about being offended by Bar Mitzvah plans for her grandchildren was told that she was justified in being angry, but she should not let anger ruin a joyous event for them all. The editor advised her to attend the ceremony and the party and put the anger behind her. (Metzker, 201) Parents who wondered how to relate to their son’s widow’s new husband, were first comforted in their loss and then told how to make decisions.

Not only did Abraham Cahan’s straightforward and sensitive responses set a standard for future “A Bintel Brief” editors, it set a standard for all future advice columns. Its readers Pauline and Esther Friedman, future “Dear Abby” and “Ask Ann Landers” writers, would eventually copy the format and bring it to all of America in syndicated columns and series of books. At its

height in the 1930s, “A Bintel Brief” reached 275,000 readers each week¹. In 1993 “Ask Ann Landers” became the most widely syndicated column in the world, appearing in 1200 daily newspapers with 90 million readers in more than 20 languages. Her sister’s “Dear Abby” column was the only chief rival.

Esther and Pauline Friedman – “Dear Abby” and “Ask Ann Landers”

Identical twins Esther Pauline Friedman Lederer and Pauline Esther Friedman Phillips were born July 4th, 1918 in Sioux City, Iowa. Their parents, Abraham and Rebecca had emigrated from Russia ten years before. After two years in New York, the Friedmans moved west to join cousins in Iowa. Abe worked as a chicken peddler and the family settled in Sioux City’s Jewish neighborhood, “The Bottoms.” In 1911, Abraham and Rebecca welcomed their first daughter Helen and purchased their own grocery store. Dorothy, their second daughter, was born in 1913, and in 1918 the twins joined the family.

Not only were Esther Pauline and Pauline Esther, Eppie and Popo as they were called, given the same name, but they were dressed alike, put in the same classes at school and for most of their childhood they even shared a bed. Esther (Ann) wrote in a collection of her columns,

I remember the sense of guilt I suffered when, at the age of eleven, I screwed up the courage to express a preference for shredded wheat over puffed rice. I had been brought up to feel that everything with twins should be alike. I knew my sister preferred puffed rice and she knew I preferred shredded wheat so we used to alternate.⁴⁵

45 Landers, Ann. Since You Ask Me. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1961. Print.

By the time the twins were teens their father invested in a local vaudeville theater. Eventually his business grew to include a chain of movie theaters, and their home became the gathering place for Jewish vaudeville performers on their way through town. In an interview with Robert Gluck, biographer Jan Pottker reported in an interview with Robert Gluck that, “The Friedmans belonged to a synagogue, were observant and felt that Judaism was important.”⁴⁶ However in her book, Dear Ann, Dear Abby, Pottker wrote that she and co-author Bob Speziale interviewed Shirley Rabinowitz Givot, the daughter of Rabbi Rabinowitz, who said that, “The girls attended Sunday school but that was it. They weren’t that involved in synagogue activities.” Speziale and Pottker also assert that the Friedmans tried hard to assimilate and “cut ties” with the old world as soon as they arrived in New York.⁴⁷ The family’s relationship with Judaism aside, both sisters acknowledged that their first language was Yiddish and they were avid readers of “A Bintel Brief” in the *Forward*. In their columns both Ann and Abby reference Yiddish phrases they learned as children. (Landers, 201). Margo Howard, Ann’s daughter wrote in her book, Ann Landers In Her Own Words: Personal Letters to Her Daughter (Warner Books 2005) that, though her mother lacked religious education, “Mother felt her ethnic heritage on a gut level.” (Howard, 11) She wrote that being raised by immigrant parents in Iowa in the 1920s made her mother feel like an outsider, which was a common theme in Esther’s life and writing. Howard also commented on her mother’s love of Yiddish. Howard attributed this to the fact that her mother was raised in a Yiddish speaking home and said it helped her to feel connected to her youth and her parents after they passed away. (Howard, 11-12)

46 Gluck, Robert. "Appreciating 'Dear Abby': How Judaism Influenced the Famous Advice Columnist." *Algemeiner.com* RSS. JNS.org2, 23 Feb. 2013. Web. 10 Jan. 2016.

47 Dear Ann, Dear Abby is an unauthorized biography of Esther Lederer and Pauline Phillips. The authors claim that all information and quotes come from interviews with friends and family members of the sisters as well as quotes from interviews and their columns and books. However the book does not mark specific sources.

Esther (Ann) and Popo (Abby) remained identical and committed to a shared life into early adulthood. They were married on their twenty-first birthday in “a fantastic double wedding with 700 guests, three rabbis and a bridal party of 22.”⁴⁸ Esther and Julius became parents to their only daughter, Margo, in 1940. In 1942, Popo and Morton welcomed their first child, Jeannie. Their son Edward joined the family shortly after the war, just before they moved to Eau Claire. Though biographers reported that “their concept of being a good mother didn’t entail being at the beck and call of their children,” (Pottker and Speziale, 75) Margo describes the relief she felt when her mother’s career began to take off. She wrote, “Finally, some of her focus was deflected from me. I was never one of those kids who could later complain I received short shrift in the attention department. On the contrary, my mother had always zeroed in on me like a laser. Probably because I was an only child, I was overprotected.” (Howard, 16)

During World War II, Esther and Popo’s husbands, Morton Phillips and Julius Lederer, were drafted to the same army unit. After the war, Phillips hired Lederer to work for him in his family’s business, Presto pressure cookers, in Eau Claire Wisconsin. According to the New York Times, Marshall Atkinson, former publisher of *The Leader-Telegram* in Eau Claire, once described this period of family life in Eau Claire “the 10 years of twins,” as life changing for the town. The sisters hosted elaborate costume parties and threw themselves into volunteer work.

During their time in Eau Claire, both sisters became active volunteers for the Democratic Party. Esther especially became involved in local politics. She ran for Democratic county chairman twice, winning once, and committed herself to addressing local party debt and campaigning for liberal candidates. Though somewhat less involved than her sister, Popo was

48 Shapiro, Samantha M. "Who Was Dear Abby?" The New York Times. The New York Times, 21 Dec. 2013. Web. 10 Jan. 2016.

famous for opposing her husband politically. According to Pottker and Speziale, Popo would change her husband's hood ornament from an elephant to a donkey whenever she drove the car. Popo was involved philanthropically and as a volunteer at the local hospital, and both were active in the Easter Seal Society and March of Dimes. Popo also led an effort to administer polio vaccines to local children. Esther founded the local chapter of League of Women Voters. Both Esther and Popo attributed later advice-giving skills to lesson learned while volunteering at Luther Hospital. (Pottker and Speziale, 68)

In 1954 Esthers's husband Jules accepted a position at the Cory Corporation in Chicago. Their family of three moved to an apartment in a former Rockefeller mansion on Lake Shore Drive. Esther claimed later that she was bored in with her new city life, and would read the advice column that appeared three times a week in the Chicago Sun-Times called "Ask Ann Landers". At the time, the column was written by Ruth Crowley. Esther and would ignore the printed answers and create her own instead. "Ask Ann Landers" had been a thrice weekly column in the *Chicago Sun-Times* for thirteen years by the time Esther moved to Chicago. Its author, Ruth Crowley, was a nurse and mother, who most often wrote about medical concerns. Landers later claimed that she, "picked up the phone, called her friend Will Munnecke, a Chicago Sun-Times executive, and told him she wanted to help Ms. Landers answer mail."⁴⁹ She then learned that Ruth Crowley had passed away and the paper was holding a contest to find a new writer. Esther called in all the influential friends she had made through her political activities and started "pulling strings like a puppeteer." (Albin, 2) With no degree or experience, she had few ways to compete with the credentialed journalists vying for the position. "The only

49 Albin, Kira. "Dear Ann Landers." Grandtimes.com, 1997. Web. 10 Jan. 2016.

thing I had going for me was that I had a teenage daughter,” she later claimed. (Pottker and Speziale, 105)

In order to win the position Lederer wrote responses to sample letters. Her response to a question about walnuts falling into a neighbor’s yard included the opinion of “her friend Justice William O. Douglass of the United States Supreme Court.”⁵⁰ (Albin, 2) In response to a question on interfaith marriage, she claimed to have called another friend, Father Theodore Hesburgh, president of the University of Notre Dame. Munneke later wrote in the introduction to her first collection of columns published as a book, that one reason she was successful was because, “she never hesitates to call upon any individual anywhere who might help her provide a better answer to the question she is asked.” (Landers, i) This was just one secret to her authority.

Like Cahan before her, Lederer/Landers believed that the source of her column’s success was in the questioner’s revelation of “human woes, strange obscenities, and sad frailties.”(Albin, 2) She claimed, too, that she was “eternally hopeful. Unflappable. Optimistic.” This upbeat attitude was what “keeps her popular with her readers and helps her maintain her moral.” (Albin, 2) Munneke however gave credit to one more personality trait that helped her column to succeed. “Her sole objective is to help the person who asks the question,” he wrote. “If the answer helps another or amuses another, it does so as a by-product.” Lederer herself explained that, “Many people who write for advice don’t really want it. They simply want to un-load.” In offering people a reason to write down their problems and in responding to each and every one⁵¹, Esther believed that she was helping them to feel heard. Furthermore she saw her role as that of teacher, “I select letters [for the column] that give me an opportunity to teach people something,”

50 Pottker and Speziale note that Douglas and Lederer could only have met once before this and he denied being a source for Ann Landers. P 108

51 Esther claimed to have responded to every letter written to her as Ann Landers.

she told journalist Kira Albin in a 1997 interview, “This was my mission from the beginning.” (Albin, 4)

Though Munneke claims humor and entertainment as a bi-product, Landers’ columns were short and pithy, full of puns and colloquialisms, sometimes insulting but most certainly entertaining. To a woman who asked if she should iron the bed sheets because her mother-in-law did and her husband liked it, Landers responded that it was worth the 30 minutes each week to make her husband happy and she should feel lucky that her marital problems “could be ironed out so easily.” (Landers, 14) She told readers not to “blow a gasket,” to “give him the heave-ho,” and titled a book and trademarked the phrase, “Wake up and smell the coffee”. (Albin, 3). In addition to her own advice, she often printed funny comments and letters written by readers. When she advised a mother to force her daughter to wear an ugly dress, lovingly made by grandmother, she reported that she received hundreds of responses. She printed one in in a later collection of columns from an 11 year-old son of a dry cleaner who said, “I feel very sorry for that little girl, and I think I can help her. My father owns a dry cleaning shop. If she will send the dress to him he will ruin it for her.” (Landers, 16)

Like Cahan in “A Bintel Brief”, “Ask Ann Landers” provided not only advice but help and sometimes a spectacle for readers. In an interview, she shared the stories of helping a man with a double cleft palate receive surgery and a mother find an adoptive home for her son. In 1971, Lederer wrote a column about cancer and asked readers to clip it and send it to Congress to support a cancer-research bill. Over a million people sent letters to President Nixon and Lederer credits this support with the bill passing.

Just like “A Bintel Brief”, “Ask Ann Landers” changed over time. Biographer Robin Judd described her as, “liberal in her politics but conservative in her morality.”⁵² She wrote about racism and anti-Semitism and devoted her column to fighting injustice. However, she famously reversed her opinion about divorce. She described her early mentality as, “You made a deal, stay with it thick or thin.” Later, she credited her own divorce, changing times, and public opinion, for changing her opinion on the issue. She also dramatically changed her stance and advice when it came to homosexuality. Originally she advised people to be tolerant but considered it “a deviant psychiatric disorder.” (Albin, 3) She eventually apologized and asserted that people are born into their sexual identity.

In 1955, less than a year after Esther and Julius moved to Chicago, the Presto factory in Eau Claire closed down and Mort Phillips accepted a job in another of his family’s businesses, a liquor distributor in San Francisco. Popo explained that her advice career began when she helped her overwhelmed sister to answer letters to Ann Landers. “I provided the sharp answers,” Popo later told *The Ladies’ Home Journal*. “I’d say, ‘You’re writing too long (she still does), and this is the way I’d say it.’”⁵³ When Esther’s editor Larry Fanning soon forbade the outside help, Phillips decided her writing, “looked awfully good in print,” (Fox, 1) and decided to find her own column.

In an interview with Larry King, Pauline told America that she simply marched into the editor’s office at the *San Francisco Chronicle* in January of 1956 and told him that she could

52 Judd, Robin. "Ann Landers." Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia. 1 March 2009. Jewish Women's Archive. (Viewed on January 10, 2016)
<<http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/landers-ann>>.

53 Fox, Margalit. "Pauline Phillips, Flinty Adviser to Millions as Dear Abby, Dies at 94." The New York Times. The New York Times, 17 Jan. 2013. Web. 11 Jan. 2016.

write a better column than the Molly Mayfield advice column they were publishing.⁵⁴ She didn't have a social security number, she had never worked a day in her life, and she described herself as "nothing but a Hillsborough housewife." The editor asked her to write her own response to a handful of Mayfield questions. She told Larry King that she went to her husband's office, wrote witty one-line responses and returned them to the editor that afternoon. He called later that day to offer her a regular position at the paper and she started the next day.

Popo decided to write under the pseudonym Abigail Van Buren, after the biblical character Abigail (I Samuel 25) and America's 8th president Martin Van Buren.⁵⁵ The column was immediately popular and was syndicated within weeks. It eventually became the most widely syndicated newspaper column, published in 1000 newspapers world-wide. "According to TIME magazine, by the early '80s, Van Buren had hired 11 employees to help manage the large quantity of inquiries: six to answer letters, four to open mail and one to help conduct research."⁵⁶ Just like "A Bintel Brief" eventually became a general term in Yiddish so too has "Dear Abby" become synonymous with advice columns. Though few copy her terse responses, many copy her name, including "Dear Sugar" and "Dear Prudence," two of the most widely read advice columns today.

The "Dear Abby" column is known today not only for its often sarcastic, humorous tone, but also for being non-judgmental and ahead of its time in many ways. The *San Diego Times*

54 "'Dear Abby' Talks about Her Big Break." YouTube. YouTube, 17 Jan. 2013. Web. 16 Jan. 2016.

55 Ander, Marsha S. "At 72, 'Dear Abby' Says Retirement Is A Dirty Word." [Http://www.webcitation.org/61hkn10Nb](http://www.webcitation.org/61hkn10Nb). St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 08 June 1991. Web. 24 Jan. 2016.

56 "Abigail Van Buren." Bio.com. A&E Networks Television, n.d. Web. 16 Jan. 2016.

first printed the word “homosexual” in a 1957 “Dear Abby” column.⁵⁷ In 1970 a mother wrote into the paper saying, “Dear Abby, Recently our 21-year old daughter came out to us and told us she was ‘in love’ with another girl.” Pauline responded, “Dear Mother, if your daughter is happy with ‘what she is’ then if you who profess to love her must accept her as she is or not at all.” Dr. David Gudelunas⁵⁸ argued, that while “Ask Ann Landers” responses were longer, fuller and more cognizant of the emotional issues, “Dear Abby’s” terse and comical responses deserve credit for influencing the way people talk about sex. He argued that both the frequency and nonchalance with which Abigail Van Buren addressed issues, from STDs to infidelity, changed the way other newspaper advice columnists addressed the issue afterwards.⁵⁹

Dr. Ruth Westheimer - *Sexually Speaking*

Though Dr. Ruth Westheimer is not an advice columnist in the same way that Abe Cahan, Esther Lederer and Pauline Phillips were, the story of advice giving in America, especially when it comes to sexuality, would not be complete without her.

Dr. Ruth was born to Orthodox Jewish parents in Frankfurt Germany in 1929. She was named Karola Ruth Siegel and lived with her parents and paternal grandmother in her father’s

57 Felder, Deborah G. A Century of Women: The Most Influential Events in Twentieth-century Women's History. Secaucus, NJ: Carol Pub. Group, 1999. Print.

58 Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Communication and Co-Director of Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies at Fairfield University.

59 Gudelunas, David. Confidential to America: Newspaper Advice Columns and Sexual Education. New Brunswick: Transaction, 2008. Print.

family home until 1939. Her father's family was wealthy and educated while her mother had come from the country and worked as their maid. In her memoir, Dr. Ruth points out the irony that her parents married because her mother was pregnant and she later grew up to "become famous as an advocate of contraception." (Westheimer, 7)

When she was a child, her father invested in both her secular and religious educations. In her memoir she wrote that despite the custom that only men attend synagogue, she was regularly his companion at synagogue until their local synagogue burned down. (Westheimer, 24) In 1939, at the age of ten, Ruth's father was arrested and her mother and grandmother decided that Germany was no longer safe for her. She was one of 300 children accepted as a refugee to Switzerland on a *kindertransport*⁶⁰.

In Switzerland Karola lived in a rural children's home and summer camp for Swiss Jewish children who could not live with their parents. The children were supervised by only a few adults and were organized into small groups, with older children expected to look after younger children. In addition, a school was organized for children aged 6-14, which they attended for a few hours a day. With a single teacher and so many students, Karola felt denied an education. After a male friend was permitted to attend the local High School, she borrowed his books in the evening to study while he slept. When not in class, Karola and the other German refugee children cleaned the home and served the Swiss children. They were initially expected to stay only six months while their parents prepared for emigration; however, even those whose parents had been able to settle in safe countries could not leave once the war began. Karola lived in the children's home until she was seventeen.

60 Kindertransport refers to a series of efforts to rescue Jewish children from Nazi Germany and Austria by bringing them to safer places in Europe. Karola was accepted into a program for children whose fathers had been arrested by the Nazis.

Though she dreamed of becoming a doctor, Karola had no access to education or certification in Switzerland. Instead she decided to get a “household diploma,” essentially maid’s certification, so that she might become a nursery school teacher. At the same time the children’s home began to sponsor Zionist youth group meetings. Karola quickly fell in love with Zionism and when the war ended she gave up her place at the teaching academy in Switzerland to move to Palestine.

In Palestine, Karola was told she needed a new, less German, name. She chose her middle name Ruth, hoping that her parents might still be alive and find her. In Palestine, Ruth and the other children were taken to Atlit, a camp built to house refugees while their paperwork was processed and they were assigned more permanent homes. Ruth’s uncle came to visit her there and asked her to join him on Kibbutz Ashdot Yaakov where he had moved before the war, but she declined, joining her friends, instead, on Kibbutz Ayanot.

Ruth stayed on Kibbutz Ayanot for just over a year, before deciding to move to Kibbutz Yagur which had a kindergarten teachers’ training school. Ruth worked in the kitchen in exchange for tuition and never truly became a part of the community. At Yagur she began to study Hebrew and arranged for tutoring in math and French. Before she was allowed into the training course, however, she realized that she would have to work a full year in the kitchen for each year of the program and was required to work off the tuition before taking any classes. Ever impatient, She decided six years to complete a three year program was too much. With the help of a distant relative, she found a training program in Jerusalem and began in 1947.

In Jerusalem, Ruth studied arts and crafts and children’s songs, and the major educational ideologies of the period. In addition, she learned Hebrew grammar, Bible, philosophy, literature, history and English. She lived in a youth house for young women, and spent time with her

mother's cousin Liesel, who introduced her to classical music and gave her her first taste of the intellectual elite. She graduated in 1949 and was assigned to teach kindergarten in a Yemenite school. While teaching, Ruth met David an aspiring doctor from a wealthy Tel Aviv family. In 1949 they married and moved to Paris so that David could enter medical school.

When the couple arrived in Paris, Ruth worked teaching kindergarten by day and giving Hebrew lessons and babysitting in the evening, while David studied. Quickly, however, she realized that she wanted to study as well. She enrolled in a program offered by the Sorbonne to help those who were unable to complete high school because of the war to do so within a year. After completing that course, she enrolled in the Institute of Psychology at the Sorbonne. While Ruth was excited by her studies, her husband David was bored. He realized that he did not want to be a doctor and they realized that they did not want to be married. So he went back to Israel, while she stayed to finish her degree.

Shortly after her divorce, Ruth fell in love with a young French Jew, "trying to find himself," named Dan. Shortly afterward, Ruth unexpectedly received a restitution check from the German government. With her money, Ruth convinced Dan to join her on an extended vacation to the US and then to Israel. As Ruth tells the story in her memoirs, she read an advertisement for a scholarship available for a Nazi victim to study in a master's degree program in sociology at the New School For Social Research in New York City. Within twenty-four hours, she had applied and received the scholarship and was enrolled in graduate school.

Ruth attended classes at The New School in the evenings and worked as a maid and at the French embassy during the day. Soon after, she and Dan found that she was pregnant and got married. Miriam was born in 1957. A year later, Ruth and Dan decided their love affair was over and they, too, got divorced. With the help of Jewish Family Services, Ruth found a family

to look after Miriam while she was at school and work. Ruth earned a master's degree in sociology in 1959 and published a thesis on the experience of German Jewish children who had been a part of the *kindertransport* to Switzerland.

In 1961 Ruth married Fred Westheimer; her third and final marriage. She became an American citizen in 1965. Two years later, in 1967, she and Fred welcomed a son, Joel, into the family. While her children were small, Ruth worked part time doing research for economist Charlotte Muller at the School of Public Health and Administrative Medicine at Columbia University. She co-authored several articles, but in 1967 funding for the project ran out. She was then hired as a research associate for Planned Parenthood.

At Planned Parenthood, Ruth finally found her professional path. She wrote in her memoir, "I didn't know that I would become a sex therapist, but I thought that teaching people would not only suit my skills and experience, but would provide a wonderful service. (Westheimer, 205) Ruth and her team made their way across Harlem interviewing women and recording the data. In discussing this period of her life, Dr. Ruth explained that she felt it was important not to see herself as "Lady Bountiful, a middle-class white savior coming up to Harlem to dispense goodness and wisdom." (Westheimer, 207) She stressed to her team that they were working with the women of Harlem, rather than doing anyone a favor. She also discussed the many ways they tried to help the women they interviewed. This attitude would come in handy later and be a trademark of her style of advice. Though well-trained and credentialed, Westheimer made her reputation by talking simply and straightforwardly and trying to help her listeners and readers without judgment.

Once her son Joel was enrolled in school for a full day, Ruth decided it was time to continue her education. She began taking one class at a time at Columbia's Teachers College.

She wrote her dissertation on the Planned Parenthood project and was awarded a Doctor of Education degree in 1970. That summer, she began teaching a course called Psychological Foundations of Education at Lehman College. She quickly rose through the ranks of the institution by publishing and participating in campus committees. She began teaching classes on teaching sex education and eventually that became her entire portfolio.

In 1947 she met Dr. Helen Singer Kaplan, author of *The New Sex Therapy*, and then began attending her lectures. She credited these audited lectures with helping her decide to become a sex therapist. She trained for two years and became a certified psychosexual therapist through Cornell University in 1975. She continued to teach courses at Lehman, while building a private counseling practice. In 1976, she was laid off from Lehman College. She taught as an adjunct professor for a year before agreeing to a position as an Assistant Professor teaching at Brooklyn College. According to Dr. Westheimer, she taught there for two years, was promoted to associate professor, but then fired without cause. Upset by being fired, Westheimer hired a lawyer and went to arbitration. The arbitrator decided however that it was within the College's rights to fire Westheimer without reason and she chose not to appeal the decision and fight for her job any further.

Just after being fired, Ruth, now Dr. Ruth, saw a letter asking for an academic to lecture the community-affairs managers of all the radio stations in the area on the need for sex education.⁶¹ She called the woman who had advertised and found out that the request was old and had already been filled by a colleague. Ruth started to chat with woman from the radio station and at the end of the conversation was invited to come in and address the group. She

61 According to Dr. Ruth, "In those days the FCC had a rule that every radio station had to have a community-affairs manager, and every month they had to hear from different people about community concerns." (Westheimer, 232)

lectured on the value of sex education and concluded by telling them, “they ought to have a program on the air that talks about these issues.” (Westheimer, 232) After she left the podium, the community affairs director invited her to be interviewed on a Sunday morning show called *Getting to Know*. The same afternoon the show was taped, Dr. Ruth was offered fifteen minutes on Sunday nights between midnight and twelve-fifteen to talk about sex.

Fred Herman, cantor and friend of Dr. Ruth’s, helped her decide on the name of the show, *Sexually Speaking*, and wrote the theme music. The first episode, which aired in 1980, Dr. Ruth lectured. At the end of the first show she said, “Listen, if there’s anything you people want me to talk about relating to these issues, send me a letter.” (Westheimer, 235) By the third week she had received “a whole stack of letters,” and from then on the format of the show became reading and answering the letters from listeners.

Westheimer explained that the popularity of *Sexually Speaking* in the following way,

One thing that helped was that I emphasized from the start that I was not a medical doctor, and that I wouldn’t do therapy on the air. What I would do was educate and give general advice, the kind that would be given by an aunt - an aunt who’s trusted, well educated, well prepared, and willing to speak explicitly. I did not ask questions - or rather I did ask questions, but only ones designed to get information, to get to the real gist of the problem. I did not ask the questions a therapist would ask, “How do you feel about that?” and so forth. Anytime someone called with a serious problem, such as depression or suicidal feelings, I quickly said that they must seek professional help. (Westheimer, 238)

Dr. Ruth had the ability to listen and understand the issues of her callers. For example, when an eighteen-year-old virgin called in 1981 and told the doctor that her boyfriend of a month was proposing intercourse, Dr. Ruth advised her not to do it, “because one month is a very short time. Also, because I hear in your question that he is putting pressure on you.” (Westheimer, 242)

The radio program, *Sexually Speaking with Dr. Ruth Westheimer*, eventually grew into two advice columns(one in a syndicated newspaper, the other in Playgirl magazine), a website, a series of successful books, countless lecture series and media interviews, four American television shows and one in Israel. Dr. Ruth Westheimer achieved pop culture stardom with her frank and specific advice about what was once a taboo subject. Her trailblazing work made room for writers like Dan Savage who educate Americans not only about sex, but specifically about LGBT sexuality and relationships and the issues of other sexual minority groups.

Today fans of Dr. Ruth can ask questions about sex and relationships and receive her answers via drruth.com, twitter, and her YouTube channel. While Esther Lederer and Pauline Phillips were successful, in part, because their advice changed along with society, Dr. Ruth's success has come from the advice she gives as well as the media through which she gives it. Dr. Ruth's work serves as a bridge from the syndicated newspaper column to today's internet blogs, vlogs and podcasts.

Dear Prudence - Slate.com

When it comes to online advice giving the column of the moment is certainly "Dear Prudence", produced and published online by Slate.com and printed in over 200 newspapers around the country. Slate calls itself a "news magazine," and was one of the first on the internet. It began as a Microsoft experiment in 1996 and by 2014 boasted 150 million unique visitors each

month. As the first online magazine, Slate has set the tone for competitors like Salon and for online journalism in general. It has also led the way in new media like blogging and podcasting⁶²

“Dear Prudence” was first published anonymously. Today Slate’s archive lists Herbert Stein⁶³ as the author for the first three months. In March of 1998 the column was taken over by Margo Howard, Esther Lederer’s daughter. Like her mother, Howard brought little formal experience to writing advice in a nationally syndicated advice column. She did, however, bring a lifetime of watching her mother live as Ann Landers and plays up this source of authority in interviews. In a *Chicago Tribune* interview in 2001 she said,

Once I started writing the column, I was shocked that it came so easily. I really got into it after a while and started to wonder why I’d hidden from it for all these years. I said to the old days, ‘Do you think there’s an advice gene?’ Her mother responded, “I don’t really think there is. But you were raised around it. If you’re awake, you can’t help but learn from what’s going on around you.”⁶⁴

Howard served as “Dear Prudence” until 2006, when she left to focus on her own syndicated advice column, “Dear Margo”. This second column never achieved the same success as “Dear Prudence” and in 2013 Howard retired from that column as well.

After Howard, Emily Yoffe took over the voice of Prudence for ten years. In her farewell column Yoffe wrote, “I leave with the same qualifications I came in with: none.”⁶⁵ Clearly a theme for modern advice columnists. However, by 2006 Yoffe was a fifty-one year old mother and wife, who had already earned her stripes as a journalist for The New Republic, was a regular

62 Kinsley, Michael. "Michael Kinsley's History of Slate." Slate.com. N.p., 18 June 2006. Web. 17 Jan. 2016.

63 Herbert Stein, was a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers under Presidents Nixon and Ford and a frequent contributor to slate.com between its birth in 1996 and his death in 1999.

64 Cogan, Rick. "Women Of Letters." Tribunedigital-chicagotribune. Chicago Tribune, 01 Apr. 2001. Web. 17 Jan. 2016.

65 Yoffe, Emily. "Saying Goodbye as Dear Prudence." Slate.com. Slate, 12 Nov. 2015. Web. 17 Jan. 2016.

contributor to Slate, had a by-line in the New York Times, and had recently published her first book, What the Dog Did: Tales from a Formerly Reluctant Dog Owner. More like Cahan than Lederer, Phillips or Howard, Yoffe's life and writing experience qualified her for the position.

Yoffe was criticized for her somewhat prudish advice related to alcohol and drug use. She was also attacked for the position on rape culture on college campuses that she took in an essay called, "The College Rape Overcorrection." Nonetheless, Slate's editor-in-chief, Julia Turner, described the qualities she loved best about Yoffe's Prudence as, "the tenderness with which she advises the lonely and lovelorn; the clarity with which she tells readers it's OK to cut off the unkind people in their lives; and the vigor with which she administers smackdowns to vain bridesmaids and other buffoons."⁶⁶ Claire Fallon, Books and Culture writer for the "Huffington Post" noted that Yoffe "played with the conventional boundaries of advice columns,"⁶⁷ by sharing stories from her own life and taking "strong seemingly contrarian positions in her advice." Compared to Slate's newest "Dear Prudence" author, however, Emily Yoffe is "old school."

In the fall of 2015, Slate announced that Emily Yoffe would be replaced by twenty-nine year-old internet celebrity, Mallory Ortberg. Not only is Ortberg the first non-Jewish "Dear Prudence" writer, she is the first without children and under age fifty. Prior to becoming "Dear Prudence," Ortberg founded *The Toast*, an irreverent website geared slightly toward twenty-something feminists. *The Toast* went viral with posts like, "Women Having a Terrible Time at Parties In Western Art History" in which Ortberg pairs famous paintings with funny captions. Her first book, Texts from Jane Eyre, is a collection of text messages she imagines famous

66 Turner, Julia. "Mallory Ortberg Will Be the Next Dear Prudence." Slate.com. Slate, 9 Nov. 2015. Web. 17 Jan. 2016.

67 Fallon, Claire. "The New Generation of Agony Aunts Transforming the Advice Column." Huffington Post. Huffington Post, 10 Oct. 2015. Web. 17 Jan. 2016.

literary characters sending to each other. Like Yoffe, Ortberg was hired because of her writing voice rather than advice-giving qualifications. This choice makes clear that Slate is looking to engage a younger audience. In the few months she has been in the position, her letters and responses are remarkably tame and straightforward. For a woman who announced her prestigious new position on Twitter, in all capitals, without punctuation (which is a fairly typical style for twitter), one might expect less formal writing, more slang, or a few pop culture references. Ultimately while Ortberg's hiring represents a departure from the norms of advice columns, she has not been in the position long enough to tell if her column will have an impact on the generation of advice columnists.

Chapter 3: Putting it all Together

My column in context

In seeking to build a relationship between the traditional texts and the modern advice columns I have studied, and with an eye to the final project of creating an advice column myself, it would be presumptuous to compare myself to Talmudic sages or the likes of Esther Lederer. Certainly, I am not a great sage, a bestselling author, or even yet, for that matter, an ordained rabbi. I could never begin to compare myself to Rabbah, a sage who was allowed to rule on legal issues before he was forty, because of his great wisdom and his ability to almost magically identify sixty types of blood sent to him by Ifra Hormiz. Nor could I compare myself to Dr. Ruth, who has degrees from some of the most prestigious academic institutions in the world. My hope then is to compare my project and goals to that of those who came before, rather than to compare myself to my predecessors.

I have three primary goals for creating an advice column. The first is to fill what I perceive as a need in my community. In 1978, Rabbi Alexander Schindler, then leader of the Reform Movement, called on American Jews to invest in outreach to intermarried families in response to “the increasing concern among American Jews about assimilation and intermarriage.”⁶⁸ He called on American synagogues to integrate into Jewish life intermarried couples, their children, Jews unattached to congregations and non-Jews interested in converting.” In an ethical will posted on the website of the Union of American Congregations (the forerunner of the Union for Reform Judaism) in 1995, Rabbi Schindler wrote that, “If our standards are high

⁶⁸ Steinberg, Jacques. "Rabbi Alexander Schindler, Reform Leader and Major Jewish Voice, Dies at 75." *New York Times* 16 November. 2000, Online ed.

and our programs are substantive, those who come from the periphery to the center, from the outside to the inside, invariably are among the first to laud and cultivate a flowering of Jewish literacy and spirituality.”⁶⁹

According to the Pew Research Center survey of American Jews (2013), 58 percent of respondents that have married since 2000, married non-Jewish spouses. Of all respondents, 44 percent are married to non-Jews⁷⁰. Although such figures have been published since the 1990s,⁷¹ and Schindler called our movement’s attention to the issue twelve years before the 1990 population survey, interfaith families still sit at the periphery of the Jewish community. Affiliation rates among interfaith families are low. Intermarriage rates are still used as an example of Judaism’s impending doom. Non-Jewish members of our community are commonly barred from leadership roles. Reform rabbis are still debating whether or not to perform marriage ceremonies between Jews and non-Jews.

During the last Biennial, in 2015, URJ President, Rabbi Rick Jacobs, added outreach to interfaith Jewish families to the agenda of the Reform Movement for the next two years. Jacobs called reaching out to non-Jews who want to be a part of the Jewish community, the “opportunity of the millennium for American Judaism,” adding that “We have a sacred obligation to open our doors,” to the non-Jew within our midst.⁷² While the needs of this group are finally on our communal agenda, many communities do not know where or how to begin. In order to address these needs within our community, we must offer opportunities for non-Jews to articulate them.

⁶⁹ Schindler, Alexander. "Hear God's Call - A Communal Ethical Will |

ReformJudaism.org." Reform Judaism. Union for Reform Judaism, n.d. Web. 18 Jan. 2016.

⁷⁰ “A Portrait of Jewish Americans.” Rep. San Francisco, CA: Pew Research Center, 2013.

⁷¹ According to Joseph Reimer, “The 1990 NJPs, with its alarming news of the sharp rise in the intermarriages between Jews and non-Jews, set off a deeply felt alarm that perhaps the Jewish enterprise in North America was engaged by the forces of assimilation.” (Springer, 2001)

⁷² Jacobs, Rick. “The Genesis of Our Future.” Union of Reform Judaism Biennial. San Diego CA. 12 December 2013. Speech.

An advice column offers a public forum, with a low threshold for entrance, to address issues and concerns particular to this sub-group of our community, to make these concerns public, and to offer an online place for people to gather. A rabbi writing an advice column related to issues in interfaith relationships says to wider society that we are not ashamed of these community members, that we see them and hear them, and we feel responsible to meet their needs.

Furthermore, to the interfaith community in particular, answering questions with advice from Jewish tradition and a Jewish perspective, conveys the message that Judaism has value to real everyday lives. In studying traditional texts and modern advice columns, I feel justified in choosing interfaith relationships as my area of discussion. This conversation is timeless. From the Mishnah to A Bintel Brief to Dear Prudence love between Jews and non-Jews seems to have always been on people's minds.

There is another subgroup I intend to reach. We call the demographic by different names: emerging adults, Millennials, 20s and 30s, young professionals, post-college aged, new parents. No matter the name, these are the members of our community who have grown up in the digital age. These are the members of our community who make friends and date online, express themselves in 140 characters on Twitter, on six-second Vine videos and images captured and edited on cell phones. My goal is to reach people where they spend their time – online. In order to do so effectively, the column must embrace not only the medium (i.e. an online column) but also by speaking in a language and tone typical of the internet to address their questions and concerns.

Again, my study of both traditional and modern texts emphasizes the value of speaking in the mode and voice most relevant to the period and audience. Talmud is written in Aramaic, the common spoken language of ancient Babylonia. Its form can feel rambling and incoherent to a

modern reader, but was typical for the time in which it was edited. Its authors and editors use idioms that mean little to modern readers using literal translations. In Nidda 20a for example Rabbi Eliezer was called “master of four,” which is actually translated by scholars as, “supreme authority.” Rabbi Feinstein, in his responsum to the worried mother, changes the way he writes his response based (we might assume) on the assumption that women readers need a shorter and less text heavy response to questions. Cahan, Lederer and Phillips are all famous for speaking in a more casual tone that was easy for readers to understand and relate to. Dr. Ruth, who took her advice from the radio to cable television, and then a website, YouTube, and Twitter, offers an example of using technology to reach readers in new and relevant ways.

The second goal of the column is to teach Judaism. As a future rabbi, I understand my primary job as helping people find meaning in their lives through Judaism. The goal of my advice column is not only to respond to the particular needs of one group within the community I serve, but to respond in a particularly Jewish way, using Jewish language, traditions and sources. For example, in the test question I respond to below, I offer links to explanations of terms like Talmud and Mishnah. I use traditional sources to explain why my advice is what it is. If my column is successful, I will have shown people that Judaism does have something to offer them as they grapple with the issues of their everyday lives; Jewish wisdom does not only speak to specifically Jewish concerns.

Talmud is most obviously a tool for teaching. The discussions within it represent a specific Jewish world-view and, in context with Jewish genres of literature before and after, Talmud helps us to understand the history of Jewish thinking and Jewish living. Similarly, Shulchan Aruch, and Rabbi Feinstein’s responsa are both very obviously teaching tools. Less obvious, however, are the ways in which advice columns are used to teach. Yet columnists from

Cahan to Emily Yoffe refer with pride to how they used their column to teach. Abe Cahan used A Bintel Brief to shed light on the plight of America's immigrant workers and spread socialist values, Lederer and Phillips wrote about cancer, politics, and even Vietnamese refugees,⁷³ while Dr. Ruth taught America not only the facts of life, but how to talk about them. In a published conversation, Emily Yoffe and Mallory Ortberg discuss what it means to write the Dear Prudence column. Ortberg asks Yoffe how authoring the column has influenced her, and Yoffe replies that she has learned from the sources she turns to in order to advise others and has become a better mother.⁷⁴ Dear Prudence has served not only to help others, but it has teach the writer as well. According Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg, author of *Surprised by God* and editor of *Yentl's Revenge: The Next Wave of Jewish Feminism*, advice columnists specifically teach people how to live out their daily lives. She claims that the job of advice columnists has always been, "to serve as guides to American social customs." In her view, the only difference between "A Bintel Brief" and "Miss Manners" today, is that "now they write from within the system, creating and enforcing it, rather than merely attempting to navigate it."⁷⁵

My third and final goal is to offer pastoral care. Though the format of an advice column assumes that the advice-seeker writes in looking for "answers," I believe that many of these seekers and the wider-reading audience are seeking, simply, an acknowledgement of their challenge. They seek a safe connection with an authority figure and the comfort and support of a readership community. Emily Yoffe, for example, reported that after running the letter that seemed particularly hard to believe, she received several emails from others in a similar situation

⁷³ Van Buren, Abigail. "Dear Abby." The Spokesman-Review - Google News Archive Search. N.p., 24 Sept. 1979. Web. 24 Jan. 2016.

⁷⁴ Ortberg, Mallory, and Emily Yoffe. "Emily Yoffe's Advice to the Next Dear Prudence." Slate.com. Slate Media, 12 Nov. 2015. Web. 24 Jan. 2016.

⁷⁵ Ellenson, Ruth Andrew. "Jewish Advice Columnists from Miss Manners to Dear Abby." Jewish Advice Columnists. JW Magazine, Fall 2008. Web. 24 Jan. 2016.

thanking her for printing the letter that helped them see that they were not alone and “gave them such relief.” (Ortberg and Yoffe 2)

The first question I asked myself in creating this column was: Who am I to write a Jewish advice column? This question permeated my reading, not only of Jewish texts but the biographies of Jewish advice givers as well. In searching through rabbinic sources I found several ways in which I can claim authority.

First, I may claim authority as a rabbi (once I am a rabbi). Sota 22b points to training as a source of authority. In defining the opposite of an authoritative leader, an “am haaretz”, as someone who has “learned Bible and Mishnah but did not serve (or study under) Rabbinical Scholars,” the editors of the Talmud made clear that both training and mentorship were necessary for entry into their ranks. For me, this means, first, that my HUC-JIR education, years of learning and studying under Reform rabbis, leaders and scholars, qualifies me to lead and teach within the Jewish community. As I have begun this project with the support of an advisor, the texts’ emphasis on discipleship or mentorship as a modern equivalent seems justified. As I continue towards publication of my column it will serve me well to continue to seek support and guidance from more experienced and educated rabbis.

Of the modern advice givers, only Margo Howard boasts anything remotely comparable to training or mentoring specific to the role of advice giver. As the daughter of Ann Landers, she was able to watch her mother perform in the role of advice giver. However, we might understand the Talmudic text in a more liberal way as authority achieved by association. “Ask Ann Landers” was already a syndicated column before Lederer took over; she gained readers through a well known name. “Dear Abby” was published in a major newspaper and Dear Prudence gained popularity and its writers’ authority as Slate became more successful. I might

learn from this example by thinking strategically about what other online sources my column is linked to, where it is hosted and advertised. Initially I thought ReformJudaism.org might be the ideal host, however in thinking about my tone and audience (discussion below) I question whether it is too formal for the style of writing I think will serve my audience best. A website like Kveller.com has the right tone, however its focus is on parenting (and my column will not be). At this point, it seems as though gaining authority by attaching myself to another authoritative source may not be possible and will remain something to think about in the future.

When I am ordained, title and degrees will also serve as a form of licensing. Sanhedrin 5a teaches that according to Rav and Samuel, one who has authorization from the *Resh Galuta* (the secular authority) to decide on monetary cases is free from liability in the case of incorrect judgments. Thus we can understand that while one may be qualified to make legal rulings, licensing or authorization allows one to do so more freely and serves as a further degree of authority. Rabbah b. Huna argues that his authorization comes not from the secular authority but from the transmission of authority passed down from one generation to another. This, he claims, is his license. Through ordination, I will receive the authority that comes with *smicha*, an authority passed down through generations of Reform Rabbis to me. I will be allowed to teach, preach, counsel and represent the Reform Jewish community, and I will do so under the sanction of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. I will also be sanctioned by the government of the United States to enjoy privileges provided to clergy. I will be able to register to officiate at weddings, I will be allowed to claim parsonage on my taxes, and, in Boston, I will be able to claim free tickets to baseball games.

Of course, Sanhedrin 5a makes clear that licensing has limits. R. Yohanan gives R. Shaman authorization to make legal rulings while in Babylonia but only until he returns to

Palestine. Rav is allowed to rule on matters of ritual and on monetary cases, but he is denied authorization to declare firstborn animals suitable for sacrifice. As a Reform Rabbi, I will be authorized to fulfill the duties of rabbi (though the question remains whether or not writing an advice column is one of those duties). Furthermore, I will be able to present myself as a Reform rabbinic counselor; such title does not give me the authority, in any way, to offer deep psychological counsel as a therapist would. My counsel will not represent all of the Jewish world, rather it will reflect the perspective from which I am trained. Just as Dr. Ruth was clear to do throughout her career, it will be important for me to define how I can help people and when I can best serve others by referring them to a trained and certified therapists or other professionals.

Niddah 20a adds to the discussion of authority the importance of expertise in subject areas. The text tells a story about Amemar, Mar Zutra and R. Ashi examining blood together. Amemar is able to tell the difference between two types. R. Ashi cannot tell the difference and claims that, “One like myself who does not know the difference between the one and the other, must not act as an examiner of blood.” The conversation continues to offer Raba as the reigning authority on blood. He proves himself by correctly identifying sixty different types. As a trained rabbi, I will have achieved a level of expertise on the subject of Judaism, and, as a person with an interfaith family, I can offer another degree of experience and knowledge in that subject area. However, in thinking about my own expertise as a Jewish advisor, I believe now that it will be in my best interest to wait to publish my online column until I have had more experience as a rabbi. More specifically I should wait until I have had more experience counseling interfaith families. The discussion in Niddah 20a-b gives provides me with a precedent for deciding when to allow or deny myself the authority to advise others. R. Ashi denies himself the authority because he cannot tell the difference in blood types when Amemar can. Rabbi Zera claims that, “The coins

of Bavel cause me to not examine blood. I do not know about the coins of Bavel. Do I know about blood?” While Rav Yehudah says that he felt authorized to examine blood and did so, until “the mother of my son Isaac said to me, ‘we do not bring the first drop to the rabbis, because it is filthy.’” He claims that because he knows now that his specimen is essentially tainted he no longer feels qualified to make rulings.

Examples of authority achieved through licensing and authority defined by expertise are not only found in Talmud but in the stories of modern advice columnists too. Dr. Ruth is perhaps the most obvious example. She has academic and professional training and experience as a psychologist, sociologist and sex therapist. She is certified and licensed by the state of New York as a therapist. She had years of experience teaching sexual education before ever taking on questions from the public on her radio show. While other popular advice givers achieved great success without formal training or even a small percentage of the practical experience Dr. Ruth has, the sensitive nature of her subject area (especially when she first began) likely demanded these more formal types of authority.

In contrast, each of the other advisers I studied claimed that they had little expertise in their subject areas. On one hand, it is clear that each had experience in the field they covered that offered them some authority with readers. Cahan, for example, lived on the Lower East Side among the people whose lives he was trying to engage. Before editing the Forward, he was a beat reporter hanging out around the local prison. He may not have had any formal training in giving advice, but he used his life experience in the community to gain authority with readers. Eppie Lederer, Pauline Phillips, Margo Howard and even Emily Yoffe used their experience as mothers and wives to claim expertise in advice giving. Yoffe talked about her daughter and her

husband as well as the death of his first wife in her columns and essays somewhat frequently.⁷⁶

In telling the story of how they became writers, Eppie Lederer claimed, “The only thing I had going for me was that I had a teenage daughter.” (Pottker and Speziale, 105); while Pauline called herself, “nothing but a Hillsborough housewife.”⁷⁷

Sota 22b seems to offer a Talmudic source for using life experience to gain authority. Mishna offers, “Our Rabbis taught, an abstinent woman, a neighborly widow and a minor whose months are not completed, these erode the world.” Gemara explains that “a minor” refers to “a disciple who has not yet attained the qualification to decide questions of law and yet decides them anyway.” The qualification, it continues, is the age of forty. Tradition offers two further explanations of this qualification. Tosefta explains that 40 years refers not to the scholar’s age, but the length of study while the Soncino translation defines forty as the “age of understanding” referenced in Pirkei Avot 5:21.

At the end of Chapter Two, I briefly discuss Mallory Ortberg’s appointment to the voice of Dear Prudence and her unprecedented youth. While in the past advice columnists achieved authority through life experience and by virtue of being middle aged, Ortberg was hired and is popular because of her youth. Ortberg’s youth and proven popularity among twenty-somethings garners her authority as an advice columnist. Not only does this offer insight into the value our society places on youth – one might even argue that youth outweighs experience in today’s world – but it proves a valuable example of the most universal source of authority in all the sources I studied. Advice givers are granted authority by those they advise. This is consistent with the message in Sanhedrin 5a, in Niddah 20b. In Sanhedrin, we see Rabbah b. Hana giving

⁷⁶ For example: Yoffe, Emily. "My husband's Other Wife: She Died, so I Could Find the Man I Love." Slate.com. Slate Media, n.d. Web. 18 Jan. 2016.

⁷⁷ 'Dear Abby' Talks about Her Big Break." YouTube. YouTube, 17 Jan. 2013. Web. 16 Jan. 2016.

an incorrect judgment in a monetary case. R. Hiyya rules that, “If both parties accepted you as their judge, you are not liable to make restitution. If not, then you must compensate them.” The story of Yalta in Niddah 20b offers this message even more explicitly. As the story goes, Yalta brings menstrual blood to Rabbah b. Bar Hana who declares it impure. Unhappy with the answer, she brings it to Rav Judah who declares it pure. The anonymous editors point out that this contradicts another baraita which states that, “a sage cannot declare something impure that another sage first ruled pure.” The conclusion is that at first the second authority also claimed it was impure, but then she told him that on every other occasion he had declared blood just like it pure. On that day he had a pain in his eye, he changed his view and ruled it pure. We see plainly here that when the person in need of a ruling did not believe its accuracy, the ruling was invalid. In asking for a ruling, the questioner grants authority to the person they ask.

This is the type of authority most advice columnists can claim. They are authorities because people treat them as such, because people continue to listen, to read, to call in, to write letters, and to buy their books. If we understand general popularity as way of gaining authority, a few themes become obvious in studying modern advice givers. First, they all speak to their audience in informal common language. Abe Cahan innovated the field by trading academic Yiddish interspersed with Hebrew and Russian for common everyday language. Eppie Lederer and Pauline Phillips, Margo Howard and Emily Yoffe and Dr. Ruth were all known for using simple straightforward language, and were described as aunts, grandmothers, and friends by their audience.

Each of the modern advice givers also gained popularity by finding a balance between questions that represent universal issues and those that provided entertainment or shock value. A Bintel Brief’s letters not only told of arguments between parents and teenagers, but of a teenage

girl forced to lie about an affair with her tutor so that no one would know that her uncle had impregnated her. (Metzker, 38-40) Dr. Ruth advises those with concerns about pre-mature ejaculation (which apparently is one of the most common questions) just as she does people with fetishes that shock readers. Even Emily Yoffe's *Dear Prudence*, known for being on the prudish end of the spectrum, offers advice on politely declining invitations as well as stories of incestuous love between twin brothers.

Finally, every single one of the columnists I studied was praised at some point for straightforward, practical advice. Clearly readers respond to advice that feels fair and realistic. In reading advice columns myself, I would add that responses are well written, easy to read, and often funny and entertaining.

This emphasizes how important it is that I identify my audience clearly and early on, so that I may choose questions that have broad appeal, using a tone that speaks to them in "their language," while remaining entertaining, honest, and realistic. Below I offer a sample question and answer along with explanations about my decision-making process.

While I feel justified in presenting myself as an authority based on all that is described above, one question was left hanging. I suggested above that as an ordained rabbi I would have the authority to perform all the roles and duties of rabbi. What remains to be answered is whether or not an advice column falls under that heading.

To answer that question I return first to the traditional sources. In, *Avot de Rabbi Natan*, Eleazar b. Azariah touts the value of labor. "Great is work, for every craftsman walks out with the implements of his craft and boasts of them." Work, he says, is good for the psyche. He does not answer in the format of question and advice, but he addresses emotional health and wellbeing, and gives an opinion on how to live a good life. Though much of the work of the

early rabbis is focused on halakha, clearly by the 3rd century when this was compiled, their purview covered more.

The Shulchan Aruch offers another example of traditional texts moving beyond the parameters of law and into the world of providing advice about how to live. While the Shulchan Aruch never poses any questions, it answers underlying ones in laying out how one should visit the sick. “We do not visit a sick person during the first three hours of the day because the illness is less pronounced in the morning and one might be tempted not to pray for him,” it begins. From the start, author Joseph Karo thinks about the psychology at play in visiting the ill. Later he writes, “we don’t visit those with stomach issues, nor illness of the eye, nor illness of the mind, nor those who have difficulty speaking. We don’t visit in these patients’ presence, rather we enter the outer courtyard of their house and ask after their welfare.” Again, Karo explains the action to be taken, and why. At the heart of his “advice” is concern for the emotional well being of the ill person. One might imagine the invisible advice request letter to which he responds: “Dear Rabbi Karo, My friend is ill with a horrible stomach flu. I know it is a mitzvah to visit but I worry that she might be embarrassed to get sick in front of me. What should I do?”

Finally, in Iggerot Moshe, we see a Rabbi offering pastoral care by responding to a letter. Rabbi Feinstein begins by acknowledging that while he usually addresses halakhic issues he makes an exception in this letter. He responds to the letter writer’s concern about her daughter. He offers her prayer and hope and tells her to, “listen calmly to her without demands and criticism.” Like “Dear Abby”, he validates her feelings, and offers very simple and realistic advice to solve her problem. More than any traditional source, this one is easily compared to an advice column.

Each of these examples shows that something like an advice column falls within the range of what a Jewish authority may offer. Furthermore, my stated goals were to address issues in the community, to teach Judaism, and to offer pastoral care. Not only are these accepted roles of the modern rabbi, but, as stated above, serving a need, teaching, and offering pastoral care can also be the roles of the modern advice columnist.

Getting Started

This project began with my love for advice columns. As a teen, my grandmother and I would read “Dear Abby” and “Ask Ann Landers” together and argue about which one was better. (I love “Ask Ann Landers”, my grandmother only appreciated “Dear Abby”) In college, my sister and I would clip out our favorite, generally the most scandalous, letters and mail them to each other. In the early aughts I discovered “Dear Prudence”, “Savage Love”, and “Dear Sugar”, as well as a few more obscure columns like “Ask Barf”. Today I am a religious reader of “Ask A Mom (Who is Not Your Mom)”. At some point in rabbinical school, I realized that while many of my favorite advice givers are Jewish women, I don’t read any columns that give Jewish advice. I set out to explore the world of Jewish advice giving and discovered two things. First, there are countless “Ask a Rabbi” websites. The majority offer answers to halakhic questions posed by letter writers. And, while almost all of them use the standard format that Abraham Cahan developed (Dear Rabbi, followed by full answer), few address non-halakhic questions and even few address a non-Orthodox audience. Reformjudaism.com, the URJ’s new website, includes an “Ask the Rabbi” page. It includes categories for questions ranging from Parenting to Life Cycle and includes a Contemporary Issues category. Though geared toward Reform Jews, the questions on ReformJudaism.com are still legal in nature. For the most part,

writers ask questions about what is or is not “permitted”, or about Jewish perspectives on a specific topic like abortion.

I found two sites offering Jewish social and relationship advice columns. Kveller.com hosts Dear Gefilte, an anonymous writer who uses yiddishisms and his/her own life to offer humorous advice on a variety of subjects signing each, “with love and schmaltz, Gefilte.” While quirky and relatable, there is nothing particularly Jewish about any of Gefilte’s responses (other than the title and schmaltzy send off). The other site is the Forward.com which hosted, for just under one year, a column addressing interfaith issues called “The Seesaw.” For most of 2015, readers sent in questions ranging from how to handle Christmas in their interfaith family to congregants who were uncomfortable with their rabbi’s non-Jewish boyfriend. Each question received a response from three different rabbis. While many were well written, thoughtful, and insightful, they rarely offered specific advice. Moreover, I could not find one example of a response that used Jewish sources or attempted to teach Judaism in a significant way.

This project is my attempt to fill the hole in advice column offerings by melding what I appreciate about my favorite columns and what I have learned researching the history of American advice giving. I hope to someday offer the world a column that addresses real needs, uses Jewish tradition, text and culture to offer responses, and does so in the tone of popular columns for young adults. Turning this project into a thesis gave me the chance to research and study, to practice and learn from my initial foray into advice column writing, in order to create a better project in the future.

Identifying Target Audience

I imagine my sister and my friend and former student, Jenni, as concrete examples of my target audience. My sister is in her early thirties and has two children with her long-time non-Jewish partner. She is a daily advice column reader as well as an avid Reddit reader. She lives in the suburbs, is tuned into mainstream pop culture and she has a confirmation level Jewish education. She takes her children to Sunday School, but rarely attends synagogue other than that. Jenni is 25 and was my neighbor in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. She is not Jewish but her last few relationships were with Jewish people, and she likes to joke that her “type” is “short and Jewish”. Jenni is an early adopter of technology and cultural offerings. By this I mean to say that whatever book you are reading, whatever band is popular, whatever new slang word suddenly appears in print, Jenni has already read it, heard it and been using it. She is heavily invested in and influenced by her social media presence. She does not read traditional advice columns but particularly enjoys the advice essayists on Vice.com. These women represent two ends of the age spectrum and two different perspectives I hope to attract. Both are tuned into to the forms and tones of popular internet writing and are avid web-readers.

Soliciting Questions:

I began by making a list of all the questions or concerns friends and family have brought to me in the past when seeking advice. I contacted them and explained that I was creating an advice column, that I remembered advising them on a specific situation, and asked that they write up the issue as if they were writing to an advice columnist. I also asked them to answer a few questions about why they think they asked me. All four respondents said, in some way, that they asked me because I am straightforward and honest. Two said that I had given good advice

to them in the past. Only one response mentioned that my rabbinical training might help answer his question.

After these questions, I put out a call on Facebook and Twitter asking friends and colleagues to share their own questions or questions that congregants had asked them. These questions fell into three general categories. There were the pseudo-halakhic questions, in which people seek permission from a Jewish authority. For example, “shiva is too long can I just do it for one or two days?” or “can I say a prayer over a rat I euthanized?” Another major category of questions had to do with interfaith relationships. Several related to weddings; many related to Christmas; a few related to mother-in-laws. Finally, the last category was general relationship questions. For example, one person asked if she knows awful things about her friend’s significant other, should she tell him?

Selecting the sample question:

While my request was broad, I read through each of the questions I received with an eye to my stated goals. First, as I stated from the outset, I intended to address relationship issues in the interfaith community. As I studied traditional texts and modern advice columns, not only did I see that relationships between Jews and non-Jews has been a vibrant issue, but I came to realize that this timelessness allows me to find sources relevant to today’s discussion in the rich history of Jewish text, while at the same time allowing me to add a new and valuable perspective to the conversation. As a Reform Jew, I am able to understand traditional texts in historical context. I am able to give voice to today’s Jewish experience, and I have the resources of modern social science to help understand that experience. More specifically I am able to understand loving relationships between Jews and non-Jews as the “opportunity of a lifetime”, of which Rick

Jacobs spoke, because that is both my personal experience and my understanding of population surveys.

Next, I chose a question about relationships between parents and children because, outside of the interfaith context, this is a universal issue to which anyone with parents can relate. It is also a classic advice column question. Additionally, this question allowed me to respond with realistic advice and to use Jewish sources to do so.

Crafting the Response:

In deciding how to respond, I attempted to first validate the letter writer's feelings. I wrote in a familiar tone, included sarcasm and a few jokes, and tried to write in a way that was both entertaining and true to how I speak. My goal was to offer a particularly Jewish response in fairly universal language. I included hyperlinks to most of the terms and texts I used, so that anyone could gain missing background knowledge easily.

My response is 1,000 words. While long in comparison to the average Dear Abby response, the online format allows a response to take up more space than a printed format; a scrolling screen reading allows for a longer response without the mental effort of turning the page. A brief survey of Dear Prudence, The Seesaw, and Ask A Mom columns shows letters and responses together ranging between 700 and 1500 words.

Taking a cue from advice columnists before me, I edited the letter from its original to correct only typos and grammatical errors.

The Question and Answer

Dear Toba,

I am 34-years old and have been married for ten years to my high school sweetheart. I grew up Jewish but my husband did not and though we are raising our two children to be Jewish (we do Shabbat every week, take them to Sunday school at the synagogue, celebrate Jewish holidays with my family) my husband has always been clear that he isn't Jewish and we celebrate Christmas in our home. Lately, my father has started to make comments to my husband when I'm not around about how his religion is confusing to our children and, not so subtly, hinting that he should convert.

My husband loves my parents and what they say means a lot to him, and now he's feeling pressure to convert. I don't feel the pressure. I just feel angry at my dad for making this about parenting and for talking to my husband about this instead of me.

If my dad has an issue with my family, I'm his daughter. Shouldn't he come to me first?

Angry Daughter

Dear Angry Daughter,

Gotta love unsolicited advice, especially when it comes to how you're raising your children! I can't really imagine a more offensive combination – unless maybe there was a racist comment thrown into the mix.

You ask a pretty simple question – should your dad talk to you about his concerns before he talks to your husband? Like any good rabbi, my answer to your question is another set of questions. How do you and your husband feel about each of your religious identities? Are you on the same page about it? Do you think you would be any less angry if your dad had come to you with his concerns for your children, instead of your husband? If your husband has been a part of your family for so long, does your father consider your husband his child? If your dad is concerned for your family, is there a way he could have approached you and/or your husband in a way that would have felt better?

Next, let's talk about this conversion issue. No one should ever feel forced or pressured to convert to another religion. It's not good for anyone in the long run (we can talk about resentment next time) and Jewish tradition forbids it. That's right. The [Talmud](#) says!

The rabbis in the Talmud are confused by a [Mishnah](#) passage that says if a man is suspected of hooking up with a non-Jewish woman and then she converts, they shouldn't get married. But, they say, if they do get married it's really not **that** big of a deal. The couple can stay married.

They quote all sorts of other texts that say that people who convert for the sake of a love interest, or for power, or social status, or out of fear, shouldn't really be considered converts. Now,

they're concerned with the legal status of conversion, which isn't what we're talking about here at all, but their conversation makes clear that they consider all of these "bad" reasons for conversion. (If you want to check it out yourself look for [Yevamot 24b](#)).

Another text from around the same period, that deals specifically with all things conversion, says, "anyone who does not convert for the sake of heaven isn't a convert." In other words, God is the only reason a person should convert. (This text is called [Tractate Gerim](#), which is printed with the Talmud, but isn't officially Talmud. If your Aramaic is up to snuff and you need the source to build your case against your father, it's Gerim 1:3. Sorry, it doesn't exist in English online, or at least not anywhere that I was able to link to.)

If your husband doesn't want to be Jewish and you and he are both ok with that, then don't let anyone pressure you to change. However, I wonder if there is a part of you, maybe even just a teeny tiny eensy weensy part of you, that wishes your husband was Jewish. My experience is that the advice that annoys us most is often the advice we agree with. If this is the case, then it's something you and your husband probably need to address at some point, in whatever way you deal with your issues best. Again, not saying he needs to convert, just that you need to figure out what it means to you, how big a deal it is to you, and how it's going to impact your life together. I wish my husband cared more about the cleanliness of our bathroom, but I've made my peace with it and we're not gonna get divorced over it anytime soon.

Now, you didn't ask it, but the question remains, what do you do about this fight with your dad?

First let's talk about what's at stake here. On the one hand, even though you are obviously angry at your dad right now, I hear that you love him, and it seems to me that you must respect his opinion, or else you wouldn't have gone to the painstaking lengths of writing to a Jewish advice column about his unsolicited advice. One might even say you want to "honor" him right? (Why yes I am taking this to the Bible – [Exodus 20:11](#) and [Deut 5:16](#)).

It's hard to know what it really means to honor our parental units. (Here's [an easy-to-read article](#) about how Jews have answered this question throughout time.) But, in your case, the question seems to be: how do I tell my dad to butt out in a loving and respectful way? If it were me, I'd go back to the questions I asked you above. I'd tell him that I love him and respect him and know he's speaking out of love and concern, but if his goal is to have a conversation about big issues like conversion and child rearing, he might try (fill in blank here). Of course, that's how I would talk to my dad – you might talk to your dad differently. The key is to do for him what he didn't seem to do for you – communicate in a way that makes it easy for the listener to hear. Maybe your dad isn't one for talking and he'd respond better to a [mildly offensive e-card](#) instead?

What I Have Learned and What Comes Next

Writing an advice column is in many ways like writing a lesson plan for an adult education class. While Eppie Lederer, Pauline Phillips, Margo Howard, and Emily Yoffe (and their teams) responded to letters that they did not publish and published several questions and answers in each question, answering letters using traditional sources takes an incredible amount of research. While it may get easier as I am in the field longer, I could also imagine feeling less in touch with text sources the further out of an academic setting I am. The key to writing a column seems to be agility with text.

Furthermore, I struggled to find a balance between teaching and informing, offering advice and staying interesting. I used the shortcut of hyperlinks in place of longer explanations within the column, but I wonder if I still explain too much. Over time, I hope that seamlessly weaving sources and my own opinions will get easier and I will find a way to simply write less.

Before launching a column I still need to decide on a name and build a website. Like “Ask a Mom,” or “Dear Gefilte,” I would like to find a name that introduces me as a rabbi, but alludes to the youthful tone I intend to use. I would also like to explore branding and user experience design⁷⁸, in order to provide the type of experience readers want to return to. As I imagine the next steps, the first is to gather a number of questions and research and write responses. I hope in the near future to gather a support team of seasoned rabbis and writer friends to help me edit for content and tone. When it comes to owning the authority to publish, I am not sure how long it will take, but I do know that I would like more practical experience as a

⁷⁸ User experience design or UX is the term web designers use to discuss the process of UX determine what the experience will be like when a user interacts with a website or webapp.

rabbi, life experience in general, and as a counselor and supporter of interfaith couples before I present myself as an authority on the subject online.

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Avot de Rabbi Nathan (Version II: 21)

אבות דרבי נתן פרק כג

נוסחא א פרק יא אבות דרבי נתן נוסחא ב פרק כא כג

רבי שמעון בן אלעזר אומר אף אדם הראשון לא מעם כלום עד יעשה מלאכה שנאמר ויניחו בן ערן לעבדה ולשמרה (וגו') מכל עין הגן אכול תאכל (בראשית ב' טז ויז) (יא): רבי מרסון אומר אף הקב"ה לא השרה שכנתו על ישראל עד שעשו מלאכה (יב) שנאמר ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם (שמות כה ה'): רבי יהודה בן בתירא אומר (אדם) שאין לו מלאכה לעשות מה יעשה אם יש לו חצר חרבה או שדה חרבה ילך ויתעסק בה שנאמר ששית ימים תעבוד ועשית כל מלאכתך (שם כ"י) ומה תלמוד לומר ועשית כל מלאכתך להביא את מי שיש לו הצרות או שדות חרבות ילך ויתעסק בהן (יג): רבי יוסי אומר (יד) אין אדם מת (טו) אלא מתוך הבטלה שנאמר וינעו ויאספו אל עמי (בראשית מ"ט ל"ג) הרי שנכסה ונפל על אומן שלו (טז) ומת הא אינו מת אלא מתוך הבטלה היה עומד על ראש הגג (יז) ועל שפת הנהר ונפל ומת אינו מת אלא מתוך הבטלה: שכן שמענו לאנשים ולנשים מנין שנאמר איש ואשה אל יעשו עוד מלאכה לתרומת הקודש (שמות ל"ו יג) למסלים מנין שנאמר וכלא חם מביא (שם יח): אמר רבי נתן בשעה שנתעסק משה

רבי אומר גדולה היא מלאכה שאפילו לאדם שהי דבוא אינו יוצא לשוק עד שיתעמק. כאי זה צד יוצא בלגמית קשורה על ידיכו (טו) וחביתו על כתפו ומשתבח באומנותו הקב"ה קורא אותה מלאכתו שנאמר מלאכתו אשר עשה (שם) (שאר) בני אדם על אחת כמה וכמה. ועוד היה רבי אומר (יז) גדולה היא מלאכה שאפילו לאדם חצר או גינה (חרנים) (חרבים) ילך ויעמק בהם כדי שיהא עמוק במלאכה: אמר (יא) מעשה ברבי יאשיהו שהיה מסנה את כליו מערב שבת עם חשיכה מבית זה לבית זה מזוית זה לזוית זה. אמרו לו רבי למה אתה עושה כך. אמר להם כדי שתעבור עלינו שבת שנאמר שבת וינפש (שמות לא יז): שבת מן המלאכה וינפש מן הכחשבה (יז):

הערות לג'ב
הגג ובטלה ומת הא וכו'. והוא רק עירוב ב' נוסחאות. (יב) אתמחא וריל דגם כשעה שעוסק במלאכה יכול לבוא לידו סכנתו (יג) בכיה לא שנו חכמים זה אלא שאם הלה וכו' וגם זה הוא מנוגד קצת. ובעיקר הדברים ע' קהלת דבה פ"ב בפסוק ויטנאני את החיים מעשה בגרגרן אחר שהיה עובד כל ימות השנה שבת וכו' המעשה ובשבת לא היה לו כה יאכל. מה עשה פעם אחת נתעסק בכלי קריוס שלו ועלה לראש הגג ונפל ומת ע"כ. והנה אף שמעשה זאת היא מותרת קצת להדברים פה מ"ס אין ספק שעל המעשים כאלה והפוסק גוססו פה כמה מאמרים. (יד) בכיה אפילו אחד מהם וכו'. וע' ב"ס צ"ב ע"א. (טו) הצנתי פה נוסחת כ"ה ובכיר ליתא לכל הנתן בין חצאי מרובע ותחת זה איתא שם השולחני יוצא ומשתבח והעם עד אזנו (אולי צ"ל והדינר על אזנו ע' שבת י"ב ע"א ובחוספתא שם פ"א) התושר יוצא ומחט תפורה על לבו ומשתבח באומנותו הקב"ה וכו'. ועי' במגן אבות למינה זו שהביא שם כ"ס האר"י גדולה מלאכה שהי הכל מתפארין בה שהי הלבלר יוצא וקולטוסו על אזנו והחט בתפוח תקועה כנגד לבו וכו'. והנה יוצא כזה שגם נוסחת הכ"ה איתא בשלמותה עוד אבל בכל מקום איתא קבועה כל כך בנוסחת בידי וי"ב בהרמיה בה. ועי' בעירך ערך איוונון. (טז) בכיה ובגמית קשורה עליהם וע' בערך ערך לגמית והוא כשפתה להסתבץ בה. (יז) ועוד אמרו בכיה, (יח) כדי שעוסק במלאכה וי' במגן אבות שמביא כזה בשם מדרש. ועי' נ"א. (יט) אולי צ"ל אמרו. (כ) ע' במילתא ויקהל בפסוק שבת וינפש וילקחם שם ופסקתא דרבי קפ"ז ע"כ. אמר ר' איבו שבת מן המחשבה ע"כ. וברור שדרשה זאת היא ענין בפני עמסת ולא נקם לה הכא אלא כשום שהביא הפסוק.

כד:

עין משפט
גר מצוה

עַתָּה אֲנִי מֵת מִן הַחַיִּים
מֵתוֹת הַלֵּלֶה אֲנִי מֵת
שֶׁכֶּן יֵשׁ מִשְׁפָּחָה אֲחֵי
סִימֹן קֶמֶן טֶקֶן אֲנִי:
עַל ב' מֵתִים מִן הַמֵּתוֹת
בִּירוֹשָׁן הַלֵּלֶה יֵשׁ מֵת
שֶׁכֶּן אֲנִי טֶקֶן מִשְׁפָּחָה אֲחֵי
דָּוִד אֲנִי מֵת:

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יוֹשִׁיעַ שֶׁסָּפִיק בִּי
 עַל הַחַיִּים שֶׁנִּשְׁמָר
 אֵיכָּתוּב הֵלֵכָה עִי
 שֶׁנִּשְׁמָר הֵלֵכָה עִי
 יוֹשִׁיעַ שֶׁסָּפִיק בִּי

תורה איר השלם

הסר ממך עקשות פה
לילות שפתיים הרחק
ממך: משלי ד כז
הן גור יגור אפס
מאודי מי גר אתך עליך
פול: ישיעיהו נד טז

ת"ס' חד מקמא

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כיצד פרק שני יבמות

לְמַעַן הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־עֲצֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל. אֲרִיז' דִּהּוּ מִנִּי לַמִּימָר לַעֲשִׂימָה
שֶׁלֹּן יִרְשֶׁמוּ חֻזְרוֹת צִיבֹלֶס: **גִּיּוֹרָת** בִּיהַא הָרִיא. דִּמְשַׁע
לֹא יִכְטֵם הוּא אֲזַל אַחֵר שָׂרִי לִנְטֹם לַעֲמָלָה: **הַחֲלִיבָה** בִּבְרִי
הַאֲמִיר בִּיהַא הָרִיא. (ה) קֵךְ גִּירִי אֲרִיזֹת לֹא דִמִּי לֹאָ דִּלְכִּי אִמִּי
נִטְמָם גִּירִי אֲרִיזֹת הוּא דִּהֲמֵס הוּ

ענדעס אדערס דעמייט ספער
מחלס יומ"ד גירי אחת קו ספער
הדוב נתגירי (נמתי: א' א'
בצחיהה נבי' לו אמת כלתם
דלתי גירי נמירי נדוי ספער
לא ינוט מחס דספער גירי הו
דספער נתגירי להם אים הידעני
למחלס יומ"ד להמחור מחס אס
מחור דרב אה' חב' ספער
קטירי אה' חב' ארי
דנעטען על ספער אים להמחור
מחלס מחס חות ספער אדלרה
למחור נכנסה דלמחור ספער אים
על ספער

שוהב-רב תמיהו ואו
 ואחד גידי חלומות ואו
 אינו גרים עד שיתגייסו
 ס"ו אלא אימא כבמוס
 א"ר יצחק בר שמואל
 זילבא כדברי האומר
 בכתחילה נמי משום
 ארר ודבר נמי משום

[illegible][illegible]

אמר רב יצחק: וכו' בעדים הוא דמפיק. מבעל ראשון דלין אשה נהטען הואיל ואיכא עדים אבל בלא עדים הואיל ויש לה בנים לא; ואכע"ל דמפיק אשה מבעלה הקול כל דהו; ויכול. מוכר בשמים לגשים להמקד. מוכר הדבר שלא אחרתו מבעלה אלא לנשות; סיגר. הוא כעין מכתמים וטאל אדנין רב ויחזיקו וכו' עריות דמיא ממוני וכו' רב יהודה אמר:

[illegible][illegible][illegible][illegible]

ונגרסה מחסה ירי אחר. ראובן
 נשען על דבר זה שחש שיש ויגרסה
 ששעון ושפחה נשחקו ויגרסה על המפה
 ראובן עמדה זו עולה: זו דריכה
 ערים. נותק קמח ירי נאסרה עולמים
 עליו: זו דלעולו דלא אסמיקו ארץ
 קלא. וכמה ראובן מתיגרשו ששעון
 אל מלח האיל וילכ עדים. וזו נותק
 מחסה ירי אחר ירש ירש אשך
 ששעוניהן ברחו דלכמהל אל יניסו
 דמתיג אל שם אל לכמהל אל יניסו

הוא אלא כל הוצאות
עדים הוא דמפקי ואי
יתא רבי היא דתניא
גרת בסניר אמר רבי
הצא רוק למער מן
ה' ומבוער הדבר תצא
מגעלים

כמה דברים אמורים. דאם כנס
הטעון ויזיל בשאין לה גנים מן
הראשון: אכלי לה גנים. מן
השני: אכלי לה משקי לה קא
מחזיקין לקלא קמא ועדיין לה קא
מחזיקין: ואם כלו כו'. גלמא דין
לה גנים כלל עדים נמי מחזיקין: און
חזינן מחזיקין לה גנים ונשיא

ספרה לבעלה משום קול וזאת רב למחר דוקא ממני' משום כך יוצא
 בלא בנים לא נפקא בלא עדים והוי מתנייהא דאמר נפקא רבי אמרינהו
 ט' כן: רובל וזל. מן הביט ומלא זה את אשתו שהיא חוגרת בסניד
 שהיו הנשים חוגרות לנשימות: רוק למעלה מן הכילה. לחיוב יוצא קול
 ה' כ"א השוכן ופינו למעלה הלך צינהו זו ודקה בשעת משמים:
 חנני

מסורת הש"ס

(א) ולקחן מה עשה
(ב) וקדשן מה עשה
(ג) וקדשן מה עשה
(ד) וקדשן מה עשה
(ה) וקדשן מה עשה
(ו) וקדשן מה עשה
(ז) וקדשן מה עשה
(ח) וקדשן מה עשה
(ט) וקדשן מה עשה
(י) וקדשן מה עשה
(יא) וקדשן מה עשה
(יב) וקדשן מה עשה
(יג) וקדשן מה עשה
(יד) וקדשן מה עשה
(טו) וקדשן מה עשה
(טז) וקדשן מה עשה
(יז) וקדשן מה עשה
(יח) וקדשן מה עשה
(יט) וקדשן מה עשה
(כ) וקדשן מה עשה
(כא) וקדשן מה עשה
(כב) וקדשן מה עשה
(כג) וקדשן מה עשה
(כד) וקדשן מה עשה
(כה) וקדשן מה עשה
(כו) וקדשן מה עשה
(כז) וקדשן מה עשה
(כח) וקדשן מה עשה
(כט) וקדשן מה עשה
(ל) וקדשן מה עשה

גליון הש"ס

רש"י ד"ה נדרי אריות
במין בריהו ע"י מנהלדין
מה ע"פ נרש"י ד"ה נדרי
אריות: תוס' ד"ה לא
יבטל דוד וכו' דמס'י
לקמן אריות ע"י לקמן
דף קט ע"פ מדרש נחש:
ד"ה אריות ד"ה דוד
למקלה בג' כ"י ע"ן לקמן
דף קכ ע"פ מדרש כל נחש:

הנהגות הב"ח

[illegible]

הגהות הער"א

[א] וַיֵּשֶׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּנָחוֹר
אָף יָבֵס הַטָּעַל מִי שָׂדֵי
יָבֵס אֲבֵל יִרְחָה מִי שֶׁלֹּא
יִטַּל חֶלֶק אִחִי אֲלֵה אִם
אֲבִי קֹדֶשׁ לִחְמִי וְעַמִּי
רָבִינוּ בְּהַדְרָה שִׁמְרֹן קָדֵשׁ
סִ"ק ד' [ב] שֶׁ יִחְלַק
אִחִי שָׂמַח יָבֵס חֶלֶקוֹ
שְׂמֵחָה

מוסף דע"י

גירי אריות. בספר חלום
ה' השנים ישנה ה'
בהם את האריות, יטמים
כמיני חסם ובה מלך אשר
מטמם יקף חסין אשר
מקומות יקף חסין. מי גר
אחר. בענין חסין, עליך
יפול. בענין חסין: ענין.

Masechet Gerim 1:5

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הקדמה למסכת גרים

מצאתי בספר שמות הרגל נדפס בליווי, אשר חבר-המורה חיים יוסף דוד אוללאי מקיבו אנשי ירושלים ע"ה תוב"ב וכנסו ספר נדפס מסכת גרים הביאה הרב בעל מגילת עון חכם מעשים בפ"ג מסכתות אבות ביאה הרמב"ם ז"ל. אכן לא ידע אנשי עיר, והיא לעצמה ספר ח"ד לעצמה לאורה וכתב בזה הלשון: 'מס' זו מהמסכת קטנות והיא לא נדפסה! והערתה מהש"ס המצויה בזה נפסדה כתוב על קף עץ אנשי קצת בפ"ג לולא חששו לאתר מקורו רבינו משמון כשרך זו, וחזרתה היא לא בספר הקטן שער יוסף, גם הורכב בספר קרבן תגאלה ח"ד הארזות על"ה ספר הגיל' אכן מס' זו הענינה ערומה, כיום תולדה, מכלי יאושף לרבויה, כמדק לא רעוניה, אשר שם קטנות נעלמה, על קן נתח' אל' רבי חיל' המתחיל במצוה אומרים לו גמור, וכאשר פרשתי ענינה' כל המסכת קטנות בפירוש קטן וכוונתו לרש' הוא' לבארה באר חושב ע"ה מעגלותיה, ופוסקים כיד'ת' ורוביה' על' והראיה בה מובא כל הלכת איה מסוק במדרש ח"ה לשמן יד' חזקיהו בה:

גם אלה דברי המחבר ספר נחלת יעקב הקטן השכנה יאקאב ב"ה ברוך נוימבורג ו'ל מתושבי ק"ק אסיבאר בשנת און וחמ"ח ותמ"ז לפ"ס :

מסכת גרים

שואמרים לאיש כך אומרים לאשה ע"ם שתהא זהירה בנדה (ט) ובחולת
אמר: (ה) חלה וכל ועלה אומרים לו דברים שובים (ו) וכוונתם היא נזקת
אשר יבא עליה כפי שמאמר הוה העולם (ז) שלא בנרא העולם אלא בשביל ישראל
אלא בקראו בניס לעולם אל ישראל (ח) ואין חביבין קודם המסות אל ישראל
אלא כדאמר דברים שרבינו (ט) לא אמרין כל אחר חריבות שכן: (י) הלכה (י) ו
אין שכלל ולא שכלל ולא כל חלק אחר המילה דברי ר"א רע"א (י) ו
שכלל מעקב: (י) הלכה ז' כל התעורר (א) שמוס אשת שמוס אחת מוסר יראה
אין זה נ' וכן הו"ו ו' נחמתי ואומרים (ב) אלא אותם שנתניינו מוסר מדי
ואמרת אינם גרים שני' (ד) ורבים מעמי הארץ מתעוררים כי נפל פחד היתדות
ועל שכלל שמוס שמוס (ה) אינו נ' הלכה (ה) האיש

פרק ראשון

וַיִּלֶכֶת א' (א) הַרְצוּתָה לַתְּחִיבִי אֵין מִקְבִּלִין אוֹתוֹ מִיד (ב) אוֹמְרִים לוֹ מַה לָּךְ לַתְּחִיבִי וְהִלָּא אַתָּה רֹוּחַת אֵין הָאוֹמֵר הָזֶה (ג) נִמְכָּר כִּפְסוּתָה וּשְׁפִילָה מִכָּל הָאוֹמוֹת וְהִלָּא (ד) וַיִּמְרִים בָּאֵין עֲלֵיהֶן וַיִּקְרְבוּן בְּכַפְסוּתָה וְהִרְגִּין עַל הַמִּילָה וְעַל הַתְּחִיבִי וְעַל (ה) שֶׁאֵין כָּל הַמִּצְוֹת וַאֲיֵם וְהֵנִים בְּפִרְהֵסִיא כִּשְׂאֹר כָּל הָאוֹמוֹת: הַלֵּכָב ב' אִם אִמֵּר אֵין בְּדִאי פִּרְשִׁין וְהִלָּא וְהִלָּב ב' הַלֵּכָב ב' קִבֵּל עֲלֵי (ו) הוֹרִידוֹ לְבֵית הַתְּפִלָּה כִּיִּסְחָר (ז) בָּאֵין עַד מִקֵּץ הָעֵרֶת וְאוֹמְרִים לוֹ מִקְצֵת קִדְקוּי מִצְוֹת (ח) וַאֲיֵם עֵנֶת (ט) שְׁוֹאֵי נֹחַן בִּשְׁכַּחְתּוֹ וּלְכִסְטֵי וּבִפְאִיתָ וּבְמַעֲשֶׂי: הַלֵּכָב ד' כֵּשׁ

לגהות הנרי"ב (א) יכמות דף מז. : (ב) [שם] : (ג) [שם] : (ד) [שם דף מז.] : (ה) [שם] : (ו) [שם מז.] : (ז) [שם בד.] : (ח) [שם כ.] : (ט) [שם מז.] :

וּסְמָא חֲדָשָׁה

[illegible][illegible]

נחלת

[illegible][illegible]

Appendix B: Rabbis Cited in Primary Sources

All biographical information comes from Encyclopedia Judaica.

Roth, Cecil, Geoffrey Wigoder, and Raphael Posner. Encyclopedia Judaica. Jerusalem: Keter Publ. House, 1974. Print.

Rabbis are listed in order of appearance.

Sotah 22b

Simeon Ben Azzai - Second Generation Tanna

Though sometimes referred to as “rabbi” Ben Azzai was actually only considered a “talmidim” or “talmid hakham” (student or disciple of the wise). He (and Ben Zoma) were considered the greatest scholars at that level (Tosef., Kid. iii. 9; Bab. Kid. 49b; Ber. Kid. 57b; Yer. Ma'as. Sh. ii. 53d; Bab. Sanh. 17b). Ben 'Azzai called "student who is worthy of the hora'ah," of the right of independent judgment in questions of religious law (Hor. 2b).

His primary teacher was Joshua b. Hananiah, whose opinions he shared and argued for (against Akiba. (Yoma ii. 3; Ta'anit iv. 4; Tosef., Sheb. ii. 13). Though Ben Azzai calls Akiba his teacher and speaks highly of him, he was not a disciple of Akiba and said that he wished he had studied with him (Ned 74b)

Ben Azzai is known for his piety and devotion to study. Midrash Hallel (discussion of Psalm 114) says that because he (and Akiba) exerted themselves so greatly in their studies, God opened for them the entrance into the Torah, so that Ben Azzai could explain even those things in the Halakha that the schools of Shammai and Hillel had not understood. He also refused to marry Akiba's daughter (Ket 63a) and when Eleazar b. Azariah asked about the contradiction between his advice to others (against celibacy) and his own life, he answered, “What shall I do? My soul clings lovingly to the Torah; let others contribute to the preservation of the community. both His Piety and Devotion to Study.(Tos. Yev. viii. 4; Bab. Yev. 63b; Gen. R. 34) It was also said that, “He who has seen Ben Azzai in his dreams is himself on the way to piety (Ber. 57b) And according to Hag. 14b, he was one of the four rabbis who entered the “pardes” the garden of esoteric learning and died. Another tradition holds that he was one of the first communal leaders to be martyred by Hadrian.

R. Eliezer b. Hurcanus (Hyrchanus) - Second Generation Tanna

He was a disciple of R. Johanan ben Zakkai and colleague and brother-in-law of Gamaliel II and of Joshua b. Hananiah. After the siege on Jerusalem he moved to Yavneh and was a member of the Sanhedrin under Gamaliel II. (Ab. R. N. xiv. 6; Sanh. 17b), and presided over his own academy at Lydda (Sanh. 36b). He was well respected by his colleagues, R. Johanan for example called him “unequaled as an expositor of traditional law” (Ab. R. N. vi. 3), and mentored famous students including Akiba (*ib.*; Yer. Pes. vi. 33b).

Though most often referred to as R. Eliezer he was sometimes called "Eliezer haGadol" (Tosef., 'Orlah, 8; Ber. 6a, 32a; Soṭah 13b, 48b, 49a;) Not only was he respected for his legal wisdom and impartiality, (Sanh. 32b) but he was also known for his strict conservatism (see Sifra, Shemini, i. 33; 'Er. 68a; Hag. 3b; Meg. 25b), he often agreed with the school of Shammai and some asserted later that he was a Shammaite, though in reality he was a disciple of R. Johanan ben Zakkai, a student of Hillel. In one of the most famous Talmudic stories, Eliezer dissents with the majority opinion over whether or not an oven can be unkosher and he was excommunicated. (B. M. 59b; Yer. M. K. iii. 81).

Though he spent many years in isolation, Eliezer is quoted in the Mishnah, the Baraita, and the Talmud more frequently than any other of his generation. He known as the author of Pirḳe De-R. Eliezer or Baraita of R. Eliezer, though scholars believe it was actually written much later.

R. Joshua b. Hananiah - Second Generation Tanna

R. Joshua was a prominent tanna in the period following the destruction of the Temple (70 CE), Legend reports that he was a Levite and served in the Temple as a singer. (Ma'as. Sh. v. 9, 'Ar. 11b). He was one of five primary disciples of Johanan Ben Zakkai (Ab. ii. 8). He is often referenced with Eliezer b. Hyrcanus. In most cases R. Joshua represents the mild and temperate position opposed to R. Eliezer's strict conservative opinion. Supposedly it was also Eliezer and Joshua who rescued Johanan ben Zakkai from Jerusalem during the fall of the city.

Joshua spoke out frequently against extreme practices and hypocrites. After the fall of the Temple he argued that those who were refraining from meat and wine should also refrain from bread, water and grapes - thus arguing that such a show of grief was ridiculous. (Yer. Suk. 55b (Tosef., Soṭah, end; B. B. 60b). He called the foolishly pious ; sly sinners; the woman who shows an over pious bearing; and the "plague of the Pharisees," the hypocrites who pretend to be saints, "enemies of general prosperity."

After the death of Johanan b. Zakkai, Gamaliel publicly questioned his authority and humiliated him twice, (R. H. 25a; Yer. R. H. 58b), and Gamaliel was removed from office for it.. He received Joshua's forgiveness, and was reinstated but was forced to share his office with Eleazar b. Azariah, who had originally been appointed his successor (Ber. 28a). After Gamaliel's death (comp. M. K. 27a; Yer. M. K. 83a), the first place among the scholars fell to Joshua, since Eliezer b. Hyrcanus had been excommunicated.

Abaye - Fourth Generation Babylonian Amora

His real name was Nahmani, after his grandfather but bestowed the nickname "little father" by is uncle. He was orphaned as a child and raised by his uncle, Rabbah bar Nahmani who taught at the Academy of Pumbedita. Abaye's studied in the Pumbedita Academy under his uncle Rabbah and Joseph bar Ḥama. When Joseph died (333), Abaye became the head of the academy until he died five years later. In addition to the scholars of Pubedita, Abaye also studied with Dimi, a Palestinian Amora credited with bringing the Palestinian tradition to Babylonia.

Abaye was closely associated with Raba. Their debates are called the "Havayot d'Abaye v'Raba" (Debates of Abaye and Raba). With the exception of six of his decisions, the opinions of Raba were always accepted as final, thus Raba is considered the master of the two.

Abaye was also known as a master of disciples and generally pleasant person. According to Shab. 118b he provided a feast for students on the completion of a study of Mishnah and advised others to, “be mild in speech; suppress your wrath; and maintain good-will in intercourse with your relatives as well as with others, even with strangers in the marketplace.” (Ber. 17a) He taught his students to behave in a way that would “lead others to the love of God. (Yoma, 86a).

Simeon b. Gamliel - Third Generation Tanna

Simeon b Gamliel was best known as the president of the Sanhedrin.

During the Bar Kokhba rebellion, he escaped massacre at Bethar (Giṭ. 58a; Soṭah 49b); B. Ḳ. 83a) and when the school in Usha was revived he was elected president, because he was a descendant Hillel, and in recognition of his wealth and importance in the community. It is likely that Simeon studied Greek philosophy as well as natural sciences, because he declared that the Scriptures might be written only in the original text and in Greek (Meg. 9b; i. 8; Yer. Meg. 71c) and offers biology, anatomy and medicinal knowledge in his teachings. (Ber. 25a, 40a; Shab. 78a, 128b; Yeb. 80b); Ket. 59b, 110b). Though we do not know who his teachers were, he shares teachings in the name of R. Judah b. Ilai (Tosefta., Kelim, B. Ḳ. v. 4), of R. Meir (Yosef., B. M. iv. 15; Ket. vi. 10), and of R. Jose b. Halafta (Tosef., Dem. iii. 12; Tos. Ṭoh. xi. 16).

During his rule as patriarch or nasi, the title itself gained prestige. He also established a new position, hakham, granted it authority equal to that of nasi and ab bet din, and appointed R. Meir to the seat. He ordered that the high honors formerly bestowed on the nasi and ab bet din were reserved for the patriarch and only minor honors awarded to ab bet din and hakam, which obviously did not make him popular (Hor. 13b). His son Judah however spoke of Simeon b. Gamaliel as humble and expressed that these changes were made to increase the authority of the college and increase respect for learning. (B. M., 84b, 85a).

In legal rulings Simeon was known for lenient interpretations and making laws easy for people to follow and in line with common practice. He declared many acts previously forbidden out of fear that they would lead to transgressions, but were not themselves forbidden by Biblical law, permissible. (Shab. 13a, 40b, 147b; Yoma 77b; B. M. 69b; Bek. 24a; Pes. 10b). He was especially protective of women's and slaves' rights (Ket. v. 5, vii. 9, xiii. 10, Giṭ. 12b, 37b, 40b) and taught that the good of the community comes before the rights of the individual (Ket. 52b; Giṭ. 37b) and that the decisions of a court of law must be protected, even when made in error so as to protect the dignity of the judges (Ket. xi. 5).

Joseph b. Hama- Fourth Generation Babylonian Amora

Joseph ben Hama was from Mahoza on the Tigris river and was the disciple of R. Sheshet in Pumbedita. He is a minor rabbi from the period who repeats teachings in the name of his teacher R. Sheshet (Gittin, 14a) as well as R. Nachman b. Yaakov (B. Talmud, Tractate Hullin, 56b; Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Taanit, ch. 1:6). He is most famous as the father of Raba (Raba b. Joseph b. Hama) who taught at Mahoza and famously debated against Abaye (read more under Raba)

Sheshet - Third Generation Babylonian Amora

R. Sheshet is known for his frequent arguments with R. Nahman b. Jacob and comes up often in stories as a friend of R. Hisda Ber. 47b; Meg. 28b, Ber. 30a, Giṭ. 67b-68a). Though we do not know his primary teacher's name, we know that he attended R. Huna's lectures. (Yev. 64b; Ket. 69a) and often quoted R. Eleazar b. Azaria (Mak. 23a; Pes. 118a). He was very critical of Rav and said that, "he must have spoken when he was asleep" (Yev. 24b, Niddah 69a).

Sheshet lived in Nehardea, studied in the synagogue Shaf V'Yativ (Meg. 29a), before he went to Maḥuza (Ned. 78a, b; B. B. 121a), and eventually Shilhe, where he founded an academy (Letter of Sherira Gaon, in Neubauer, "M. J. C." i. 29). According to tradition he was physically weak and blind (Pes. 108a), but was emotionally and intellectually energetic and strong (Men. 95b) and memorized "entire body of tannaitic tradition, and its amoraic interpretations" (Shebu. 41b) which he used in answer to any question and in support of every argument (for example Zeb. 96b, B. M. 90a, Yoma 48b, Ket. 68a; comp. Yeb. 35a, 58a).

Sheshet devoted much time to Biblical exegesis; and whenever he recapitulated his studies, as was his custom at the end of every thirty days, he used to say: "Rejoice, my soul! rejoice, my soul! For thy sake have I read the Holy Scriptures; and for thy sake have I studied the Mishnah and the baraitot" (Pes. 68b).

Zerika - Fourth Generation Palestinian Amora

Was a disciple of Eleazar b. Pedat and Ammi both of whom he quoted often (Soṭah 4b; Zeb. 93b; Men. 7b, 86b, Hul. 46a). He was a colleague of Abba, and together they ruled in the argument between controversy of R. Judah I. and R. Nathan on whether the night should be divided into three or four watches (Yer. Ber. 2d). He was also friendly with R. Ze'era (Yer. Bezah 60c), and Jeremiah (Men. 88b; Suk. 37b). According to a tradition found in the Babylonian Talmud, he called Safra's attention to the "pious Palestine" and the audacity of "bold Babylonia" when praying for rain (Ta'an. 23b).

Huna (Huna the Babylonian) - Second Generation Babylonian Amora

Rav Huna was the disciple of Rab and head of the Academy of Sura in the early 4th century who was respected not only in Babylonia but in Palestine as well. Raba for example wished to be as wise as Huna (M.K. 28a), and Huna read from the first passage from Torah on Shabbat and holidays, an honor generally reserved for those with priestly ancestry and Ammi and Assi Palestinian Amoraim from priestly families referred to him their superior (Meg. 22a; Giṭ. 59b). He was the disciple of Rab (Abba Arika) and was related to Sherira Gaon (the exilarch). Huna is likely most famous for the wealth he accumulated over the course of his life. According to tradition he was so poor that he had to pawn his belt to buy wine for Shabbat early in his career (Meg. 27b) but Rav "blessed him with riches", and Huna displayed great wealth at the wedding of his son Rabbah (*ib.*), owned flocks of sheep cared for by his wife Hoda (B. Ḳ. 80a), and traveled by gilded litter (Ta'an. 20b). Huna was generous with his wealth and when the houses of the poor people were damaged by weather would help rebuild them, and would invite the poor off the street into his home for meals (*ib.*).

When Rab died Huna began to lecture in the Academy of Sura, but was only made head of the Academy after Samuel died (c. 256). During his leadership, the academy became known as

"metivta" (Hebr. "yeshivah"), and Huna was the first "rosh metivta" and under his direction the academy increased its stature and number of students. He served as Rosh Yeshivah for forty years, and, during his lifetime, the Sura academy held the supremacy in Babylonia (M. K. 28a). His remains were brought to Palestine and buried by the side of Hiyya Rabbah (*ib.* 25a).

Huna often quoted Rab's rulings, sometimes without using his name (for example Shab. 24a), and he declared Rab the supreme authority in religious law (Niddah 24b). In his own numerous teachings, he interpreted text literally even when it contradicted Rab (Shab. 21a-b, 128a) or the context of the passage (Shab. 20a, Men. 36a)

Ulla -Third Generation Palestinian Amora

Though considered one of the leading halakhic minds in Palestine during the late third and early fourth centuries, Ulla repeatedly traveled throughout Babylonia spreading his teachings. (Ber. 38b; R. H. 22b; Pes. 53b, 104b, Ket. 65b; Kid. 31a; Shab. 157b) He was a disciple of R. Eleazar II (Tos. to Hul. 34a, s.v. "Man Hābraya"), and spoke in R. Eleazar's name often in Talmud.

Ulla ruled in important discussions of blessings benedictions and the calculation of the new moon, and was known for strictly interpreting religious laws (Shab. 147a, 157b). According to tradition it was only before R. Naḥman that Ulla waited to rule until the former had departed (Giṭ. 11b, 12a) as a sign of respect. According to Ket. 53a he was friends with R. Nahman but he was most often associated with , with Rabbah bar bar Ḥana (Tosef., Hul. xxxiv. 1). Raba was his only son (Shab. 83b).

Samuel Nahmani - Third Generation Palestinian Amora

Samuel studied under R. Jonathan ben Eleazar (Pes. 24a) and was one of the most famous haggadists of his time (Yer. Ber. 12d; Midr. Teh. to Ps. ix. 2). He was lived in Palestine but went to Babylonia at least once in his youth a (Sanh. 96b) and later on a mission to determine the intercalation of the year (Yer. Ber. 2d; Pes. 54b). As an old man he went to the court of Empress Zenobia (267-273) to petition her to pardon an orphaned youth who had committed a grave political crime (Yer. Ter. 46b). He was close with Patriarch Judah II, and the two traveled together (Yer. Ter. ix., end; Gen. R. lxiii.).

Samuel was most famous as a hagadist and poet. Helbo, Levi, Abbahu and Eleazar ben Pedat passed on his teachings. (Lev. R. xxxv., end; Yer. Ta'an. iii., Pes. 159b).

Yannai (Jannai) - First Generation Palestinian Amora

According to genealogical chart found at Jerusalem Jannai, also known as Jannai Rabbah, descended from Eli (Yer. Ta'an. iv. 2; Gen. R. xcvi. 13). He was both wealthy (B. B. 14a) and generous (M. K. 12b).

Yannai was prominent both as halakhic and hagadist and was a student of Rabbi whom he quoted frequently. (Yer. Hag. iii. 2; Yer. Kid. iii. 14; *et al.*). He was closely associated with R. Hiyya Rabbah who was also a student of Rabbi and sometimes Jannai's tutor (Yer. Dem. vii. 1; Yeb. 93a). The two were friends (Yer. Ber. iv. 5) and Jannai's daughter married Hiyya's son Judah (Yer. Bik. iii. 3; Ket. 62b). Yannai transmitted several legal rulings in the name "ḥavurah" of the last tannaim (Mak. 21b) and he created a school at Akbarah which is called Beit. R.

Yannai in the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds and Midrash. According to tradition Yannai treated his students like family, they worked on in his vineyards, made a salary and lived in his home. His primary mentee was R. Johanan, who transmitted Jannai's rulings (Yer. Kil. viii. 1; Soṭah 18b; Kid. 64b). Others of his many pupils were Simeon b. Lakish (Yer. Yoma iii. 10; Ta'an. ii. 6; Hul. 82a), R. Aibu (Kid. 19), and R. Hoshaiah (Ket. 79a).

Yannai believed that the Mishnah had no greater authority than other collections of halakhot or baraitot by disciples of Rabbi (comp. Yer. Pes. i. 5; Yer. Yoma iv. 2). When R. Johanan pointed out a contradiction between Mishnah and Yannai's ruling he responded, "The Mishnah gives only the decision of a single tanna, while I decide conformably to the Rabbis as a whole" (Shab. 140a). His rulings were often conservative when it came to the individual (Yer. Ber. ii. 6; Yer. Ket. i. 10; Shab. 14a), but more liberal for the whole community. Yannai was famous for his contempt of R. Judah II, Rabbi's grandson (B. B. 111a, b), and for R. Hanina, who fought to preserve the standing of Rabbi's Mishnah (Yer. Kil. ix. 7; Ber. 30a; *et al.*). Referring to Hanina, Yannai said, "He who studies the Law under only one teacher sees no sign of blessing" ('Ab. Zarah 19a).

Aha b. Jacob - Fourth Generation Babylonian Amora

R. Aha b. Jacob was a disciple of Huna, head of the academy at Sura known for his devotion to his studies. He studied so hard he became ill (Yeb. 64b) and according to Er. 65a he devoted all of the day to study and when a matter of daily life interrupted his study, he would make up for it by studying at night.

He taught at Paphunia on the Euphrates River, and was considered an authority on ritual and a prolific hagadist ('Er. 63a). He was also described as a skilled Torah scribe (B. B. 14a; Kid. 35a; B. k. 54b; Niddah, 67b; Sanh. 46b) and studied philosophy and mysticism (Ber. 59a, Shab. 66b, B. B. 75a). According to one legend he defeated a demon living in Pumbedita (Kid. 29b).

Nahman b. Isaac - Fifth Generation Babylonian Amora

Nahman b. Isaac studied under Nahman b. Jacob with Raba. He made a name for himself at an early age and went to Sura to study under Nahman b. Hisda (Hul. 88b; Shebu. 12b; Ta'an. 21b). After Raba died, Nahman b. Isaac took over as head of school and transferred it from Mahuza to Pumbedita. He led the academy for four years and collected, arranged and edited collections of the halakha and aggadah of his predecessors (Pes. 105b). He frequently cited Biblical passages ('Ar. 33a) and proverbs (Yoma 86a; Shab. 54a; Soṭah 22a) to support others' teachings and he explained challenging terms in the Mishnah with analogous passages (Beṣah 35b; Yoma 32b).

Meir - Third Generation Tanna

According to tradition R. Meir was a descendant of Nero who secretly converted to Judaism (Git. 56a). Another aggadic tradition teaches that Meir was not originally his name, but changed from Me'asha to "one who enlightens" because he was so wise ('Er. 13b). He is also called "Nehorai," the Aramaic of "Meir."

As a child R. Meir studied in the school of Akiba but was able to follow the teaching and so he went to study law with the school of Ishmael. He then returned to Akiba who recognized his

dialectical skill and ordained him. According to Sanh. 14a this ordination was considered invalid by some because Meir was so young, but later confirmed by Judah b. Baba.

Meir's family members also make exciting appearances in Jewish legend. His father-in-law, Hananiah ben Teradion, was martyred by Hadrian. His sister-in-law was sold into prostitution in Rome and according to legend Rabbi Meir saved her with both money and magic. ('Ab. Zarah 18a; Eccl. R. vii. 12). Rabbi Meir's wife Bruria is one of the few women named in Talmud and is described for her intelligence, wit and piety.

As explained in the description of Simeon ben Gamaliel II, Meir helped to rebuild the Sanhedrin in Usha and was appointed hakam. He also established academies in Bethsan and Ammaus. Meir's contributed to the study of law in two important ways. First, he introduced the idea that the validity of halakha could be tested by rationality. "He was able to give a hundred and fifty reasons to prove a thing legally clean, and as many more reasons to prove it unclean" ('Er. 13b). He also continued Akiba's work of collecting the oral law by subject.

In the last years of his life Meir argued with the patriarch over the honors given to that position (Yer. M. K. iii. 81a) and lived in exile. See Simeon b. Gamaliel above for more information.

Jonathan b. Joseph - Third Generation Tanna

Jonathan b. Joseph is only mentioned a handful of times in Talmud, however according to the Jewish Encyclopedia, "there is ample reason for identifying him with R. Jonathan, Nathan b. Joseph and Jose b Joseph). R. Jonathan and his friend and Josiah studied under Ishmael b. Elisha (Men. 57b) though in later years the two who are most often quoted together, adopted Akiba's method of study. Yer. Ma'as. v. 51d).

Both Jonathan and Josiah studied halakic midrashim and made legal rulings based on interpretation of Bible. Their work was primarily recorded in the Mekhilta and Sifre to Numbers. Jonathan was also known for his aphorisms, including "Consoling the mourner, visiting the sick, and practical beneficence bring heavenly grace into the world" (Ab. R. N. xxx. 1).

Abbahu- Third Generation Palestinian Amora

R. Abbahu is also called R. Abbahu of Cæsarea (Kisrin). He studied primarily at Tiberias under R. Johanan. (Yer. Ber. ii. 4b; Giṭ. 44b; B. B. 39a) and he visited Tiberias often, even after becoming the head of the Caesarean Academy. (Yer. Shab. viii. 11a; Yer. Pes. x. 37c). He was an authority on weights and measures (Yer. Ter. v. 43c) and he studied Greek taught it to his daughters as well. (Yer. Soṭah, vii. 21b, (Yer. Shab. vi. 7d; Yer. Soṭah, ix. 24c; Sanh. 14a). Abbahu had two sons, Zeira and Ḥanina and several disciples. R. Jonah and R. Jose were the most accomplished of his disciples.

According to tradition Abbahu was wealthy, attractive and intelligent (B. M. 84a; Yer. B. M. iv. 9d), and was popular not only in the Jewish community but with the Roman rulers as well (Ḥag. 14a; Ket. 17a). As the rector in Caesarea he enacted several rulings about ritual (Yer. Dem. ii. 23a, R. H. 34a). His ruling about the sound of the shofar, was universally adopted. He traveled around the country teaching and gathering teachings and legal rulings (Yer. Ber. viii. 12a; Yer.

Shab. iii. 5c). Though Abbahu was proud of strictly following the law, he modified the decisions of others when laws created hardship for the community (Shab. 134*b*; Yer. Shab. xvii. 16*b*; Yer. M. K. i. 80*b*).

In addition to halakha R. Abbahu was a dedicated haggadist who often debated with the Christians of the period (Shab. 152*b*; Sanh. 39*a*; 'Ab. Zarah, 4*a*). One tradition relates that his physician, upset by these arguments slowly tried to poison him ('Ab Zarah, 28*a*).

Rav (Abbah Arika, Rab) - First Generation Babylonian Amora

Rav is most famous for founding the Academy of Sura. Though he was almost exclusively called Rab in Talmud (with one exception in Hul 137*b*), he was also known as Abbah Arika because he was tall, and Tannaitic Literature refers to him as Rabbi Abba (for example Tosefta, Bezah, i. 7). He studied under Judah I (who also went by the single name Rabbi) and because he represented the transition from the Tannaim to the Amoraim he is allowed to dispute the opinion of a tanna (B. B. 42*a* and elsewhere).

Rav came from a prominent family that traced itself back to King David (Sanh. 5*a*; Ket. 62*b*). His uncle Ḥiyya, was a prestigious scholar in Palestine in the circle of Judah I. Rav moved to Palestine to study under his uncle. The year he returned to Babylonia is considered the beginning of the Talmudic age.

Rav became a teacher in the academy in Nehardea and the exilarch appointed him “market-master.” (Yer. B. B. v. 15*a*; Yoma, 20*b*). After several years in Nehardea he moved to Sura to build his own academy. The Sura Academy eventually became the most prominent in Palestine and Babylonia and cemented Babylonia as the new center of Jewish learning. It was at the academy that the method of discussing Mishnah as a foundation text along with other tannaitic traditions (the method which would become the Talmud) originated and the legal opinions recorded in Rav’s name as well as his arguments with Samuel permeate the Babylonian Talmud.

21. Rabbah b. Nahmani - Third Generation Babylonian Amora

Rabbah as he is called in Talmud descended from a priestly family in Judea that traced its ancestry to the prophet Eli. He studied under R. Huna at Sura and R. Judah b. Ezekiel at Pumbedita.

Rabbah devoted himself to halakah and produced little aggadic work. He was called “uprooter of mountains,” (Ber. 64*a*) because he came to new legal conclusions by studying individual passages of Mishnah out of context. He was also the expert in his day on Levitical purity regulations (B. M. 86*a*).

After R. Judah died Rabbah was chosen to be “resh metivta” of the Academy of Pumbedita (Ber. 64*a*). Under his leadership the status of the academy dramatically increased, and according to Bava Metzia 86*a* twelve thousand people attended his lectures during the kallah months. Though popular in academic circles Rabbah frequently denounced the activities of the townspeople and was disliked by the community of Pumbedita (Shab. 153*a*).

Sanhedrin 5a

Nahman (see above)

Hiyya B. Abba (Hiyya the Great)- First Generation Palestinian Amora

R. Hiyyah was a Palestinian sage who bridged the transition from the Tannaitic Period to the Amoraic Period. He was born in the middle of the second century in Babylonia. He was a disciple of Judah I, uncle and teacher of Rav and father of twins Judah and Hezekia (both prestigious scholars). His family traced their roots to King David. (Ket. 62b).

Hiyyah lived in Palestine as a young man. He was unhappily married and in addition to twin sons, fathered twin daughters. He developed a reputation for his scholarship in Babylonia before moving to Tiberias, Palestine. In Tiberias he ran a successful silk export business (Ruth R. i. 17; Lam. R. iii. 16; Gen. R. lxix.) and entered the academic circle of the patriarch Judah I. (Tan., Vayeshev). In Palestine he established and taught in new schools for children (Ket. 103b)

R. Hiyya was associated with magic and miracle. Tradition tells that while he was briefly banished by Judah, Elijah assumed his features and healed Judah from a thirteen year-long toothache, regaining Hiyya's favor (Yer. Kil. ix.). There was a saying in the Palestinian tradition that since Hiyya arrived in Palestine there were no storms and wine did not turn sour (Hul. 86a). According to another tradition, his prayers ended drought and sent a dangerous lion out of Palestine. (Gen. R. xxxi.).

Hiyya was a prolific legal scholar. He and his protege Hoshea redacted halakhot that had not been included in the Mishnah into collections called "Baraitot de-Rabbi Hiyya," "Mishnat de-Rabbi Hiyya," and "Mishnayot Gedolot." Hiyya also authored a number of original halakhot. While he was generally very conservative, he was against issuing new prohibitions (Gen. R. xix.). Though he is sometimes credited with writing Tosefta, scholars have rejected the idea.

Mar Zutra - Sixth Generation Babylonian

Amora <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/contribs/608>

Not much is known about Mar Zutra. He served as exilarch from 401 to 409 after Mar Kahana and was a colleague of R. Ashi and R. Amemar. He lived in Nehardea and was associated with Pumbedita, but eventually lived in Sura where he hosted an annual feast at the beginning of the harvest season.

Joseph Ben Hama - Third Generation Babylonian Amora

Rabbi Joseph was a disciple of R. Sheshet and but also taught in the name of Rav Nachman b. Jacob (For Example B. Talmud, Tractate Gittin, 43b) His son Rava was one of the most famous Amoraim and head of the Academy of Pumbedita.

Rav (see above)

Samuel (see above)

Rabbah b Huna (see above)

Rabbi (Judah I, Judah HaNasi, Rabbenu) - Fifth Generation Tanna

Judah is most famous for redacting the Mishnah. He was born in approximately 135 and died in 220. According to tradition Judah was born the same day Akiba was martyred. His father was Simon b. Gamaliel II (see above).

Judah studied under the students of Akiba as well as the other prominent scholars who associated with including Judah b. Ilai (Men. 104a; Sheb. 13a, Meg. 20a; Tosef., Meg. ii. 8). Judah seemed to especially appreciate R. Jose b. Halaftha and defended his statements and spoke in his name (Yer. Giṭ. 48b, Men. 14a.)

Though Judah succeeded his father as Patriarch little is known about that time in his life though he did move the seat of the authority to Bet She'arim during this time. Similarly there is little evidence that Judah was in fact the redactor of the Mishnah other than the fact that both the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds assume that he did.

Rabbah b. Hana - First Generation Babylonian Amora

Rabbah came from an impressive academic family. His uncle was R. Hiyya (above) and his first cousin was Abba Arika (Rav)(Rab; Sanh. 5a) with whom he was often associated (Kid. 59a; B. B. 52a). Both he and Rav moved to Palestine to study under Judah I.

Yohanan (B. Nappaha / B. Nafcha)- Second Generation Palestinian Amora

Yohanan was born in Sepphoris in the Galilee. His father, a blacksmith (Nafcha) died before he was born and his mother died shortly after his birth so he was raised by his grandfather. He was mentored by Yehudah Ha-Nasi (see above) but studied primarily under R. Yehudah's student Rav (see above). His brother-in-law, friend, and colleague was Shimon b. Lakish.

Yohanan moved to Tiberias and started a school which allowed admittance to anyone regardless of their ability to pay and laid the foundations for the Jerusalem Talmud. When making legal rulings based on Mishnah, Yohanan established general rules for most situations. For example, he believed that the law should always agree with the *stam* (anonymous editorial voice)

Yohanan was also famous for his physical appearance. According to *Baba Metzia* 84a¹ "He that wishes to see the beauty of Rabbi Yohanan, let him bring a silver chalice when it comes out of the silversmith's refinery, and let him fill it with the red kernels of a pomegranate, and then let him adorn the chalice around its brim with red roses, and then place it between the sunlight and the shade. The emanating radiance would be somewhat similar to the beauty of Rabbi Yohanan."

R. Simon (B. Abba) - Third Generation Palestinian Amora

R. Shimon was a student of Hanina b. Hama (see above) and of Yohanan (above). Though he came from Babylonia he lived in Palestine. He was married twice, both times to daughters of Mar Samuel (see above) (Ket. 23a), and was widowed twice shortly after the weddings. (Yer. Ket. ii. 26a). After Hanina died, Simon left Palestine for Damascus. He returned after Yohanan died (Yer. Bik. 68d). Simeon transmitted sayings of his teachers Hanina and Yohanan, also of Joshua b. Levi and Simeon b. Lakish.

Niddah 20a

Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel - First Generation Tannaitic Schools

The house of Shammai and house of Hillel are also referred to as “schools,” and refer to discipleships that flourished in the first century. Schools are named after Hillel and Shammai who represent two different halakhic philosophies.

Hillel and Shammai dispute only a handful of times in Talmud (Shab. 15a; Hag. ii. 2; 'Eduy. i. 2, 3; Niddah i. 1); but their discipleships dispute for generations afterwards. Shammaites represent conservative legal judgements while Hillelites represent moderation. Talmud includes 316 disagreements between the schools.

Akavia B. Mahalalel -likely Second Generation Tanna

We know almost nothing about Akavia today. His teachers are not mentioned in Talmud and only a few of his teachings have survived (Mishnah 'Eduy. v. 6, 7; Mishnah Bek. v. 4; Mishnah Niddah, ii. 6; Mishnah Neg. i. 4, v. 3). One that not only remains but is famous. Reflect upon three things and you will not come to the hands of transgression. Know from where you came, where you are going, and before whom you are destined to give a judgement and accounting. (Ab. iii. 1; compare Ab. R. N. xix; Yer. Soṭah, ii. 18a; Derek Erez R. iii) There is also debate about whether or not Akavia may have been excommunicated toward the end of his career.

R. Meir (see above)

R. Yose (B. Halafta) - Fourth Generation Tanna

R. Yose was born in Sephoris in Palestine but his family came from Babylonia. (Yoma 66b). He was one of Akiba's five disciples referred to as “the restorers of the Law.” (Yeb. 63b). He also studied under Johanan b. Nuri and later passed on his teachings (Tosef., Kelim, B. Ḳ. lxxxii. 7; B. B. lxxxvii.), and under Eutolemus ('Er. 35a; R. H. 15a). He also speaks in the name of his father Halafta several times (B. Ḳ. 70a; Me'i. 17b).

R. Jose was ordained, though ordination was a violation of Roman law (Sanh. *l.c.*), and immediately immigrated to Asia Minor (B. M. 84b), until the law changed. He then moved to Usha, where the Sanhedrin gathered, according to tradition he failed to reprimand a colleague who disparaged the Roman government and he was forced to return to Sephoris (Shab. 33b, B. B. 75b).

In Sephoris R. Jose created a flourishing school and remained at its head until his death. His most famous student was Judah ha-Nasi. His halakot are mentioned throughout the greater part of the Mishnah, as well as in the Baraita and Sifra. His teaching was very systematic and represented a compromise between the extremes of Hillel and Shammai.

Amemar (II) - 5th Generation Babylonian Amora

Amemar is best known for reestablishing the college at Nehardea after it was destroyed a century before by Odenathus (Bar Nazar, Ket. 51*b*, Yer. Ter. viii. 46*b*). He was also the president of the court in Nehardea. On festivals he and Rab Ashi and Mar Zutra officially represented the Jewish community at the local court (Ket. 61*a*). Amemar was also a friend of Rab Ashi and the two often appear together in Talmud (B. M. 68*a*; Ber. 12*a*; Bez. 22*a*; Ket. 21*b*; Kid. 72*b*; B. K. 79*a*; Hul. 53*b*, 58*a*).

Zutra (see above)

Ashi - Sixth Generation Babylonian Amora

Rav Ashi is most famous for being the first editor of the Babylonian Talmud and for re-establishing an academy at Sura, the intellectual center for Babylonian Jews. In fact, at a very young age, Ashi became the head of the Sura Academy. Ashi's teacher was Rav Kahana who later became the president of the academy at Pumbedita.

While Judah I is famous for compiling and editing the Mishnah, Ashi devoted himself to collecting the commentary of the Mishnah, called the "Gemara."

Hanina (b. Hama, Hanina Ha-Gadol) - First Generation Palestinian Amora

R. Hanina is quoted in both Palestinian and Babylonian Gemara and Midrash frequently.

Though he spent most of his life in Palestine, he references arriving there with his son and so many believe that he was from Babylonian (Yer. Soṭah i. 17*b*). He studied under Bar Kappara and Hiyya the Great (Yer. Sheb. vi. 35*c*; Yer. Niddah ii. 50*a*) and then became a member of Judah I's academy (Yer. Niddah. ii. 50*b*).

He was Judah's favorite student until the two had a falling out. On his deathbed however Judah instructed his son to put Hanina at the head of all the other students (Yer. Ta'an. iv. 68*a*; comp. Ket. 103*a*). Hanina chose not to take the position.

Hanina had three sons. Two died young but the other, Hama became a prominent scholar. His daughter married Samuel b. Nadab. Johanan b. Nappha and Eleazar II were two of his most prestigious students.

Ishmael (b. Jose) - Fifth Generation Tanna

Both Ishmael and Eliezer b. Simon both worked with the Roman government suppressing Jewish pirates during the war between Severus and Rescennius Niger. The Jewish community resented his relationship with the Roman rulers (Meg. 84*a*). In Talmud he frequently speaks in the name of his father. Ishmael was known for integrity in his judgement (Mak. 24*a*).

Eleazer (see above)

Ze'era - Third Generation Palestinian Amora

R. Ze'era was born in Babylonian and spent his early life there. He studied under H̥isda (Ber. 49*a*), Huna (*ib.*), and of Judah b. Ezekiel in Pumbedita and was associated with other prestigious

Babylonian teachers including Naḥman b. Jacob (Yer. Ber. 8c), Hamnuna (Zeb. 105b; Ber. 24b), and Sheshet (Er. 66a) and R. Judah.

Ze'eira moved to Palestine without the permission of R. Judah. (Shab 41a; Ket. 110b). In Palestine he studied with the most prominent scholars including Eleazar b. Pedat (Niddah 48, Yer. Ter. 47d). He was close friends with R. Assi and Hiyya b. Abba (Yer. Shab. 7c). Ze'era especially respected R. Ammi, head of the school in Tiberias (Yer. Dem. 25b; Yer. Shab. 8a; Yer. Yeb. 72d) and was highly esteemed by Abbahu, the rector at Caesarea. He was one of the only Babylonians to receive the honor of ordination as Rabbi.

Rabbah (see above)

Ulla (see above)

Ammi - (Ammi b. Nathan) Third Generation Palestinian Amora.

Ammi is almost always associated with R. Assi. Some believe that they were brothers, as R. Assi is sometimes referred to as R. Jose b. Nathan and R. Ammi gives his full name as Ammi b. Nathan in Git. 44a. Both come from priestly families (Meg. 22a, Hul. 107b). Because R. Assi is from Babylonia scholars assume that R. Ammi is as well.

R. Ammi studied under R. Hoshaiiah I at Caesarea (Yer. Shab. iii. 5d), as well as R. Johanan at Tiberias. and later he went to Tiberias and became the disciple of R. Johanan (M. K. 25b). In addition to R. Assi, Ammi was close with R. Abbahu, R. Hanina b. Pappi, R. Isaac, and R. Samuel b. Naḥmani (M. K. 17a, 20a; Yeb. 48b) and his fellow Babylonian immigrant R. Hiyya b. Abba (Ber. 16a, Yer. Pes. iii. 30b).

R. Assi, R. Ammi and R. Hiyya, made up a Beit Din. Among their Babylonian contemporaries, Ammi and Assi were known as "the Palestinian judges," or as "the distinguished priests of Palestine" (Git. 59b, Sanh. 17b).

Ammi served as rector of the college at Tiberias (Hul. 134b) while continuing his work as a judge (Shab. 10a), and with Rabbi Hiyya he taught and organized schools for children in the area. (Yer. Meg. iii. 74a). In connection with one of the tours of inspection, the following characteristic anecdote is related:

R. Judah (See above)

Isaac b. Judah - Fourth Century Babylonian Amora

R. Isaac was a student of his father, Judah B. Ezekiah in Pumbedita. R. Isaac commented on his father's work, but more interestingly his father passed on teachings in his name, which was quite rare (usually only a student spoke in the name of a teacher, not the other way around.) (BT Shab. 151a) In addition to his father he studied under Rabbah (Sheb. 36b), Rami bar Hama, and under R. Sheshet. Though there are several stories that mention him along with Ulla, they were more like adversaries than colleagues. His close friends were Aha b. Hana and Samuel b. Rabbah (Sheb. 36b).

42. Rabbah bar bar Hana - Second Generation Babylonian Amora

Rabbah bar bar Hana studied under R. Johanan in Palestine. After an extended period of time studying in Palestine, Rabbah bar bar Hana returned to Babylonia and became a trusted friend and mentee of R. Judah Ezekiel. Rabbah bar bar Hana is known for his wild journeys and adventures through the desert; he has become well known for the narratives detailing his observations and experiences in the desert. Similarly, Rabbah bar bar Hana is also well known for his stories describing his adventures at sea. These stories often included descriptions of various marine animals, for example "Once, while on a ship, we came to a gigantic fish at rest, which we supposed to be an island, since there was sand on its back, in which grass was growing. We therefore landed, made a fire, and cooked our meal. But when the fish felt the heat he rolled over, and we would have drowned had not the ship been near" (B. B. 73b). In addition to his narratives regarding his sea and desert adventures, Rabbah bar bar Hana is also renowned for his commentaries on the haggadic portions of the Talmud.

Avot d'Rabbi Natan

Eleazer b. Azaria - Second Generation Tanna

R. Eleazer b. Azaria was a junior contemporary of Gamaliel II., Eliezer b. Hyrcanus, and Joshua b. Hananiah, and senior of Akiba (Sifre, Deut. 32; Sanh. 101a). His family traced their roots to the biblical prophet Ezra (Ber. 27b; Yer. Yeb. i. 3b).

When Gamaliel II was temporarily deposed from his Patriarch, Eleazer was elected to replace him. The Sanhedrine reinstated Gamaliel after only a short time and Eleazer became "av bet din." (Ber. 27b *et seq.*; Yer. Ber. iv. 7c *et seq.*; Yer. Ta'an. iv. 67d).

Eleazer b. Azaria traveled to Rome and to Jerusalem with Gamaliel, Joshua and Akiba (Kallah R. vii.; Derek Erez R. v.).

Under his leadership, the academy grew immensely and the school undertook the project of collecting and ruling on undecided points of law. Eleazer believed that underlying meaning of biblical text could be found in analyzing it with passages directly before and after (an exegetical rule called *smuchin*. In his prolific homiletic teaching he attempted to teach an ethical or practical lesson (For example; Yoma viii. 9; Sifra, Aḥare Mot, viii. 2).