

WISDOM FROM ALL MY TEACHERS

CHALLENGES AND INITIATIVES IN
CONTEMPORARY TORAH EDUCATION

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HARBATZAT TORAH: MOTIVES AND OBJECTIVES

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AT FIRST GLANCE, a discussion in this volume of the motives for *harbatzat Torah* – disseminating Torah – seems entirely superfluous. Is there any need to explain to Jewish educators, and those concerned with the holy enterprise of Torah education, the importance and critical nature of this endeavor? Yet, on second thought, there is no concern here of “carrying coals to Newcastle.” Specifically because this topic is so fundamental and central, and since it can be formulated in a variety of ways, it is appropriate for this volume to host the presentation of one formulation.

We may open the discussion itself with a parallel between two elements of Torah study: studying and teaching. With regard to the first, a careful look at the text instituted by the Sages for the blessing recited over Torah study reveals that it relates to two principles. Every yeshivah student is aware of the precision required in the formulation of the text of blessings recited over the performance of *mitzvot*, when we define the nature and root of the *mitzvot*, and this is surely true of one of the most fundamental: Torah study.¹

[An earlier, Hebrew version of this essay appeared in *Al Derekh ha-Avot*, ed. A. Bazak, S. Wygoda, and M. Munitz (Alon Shevut: Tevunot/Mikhlelet Herzog, 2001), pp. 15–31, published for the 30th anniversary of the Yaakov Herzog Teachers’ Training College at Yeshivat Har Etzion. David Silverberg prepared this translation. After this essay was completed, a collection of Rabbi Lichtenstein’s essays was published as *Leaves of Faith: The World of Jewish Learning* (Jersey City: Ktav, 2003). The interested reader is referred to that collection for further discussion of issues raised in this essay and in others in the present volume.]

¹ The very association of *birkat ha-Torah* to the general realm of *mitzvot* is subject to dispute. It is generally assumed that the *berakhot* recited on *mitzvot* originated from rabbinic enactment, whereas with regard to the source of *birkhot ha-Torah* the *rishonim* are in disagreement. Undoubtedly the most prominent among those who view this obligation as biblical in origin is Ramban, from whom it appears that *birkat ha-Torah* is an expression of praise and thanksgiving for the phenomenon, not a *berakhab* relating to a

Responding to the query, "What does one recite" over Torah study (i.e., which blessing), the Gemara (*Berakhot* 11b) presents a variety of formulations:

Rav Judah said in the name of Shemuel: "... who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to engage (*la'asok*) in words of Torah."² Rabbi Yohanan ends with the following conclusion: "The Lord our God, make the words of Your Torah pleasant in our mouths and in the mouths of Your nation, the House of Israel, and we, our descendants, and the descendants of Your nation, the House of Israel, all of us, shall be people who know Your Name and engage in Your Torah. Blessed are You, O Lord, who teaches Torah to His nation, Israel." Rav Hamnuna said: "Who has chosen us from all the nations and has given us His Torah. Blessed are You, O Lord, giver of the Torah." Rav Hamnuna said: this is the greatest of the blessings; let us therefore say all of them [the aforementioned formulations].

We, of course, follow the Gemara's conclusion, but the *rishonim* argue as to its meaning. The Ba'al ha-Ma'or explains that the three different blessings relate to different areas of Torah: "They correspond to Torah, Mishnah, and Rabbi Yishmael's system of extrapolation through the thirteen principles [of halakhic exegesis]."³ The Ra'avad objected to this approach:

Is not the entire concept of Torah a single concept? Why then is a blessing necessary for each [area]? Furthermore, if a blessing is required for each as

personal obligation; in Reb Hayyim's terminology, a type of *birkat ha-nehenin* (blessing recited before deriving benefit from food and the like) on the very concept of Torah. While this might lead one to conclude that it is futile to reflect on the essence of the *mitzvah* of Torah study by examining its blessing, I believe such an inquiry is, indeed, appropriate. Firstly, even if we would explain that this blessing does not constitute a *birkat ha-mitzvah* at all, it still features the standard text formulated by *Hazak*; we may assess the quality of one of the focal points in our lives by analyzing *Hazak's* formulation in any context. Secondly, we may reasonably assume that the nature of *birkat ha-Torah* as a blessing expressing praise is limited to its biblically ordained aspect. Rabbinic enactment has added a further aspect, that of a *birkat ha-mitzvah*, precisely as the Sages' ordinance in this regard applies to *mitzvot* in general. For more on this topic, see the Hebrew version of this essay, pp. 15–16 and sources in notes 1–7.

² The Rif's version of the text reads, "with regard to words of Torah," rather than "to engage in words of Torah." This point obviously touches upon the general discussion among the *rishonim* centered around the Gemara in *Pesahim* 7b as to the principles governing the formulation of a *birkat ha-mitzvah* with the term, "*al*" ("with regard to...") or "*le*" ("to do such-and-such"). This issue lies beyond the scope of our discussion.

³ Ba'al ha-Ma'or on the Rif, *Berakhot* 5b (in the Rif's glosses).

if they were three *mitzvot*, then one should bless and then read [from the corresponding area of Torah to which the given blessing relates]. Where do we find a composite *berakhab* for many *mitzvot*?!

He suggests two alternatives to the rejected explanation:

Rather, Rav Papa said [to recite all three] because he was in doubt as to which is the accepted one. The question has been asked on Rav Papa's comment: does one not utter a blessing in vain [by reciting all the different blessings suggested merely out of doubt]? For there is no doubt regarding Rav Hamnuna's blessing that it is the best of the [suggested] *berakhot*, and we fulfill our obligation through it in the synagogue! I say that since Rabbi Yohanan's *berakhot* include a request relevant to [all of] us, that we do not err in matters of Torah, we do not want to leave it out.⁴

According to both the Ba'al ha-Ma'or's explanation and the Ra'avad's conclusion, the multiple *berakhot* result from the multifaceted nature of Torah study, each facet being critical and significant, and not from a halakhic doubt. It seems that there remains room for further analysis, to continue in their direction, only by pointing to other elements – particularly with regard to the formulations of Shemuel and Rabbi Yohanan.⁵ Our relationship to Torah study is a twofold one. We learn, on one level, in fulfillment of a divine imperative. Whatever the reason behind the *mitzvah* – be it to acquire guidance for *mitzvah* observance, for spiritual enrichment, to draw nearer to the Almighty, or, simply, *li-shemah*, to come in contact with the eternity of God's word, without gearing towards any other purpose – we lean over the *Humash* and Gemara in compliance with the divine command. The *berakhab* formulated by Rav Judah in the name of Shemuel is devoted to this perspective: "Who has sanctified us with His *mitzvot* and commanded us to involve ourselves in the words of Torah."

But despite our subjugation to Torah study by virtue of the obligation, we surely do not wish to feel content with this aspect. Certainly, we will delve into talmudic deliberations (*havayot de-Abaye ve-Rava*) even if, Heaven forbid, we find no interest in them, as a sort of continuation and perpetua-

⁴ Ra'avad's *Hasagot* on the Ba'al ha-Ma'or, *ibid*.

⁵ The blending of different elements characterizes *halakhab's* acceptance of a combination of differing liturgical texts in situations similar to ours. For example: "*zokher haberit ve-ne'eman bi-vrito ve-kayyam be-ma'amaro*" (*Berakhot* 59a); "*rov ha-hoda'ot ve-ha-Kel ha-hoda'ot*" (*ibid.*, 59b); "*rofei kol basar u-mafli la'asot*" (*ibid.*, 60b); "*ha-nifra le-Yisra'el mi-kol tzareibem ha-Kel ha-moshi'a*" (*Megillah* 21b); and the text of *modim de-rabbanan* (*Sotah* 40a). We should note, however, that in all these examples we deal with additional expressions within a single *berakhab*, not multiple *berakhot*.

tion of the suspension of Mount Sinai coercing us to accept the Torah. But our aspiration is to occupy ourselves in Torah out of an existential attachment, as we discover its inner light and experience its being “complete, restoring the soul,” and as we become bound to it through bonds of love. *Hazal* (*Erwin* 54b) went very far in expressing their love of Torah:

Rabbi Shemuel bar Nahmani said: What does the verse mean, “A loving doe, a graceful mountain goat...” (*Mishlei* 5:19)? Why are the words of Torah likened to a doe? To teach you that just as a doe’s womb is narrow and she is beloved to her mate each time just as at the first time, so are the words of Torah beloved on their students each time just as at the first time. “And a *graceful* mountain goat” – it draws the grace of its students. “Let her breasts satisfy you at all times” – why are the words of Torah likened to a breast? Just as whenever a baby handles the breast he finds milk in it, similarly, whenever a person engages in the words of Torah he finds flavor in them.”

Love of Torah

Is the exultant student, when he reenacts daily his wedding night with the word of God, driven solely by the command? Is the one who engages in Torah, who nurses from the breasts of his Torah-parent, working out of a sense of obligation? Here the second aspect of our study is reflected, and to this aspect Rabbi Yohanan’s *berakhab* is devoted: establishing the love of Torah, the aesthetic, sensual, experiential attachment to the Almighty’s laws, “that are more desirable than gold, than fine gold; sweeter than honey, than drippings of the comb” (*Tehillim* 19:11). All this is, in part, a human undertaking. A person must strive towards the realization of “I will delight in Your commandments, which I love. I reach out for Your commandments, which I love; I study Your laws” (*Tehillim* 119:47–48). But he may also yearn for divine assistance for the realization of “Be infatuated with love for her always.” This is the crux of Rabbi Yohanan’s plea. It is not only, as the Ra’avad writes, “a request that we do not err in matters of Torah,” but rather an appeal by the individual reciting the *berakhab* that he may earn the privilege of fortifying his learning simultaneously on the foundations of obligation and love. “*Ha’arev na Hashem Elokeinu*”: Rashi explains, “May it be pleasant to us to occupy ourselves in them out of love.”

This is true with regard to study and applies as well to teaching. Torah instruction, too, is based upon two foundations: obligation and love. *Hafatzat Torah*, spreading Torah – bringing it into public awareness and establish-

ing it, explained and elucidated, in the public domain – is possible to do with other motives. But *harbatzat Torah* – implanting it, rather than merely supplying it; bequeathing it to students and granting them a portion in Torah – is driven by a combination of responsibility and emotional attachment.⁶

Meleket Hashem

These two components subdivide further, each one independently, into several branches. First, the obligation is four-tiered: towards the Almighty, towards the Torah itself, towards “*Reb Yisra’el*” (the individual Jew) and towards *Kenesset Yisra’el*. As for the first, it is summed up in one expression used by *Hazal* in reference to teaching Torah: “*meleket Hashem*” – God’s work.⁷ This expression appears in a verse in Yirmiyahu in a much different context. In a prophecy of fury describing the foreseen destruction of Moab, the prophet declares, “Give wings to Moab, for she must go hence, her towns shall become desolate, with no one living in them. Cursed be he who is slack in doing God’s work! Cursed be he who withholds his sword from blood!” (*Yirmiyahu* 48:9–10). As Rashi explains, this verse speaks of “the work of the destruction of Moab, which is the mission of the Almighty.” But in a daring fling, *Hazal* transferred the verse to an entirely different mission, as they depict David citing this verse to Joab’s teacher, scolding him for having erred in his instruction of the section of *zakhor*. This is indeed codified – let us hear the severity of what is demanded of us! – by the Rambam (*Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Talmud Torah* 2:3):

A schoolteacher who abandons the children and leaves or who does some other activity with them or is lax in their study is included under, “Cursed be he who is slack in doing God’s work.” It is therefore proper to appoint only a God-fearing man who is skilled in reading and precision.

This terminology has several implications. Firstly, Torah instruction is the work in which the Almighty Himself engages. The Sages described Him as such in their formulation of the text for *birkhot ha-Torah*: “*ha-melammed Torah le-ammo Yisra’el*” – “Who teaches Torah to His nation, Israel.” True, the Rambam, in a famous and characteristic responsum, inveighs against

⁶ *Mo`ed Katan* 25a, *Bava Metzri`a* 85b, *Temurah* 16a all speak of *lerabetz*, employing the *pi`el* verb form, as opposed to *leharbitz*, but its distinction from *hafatzah* (spreading) is identical.

⁷ See *Bava Batra* 21b.

this conclusion of the blessing, viewing it as undermining the hegemony of free will:

The *berakhab* is meant to conclude, *noten ha-Torah* [Giver of the Torah], for this concept [of its having been given to us] is what obligates us to study it. This is the concept of its having been given, and this is the intent of the *berakhab*: to request assistance in order to learn it. But one who concludes [the *berakhab*], *ha-melammed Torah* errs, for God does not teach it to us, but rather commanded us to learn it and study it. This is built on a fundamental precept of our faith, that the performance of the commandments – or their neglect – is in our hands, not forced upon us from God.⁸

In light of this protest, the Rambam adopted a different text for the *berakhab*, one which corresponds to that accepted by Rav Sa'adyah Gaon⁹: “*noten ha-Torah*.”

Generally, however – despite the testimony of *talmidei Rabbenu Yonah*: “With regard to *ha'arev*, there are places that conclude, *Barukh atah Hashem noten ha-Torah*”¹⁰ – the text, “*ha-melammed Torah*” has been accepted as the standard conclusion.¹¹ And we need not wonder as to why. The Gemara (*Bekhorot* 29a) inquires as to the source of the prohibition against taking money to study or teach Torah. “Rav Judah said: The verse states, ‘Behold, I [Moshe] have taught you [statutes and laws, as the Lord my God has commanded me] – *Devarim* 4:5] – just as I [studied] free of charge, so [must] you [study] free of charge.” In other words, Moshe is to teach *Kenesset Yisra'el* in the same manner as the Almighty taught him. Thus, the process of the command is equated with the study, and the Giver of the Torah with its teacher. That which applied with regard to Moshe, applies as well to his nation.

⁸ *Shut ha-Rambam*, ed. Blau, chapter 182, vol. 2, p. 333; see the editor's notes *ad loc*.

⁹ See *Siddur Rav Sa'adyah Gaon*, ed. Assaf (Jerusalem, 5730), p. 358. We should note, however, that, unlike the accepted practice, Rav Sa'adyah Gaon's version places “*ha'arev na*” as the continuation of the *berakhab*, “*asher babar banu*.”

¹⁰ Glosses to the Rif, *Berakhot* 5b.

¹¹ Some controversy exists as to the Rambam's ruling in *Hilkhot Tefillah* 7:10. The *Haggahot Maimoniyot* comments: “But Rashi there explains that one concludes, *ha-melammed Torah le-ammo Yisra'el*,” indicating that his text of the Rambam follows the ruling in the responsum; this is indeed how the text appears in the Venice edition. By contrast, in the Rome edition and those in widespread use today, the text reads, “*ha-melammed Torah le-ammo Yisra'el*,” though Rabbi Kapach and Rabbi Rabinovitch adopted the text of the *Haggahot Maimoniyot*.

“Behold, I [Moshe] have taught you statutes and laws, as the Lord my God has commanded me” (*Devarim* 4:5). From this verse emerges a second aspect of the definition of Torah instruction as “God’s work.” The straightforward reading of the Gemara in *Nedarim* (37a) – “He commanded me, and I [commanded] you” – implies that “commanded me” relates to the content of the Torah, to the *mitzvot* in general, which Moshe heard from the Almighty. We may, however, suggest an alternate explanation, that “commanded me” modifies “I have taught,” that the command was to teach. Indeed, this reading of the verse was adopted by the Rosh – “Just as I [studied] free of charge – He commanded me to teach you free of charge just as He taught me free of charge” – and the Ran – “Meaning, that He commanded me to teach free of charge”;¹² and the ramifications are clear. But do we even require a precise analysis of the meaning of an isolated word to determine that teaching Torah is the work that the Almighty commanded to perform? There are explicit verses that cry out to this effect. Some, such as, “And now, write for yourselves the words of this song and teach it to the Israelites; place it in their mouths” (*Devarim* 31:19), were directed at the time specifically to the religious leaders, while others, such as, “And make them known to your children and to your children’s children” (*Devarim* 4:9), and, “Impress them upon your children” (*Devarim* 6:7), were spoken even initially to the nation as a whole. “For without question,” the Maharitz concludes, “Moshe was commanded by God to teach them at Sinai and after Sinai until they all knew the practical commandments, statutes, laws and prohibitions that they must observe, until it became a ‘set table’ before them.”¹³

Moreover, the Rambam positioned the aspect of “*lelammed*” in the center of his treatment of the laws of Torah study. The first seven *halakhot* of his *Hilkhot Talmud Torah* deal with the details and parameters of the obligation to teach; only in the eighth does the Rambam discuss personal study: “Every man among Israel is obligated in Torah study... Even one with a wife and children must set aside time for Torah study by day and night, as it says, ‘You shall engage in it day and night.’” Even more remarkable is *halakhab* 3: “One whose father did not teach him must teach himself once he possesses sufficient intelligence, as it says, ‘You shall study them and learn to do them.’” The Rambam does not write that the individual must “learn,” but rather “teach himself.” This formulation requires some explanation; and the answer is self-evident. The *mitzvah* contains two components. The

¹² See their respective commentaries to *Nedarim*.

¹³ Cited in *Shitah Mekubbetzet*, *Nedarim* 38a.

first is the study, the involvement in God's Word, in and of itself, irrespective of its contribution towards the shaping of the student's personality and his status as a servant of God or his development into a scholar. When the Rambam includes under the obligation discussed in *halakhab* 8 "a very aged man whose strength has diminished," he does not expect that this elderly man's involvement in Torah will have a revolutionary impact on his scholarly talents or religious level. The devotion to the task, the effort and dedication, the exertion rather than the result – these are the main features of this obligation.

A beautiful expression of this perspective emerges from a scenario described in the Gemara (*Shabbat* 30a) in the form of a dialogue between King David and the Almighty:

R. Judah said in the name of Rav: What does it mean, "Tell me, O Lord, what my term is, what is the measure of my days; I would know how fleeting my life is" (*Tebillim* 39:5)? David said before the Almighty, "Master of the world, tell me, O Lord, what my term is." He said to him, "I have decreed that I will not disclose the term of any human being." "What is the measure of my days?" "I have decreed that I will not disclose the measure of a human being's days." "I would know how fleeting my life is" [Rashi: "On which day will I cease and be eliminated from the world?"]. He said to him, "You will die on *Shabbat*." "Let me die on Sunday." He said to him, "The time for your son Shelomo's reign has already arrived, and one reign cannot infringe upon another even a hairsbreadth." "Let me die on Friday." He said to him, "Better one day in Your courts than a thousand [anywhere else]" (*Tebillim* 84:11) – one day when you sit and involve yourself in Torah is better for Me than the thousand burnt-offerings that your son Shelomo will sacrifice before Me on the altar.

That single day, when David will have the opportunity to sit and study Torah on his deathbed, is not meant, presumably, to mold new qualities in his being. Nevertheless, an hour in service of God, which itself is more valuable than all of life in the next world, can avail itself at any time.

Teaching

The foregoing component of the obligation belongs to the strict "learning" aspect. A second aspect, however, exists as well, its essence rooted in teaching. Involvement in Torah constitutes – particularly during one's formative, younger years – a central instrument in the fashioning of one's Jewish spirit. It is meant to establish a person in our spiritual world – to confer

a reservoir of Torah knowledge and scholarly talent, to implant the love and fear of God, to instill faith and knowledge of our ancestral heritage, to build a personality overflowing with loyalty and sense of obligation to a life of Torah and *mitzvot*. This creative effort, which is most certainly geared towards an end result, which requires arduous exertion and perspiration but strives for spiritual output, takes effect, first and foremost, in education within the family. The realization of its goals is latent within the imperative, “And impress them upon your children,” whereby the learning serves as the key medium but the goal is the transmission of the tradition and the development of its recipients. This is what the Rambam explains, that one who did not have the privilege of a proper Torah education during childhood and has yet to reach an appropriate spiritual level, must, when he reaches maturity, not only fulfill the commandment of learning Torah for its own sake, but also “teach” – meaning, to mold – himself, and, as an autodidact, become simultaneously the builder and the one built, teacher and student.

This process is not limited to the teacher’s offspring: “Not only one’s son and grandson; there is rather a commandment for each and every scholar in Israel to teach all students even though they are not his children, as it says, ‘Impress them upon your children.’ Through tradition it is taught that ‘your children’ refers to your students, for students are called children, as it says, ‘The children of the prophets left.’”¹⁴ This, as stated, is the focus of the Rambam’s introduction in his laws of Torah study, and it forms a natural transition to the third aspect of “God’s work.” *Harbatzat Torah* is an occupation that is performed not only following the Almighty’s lead, imitating His conduct and obeying His order, but also for Him, as it were. One who teaches Torah furthers the realization of His will and serves to carry out Providence’s plan. We may not inquire as to that which lies beyond our comprehension, and who will dare to explain the reason behind the creation of man and the universe. But even if the “why” is beyond our reach, we may, and perhaps must, delve into the teleological question of “for what purpose, and towards what end?” Obviously, this question extends well beyond the specific context of Torah study and even transcends the narrow focal point of *Kenesset Yisra’el*. Clearly, its answer may be the all-inclusive, universal formulation of the Ramban: “The intention behind all the commandments is that we believe in our God and acknowledge that He created us, and this is the intention behind creation. For we have no other reason for the original creation, and the Supreme Lord has no desire for the lower

¹⁴ Rambam, *Hilkehot Talmud Torah* 1:2.

world other than that man will know and acknowledge that God created him. The intention behind the inspirational sound of prayers and the intention behind synagogues and the merit of public prayer is that people have a place to gather and acknowledge that God created them and brought them into existence, and that they publicize this and say before Him, "We are Your creatures."¹⁵ However, it is also clear that, with respect to implanting Torah, advancing the "need" for the Kingdom of Heaven is of supreme importance, either because it instills fear of Heaven, and thereby strengthens and deepens the preparedness to declare, "We are Your creatures," or because the knowledge of God, in and of itself, constitutes a sublime goal of Providence's plan, the eschatological crown jewel of which is, "The earth will be filled with knowledge of God, like water covers the sea" (*Yishayahu* 11:9).

In the expression of the "needs" and "longing" of the Almighty, and the adulation of disseminators of Torah as advancing them, there is undoubtedly an element of problematic impertinence. Nevertheless, even as it must be done with care, it has support. On the kabbalistic level, this element is quite common. For example, the Ramban, in a familiar passage, after rejecting Rashi's explanation of the conclusion of the section dealing with the daily *tamid* offering in *Parashat Tetzaveh* – "They shall know that I am the Lord their God who took them from the land of Egypt to reside in their midst; I am the Lord their God" (*Shemot* 29:46) – notes:

But Rabbi Avraham [Ibn Ezra] said that [the verse means,] I took them from the land of Egypt only so that I may dwell in their midst, and this is what is meant, "You will serve God on this mountain," and he explained well. If so, then within this concept lies a great secret, because according to the simple approach to the matter, the *Shekbinah* in Israel serves a need of man, not a need of God. But the truth is that which is said, "Israel, that through you I am glorified"; "Here I will dwell for I have desired it"; and it is written, "I will remember the land."

But the concept may be understood as well in purely rationalistic terms. If, as a result of the series of exiles, "the Almighty has in His world only the four cubits of *halakhab*," then whoever disseminates Torah and raises its banner delineates, as it were, the portion of his Creator in the world.

In light of this, we should draw a clear distinction between *meleket Hashem* (God's work) and the corresponding term, *meleket shamayim* (the

¹⁵ Ramban's commentary on the Torah, *Shemot* 13:2.

work of heaven). This expression appears in the Gemara with regard to the preparation of materials to serve as sacred objects. Rav Yosef, for example, taught, “Only the skins of permitted [kosher] animals are suitable for *meleket bet shamayim*” (*Shabbat* 28b). That is, only these skins may be used for the boxes, parchment, and straps of *tefillin*. Similarly, Rabbi Ishmael warned Rabbi Meir, then a scribe’s apprentice, “My son, exercise great care in your work, for your work is *meleket bet shamayim*” (*Eruvin* 13a). Quite obviously, as these examples demonstrate, the description, “*meleket bet shamayim*” also comes to glorify a certain activity and extol its value. Nevertheless, it remains very far, in both scope and intensity, from the array of qualities analyzed earlier. We speak here of a contribution towards the advancement of certain needs or interests, as it were, of the Almighty, by creating and shaping the necessary tools. The areas involved and the product, the importance of sacred objects – and certainly sacred bodies – notwithstanding, are relatively concentrated and relate to the means, as opposed to the ends. This is not the case, as we have seen, with regard to the concept of “*meleket Hashem*,” which, from differing perspectives, is linked to the Almighty Himself, and harnesses the One who disseminates Torah to His chariot.

Responsibilities to the Torah Itself

Aside from the connection to the Giver of the Torah, we have a responsibility to the Torah itself. Besides its role towards us, as a guide and source of truth, the Torah is, in its splendid isolation, a treasury of precious vessels. In it, as it were, the King of the world delights, both before creation: “I was with Him as a confidant, a source of delight every day, rejoicing before Him at all times” (*Mishlei* 8:30);¹⁶ and in the wake of creation: “He [Moshe] said before Him: Master of the world, You have a precious treasure in which You delight every day; shall I flatter myself?” (*Shabbat* 89a).¹⁷ *Kenesset Yisra’el* has exulted in it throughout its generations and dispersions, and it exalts and extols it in its poetry and *midrash*, song and praise, in the mouths of children and nursing babes as well as the mouths of the elderly and distinguished. It is the Torah whose presence within us, given our intense concern for its wondrous and sublime proliferation, obligates us, even if we hadn’t accepted it. Would an art enthusiast refrain from rushing to save the Mona Lisa if it came under the threat of destruction? When dealing with the eternal Torah, all the more so.

¹⁶ Based on the *Sifrei, Devarim, Ekev* 37, ed. Finkelstein, p. 70, offering the view that the “wisdom” spoken of in this chapter refers to the wisdom of the Torah.

¹⁷ Compare with *Avodah Zarah* 3b.

We have, however, accepted it, and we accepted it as a delightful treasure. It was specifically this quality that prompted the ministering angels, in *Hazal's* graphic description, to protest its transmission to those living in physical bodies: “They said before Him: this precious treasure that has been concealed with You for nine hundred and seventy-four generations before the world was created – You wish to give it to flesh and blood?” (*Shabbat* 88a). It was in this capacity that we accepted it, as both a gift and something for us to protect. In one sense, we acquired it; in a different sense, we are its guardians – and, presumably, given that we conduct our lives according to the Torah, we are like the *sho'el* (a borrower, as opposed to a renter), about whom the Talmud says all the benefit is his.

This responsibility of ours has several different aspects. First and foremost, there stands an obligation to protect the content of the Torah, its sanctity and purity; to resist efforts, from both within and without, to dilute, distort, and misconstrue. However, there is also the task of raising the Torah's banner, of striving to bring it to the center of the life of our nation and community, to ensure that it will not remain isolated in a corner. This objective is preceded, in part, by a certain quality of studying – study that is, at once, both static and dynamic, rooted in traditional sources with firm belief in them, yet at the same time linked to contemporary intellectual and social reality. Clearly, however, the motivation comes primarily from the task of teaching. The comprehensive, concentrated effort to disseminate God's word in every location is the only guaranteed way to raise its flag to a height commensurate with its value, to steer towards a situation where all the schoolchildren “from Dan to Be'er Sheva” acquire proficiency in the laws of ritual purity. In disseminating Torah, then, we are driven by our relationship to the Giver of the Torah and the Torah itself.

And, correspondingly, to those who have accepted the Torah. We have dealt heretofore with a responsibility to disseminate Torah from the viewpoint of “*bein adam la-Makom*” (our obligation to the Almighty), on two different levels. But aside from this, we are obliged at this point to move our discussion to the aspect of “*bein adam le-haveiro*” (one's obligation towards others). Recall that this aspect, too, splits into two subdivisions – towards *Reb Yisra'el* and towards *Kenesset Yisra'el*. In a general sense, the first – and perhaps both – involve *hesed*, an act of kindness. Indeed, *Hazal* (*Sukkah* 49b) pointed to this connection:

Rabbi Elazar said: What does it mean, “Her mouth is open with wisdom, and the Torah of kindness is on her tongue” (*Mishlei* 31:26)? Is there a “Torah of kindness” and a Torah that is not of kindness? ...Some explain,

[studying] Torah in order to teach – this is Torah of kindness; [studying Torah] without the intention of teaching – this is Torah that is not of kindness.

It is noteworthy that this passage does not speak of actual teaching, but rather of the purpose behind one's study. The message conveyed is that already in the preliminary stages of academic preparation and training, determining the final goal lends a quality of *Torat hesed* – even before any concrete actualization of this goal. If this is the case regarding Torah that is learned, then it applies all the more so with regard to Torah that is taught.

In this context, it must be emphasized that we do not speak here merely of a coincidental meeting of two qualities under a single roof. A careful reading of the aforementioned talmudic passage suggests that the quality discussed adds a layer to the Torah, one which qualitatively changes its fundamental character. It seems to me that in this vein we may understand the conclusion of the discussion at the end of the first chapter of *Bava Kamma* (17a). The Talmud there assesses the relative values of study and performance. After first noting a contradiction between earlier sources in this regard, the Talmud distinguishes between studying and teaching. Rashi explains: “Studying for oneself – performance is preferable; but teaching others is preferable over performance.”¹⁸ It appears that here, too, the determining factor is not the cumulative effect of the two areas – study and performance – over the single area of study alone, but rather the very fact that learning itself receives added weight when its springs gush forth to the public.

From a more specific perspective, this issue relates to the concept of *arevut* (mutual responsibility). Colloquially, this term is used in reference to the national aspect of this concept. In its source in rabbinic literature, however, the dominant thread – albeit with regard to punishment more so than with regard to responsibility (though clearly these two issues are intertwined)—is, specifically, the personal element: “They shall stumble over one another’ (*Vayikra* 26:37) – each in the sin of his brother. This teaches that all of Israel are mutually responsible for one another” (*Shevu'ot* 39a). It is commonly understood that the most famous halakhic application of this principle is embodied in the rule of “*yatza motzi*,” by which an individual who has already satisfied his requirement vis-à-vis a given recitation or

¹⁸ *S.v.* “*lemigmar*.” Although many commentators have different versions of the Gemara's text or explained it differently, they would not necessarily dispute the ruling that emerges from Rashi's approach.

reading may read or recite on behalf of those who have yet to fulfill their requirement. Despite the Mishnah's axiom that "Whoever is not obligated in a given matter cannot fulfill the obligation of the masses on their behalf" (*Rosh ha-Shanah* 3:8), one who has already satisfied his obligation may read on behalf of others, since *halakhab* deems his requirement as not yet completely fulfilled. This is indeed Rashi's explanation: "Even if he has fulfilled [his requirement], he nevertheless may fulfill the requirement for others, since all of Israel are responsible for one another with regard to *mitzvoth*" (*Rosh ha-Shanah* 29a, s.v. "af al pi"). If Re'uven's responsibility towards Shimon establishes that he, Re'uven, has not completely satisfied his obligation with regard to a given *mitzvah* so long as Shimon has not performed his duty towards it, then this concept is most certainly valid regarding Re'uven's obligation to transmit to Shimon the messages of the Torah in all their parameters and instill within him a sense of obligation towards them.

The relationship between *harbatzat Torah* and *arevut* is emphasized in the Talmud's central treatment of the latter concept, in the context of the blessings and curses administered at Mount Gerizim and Mount Eval: "A blessing with respect to the community, a blessing with respect to the individual; a curse with respect to the community, a curse with respect to the individual. 'To study, to teach, to observe and to perform' – the result is twice four" (*Sotah* 37a). Rashi explains (s.v. *lilmod u-lelammed lishmor ve-la'asot*):

All the *mitzvoth* carry these four [elements]: "You shall study them"; "You shall observe, to perform"; and it is written, "You shall teach them to your children," etc. We thus have here four commandments with regard to every *mitzvah*, and for all four a curse and a blessing were administered on both the community and individual: "Blessed are those who study; cursed are those who do not study," and the same with regard to teaching, observing, and performing. Over each one there are four covenants: a covenant of blessing for the community, a covenant of blessing for the individual, a covenant of curse for the community, a covenant of curse for the individual.

We must internalize this message very well. This passage does not say that if one takes the *lulav* properly but refrains from instructing others in this regard, he has satisfactorily fulfilled the *mitzvah* of *lulav*, but lacks the fulfillment of teaching others. It rather states that the commandment of *lulav* itself consists of four elements. So long as one has not addressed them all, his fulfillment of this specific *mitzvah* is incomplete.

This notion is undoubtedly both a novel and powerful one; in any event, for a Jew who both senses and believes, the central message is clear even without it. A person who, on the one hand, feels deep concern for the welfare of others and, at the same time, is saturated with the belief in the assertion that a life of Torah and *mitzvot* are “for our own good” (*Devarim* 6:24); a person who feels obligated towards his fellow’s progress on the one hand, and for whom, on the other, the declaration that “they are our lives and the length of our days” is not merely a habitual, routine recitation from the lips outward, but rather an expression of a deeply entrenched awareness – is it plausible that he would not take upon himself the mission of binding others to the world and yoke of Torah? In the context of the obligation to return a lost item to its owner, the famous dictate in the Mishnah reads: “A lost item of one’s father and a lost item of one’s rabbi – that of his rabbi takes precedence, for his father brought him to this world, whereas his rabbi, who taught him wisdom, brings him to life in the next world” (*Bava Metzi’a* 2:11). Correspondingly, then, if saving one’s fellow is included under *hashavat aveidah* (the obligation to return a lost item) – “The loss of one’s body – from where [do we derive an obligation to ‘return’ it]? The verse states, ‘You shall return it to him’ (*Devarim* 22:2)”¹⁹ – then, in light of the Mishnah, all the more so does this *mitzvah* include “returning” the soul of another. If we bear in mind as well that this *mitzvah* requires not only the return of a lost item, but also preventing it from being lost – “If one saw floodwaters coming, he must erect a barrier before them; Rava says: ‘for all your fellow’s lost property’ (*Devarim* 22:3), including the loss of land” (*Bava Metzi’a* 31a) – then the interpersonal aspect of *harbatzat Torah* becomes particularly evident.

Torah and National Formation

The realm of “between man and his fellow” has a national element, as well, and with regard to it there is a fourth obligation of *harbatzat Torah*. On one level, this touches upon our very identity as a nation. The conception and birth of *Kenesset Yisra’el* occurred in a spiritual melting pot. The nation entered the world without the standard national ingredients, without territory or sovereignty, by rallying around a lofty system of values and ideas. The preservation of its identity depends on the continuity of its attachment to that system. “Our nation is a nation,” as Rav Sa’adyah Gaon established,

¹⁹ *Sanbedrin* 73a. It is not clear to me whether by saving someone from drowning one fulfills the formal *mitzvah* of *hashavat aveidah*, returning a lost item to its owner, or if this *mitzvah* is limited to the loss of property, and the obligation of saving the body of another is established by logical deduction (through a *kal va-homer*).

“only in its Torah.”²⁰ Ahad ha-Am correctly observed that more than Israel guarded the Sabbath, the Sabbath guarded Israel.²¹ Thus, whoever strengthens this attachment bolsters our national identity.

Beyond the issue of identity, the connection to Torah determines the stature of *Kenesset Yisra'el* – towards itself, before the world at large, and in relation to the Almighty. Since long ago, extraordinarily, the element of distinction characterized our existence and awareness. Rabbi Judah's description in the *midrash* regarding Avraham – “The entire world is on one side, and he is on another”²² – in explaining the appellation “*Avraham ha-Ivri*” (“*ever*” means “side”) paved the way for the patriarch's descendants. “This is a people that dwells apart” – imbued with a sense of distinction and destiny, saturated with faith, a people that sees “And who is like Your people Israel, a singular nation on earth” as parallel to “You are one and Your Name is one.” The foundation of both this singularity and this destiny is the Torah, in the dissemination of which we exert ourselves.

So are we perceived in the eyes of the other nations. Both our admirers and foes have seen in us, since time immemorial, a spiritual power, carriers of the banner of faith and wisdom embodied in the Torah. The Bible clearly testifies to this perception: “Observe them faithfully, for that will be proof of your wisdom and discernment to other peoples, who on hearing of all these laws will say: Surely, that great nation is a wise and discerning people” (*Devarim* 4:6). Our system of laws and statutes has not always earned the admiration of other peoples. But from a broader, long-term viewpoint, there is no doubt that the Torah is perceived as our major contribution to world culture. Promoting the yoke of Torah, then, amounts to promoting the glory of Israel.

However, our status among the nations is meaningless compared to our status vis-à-vis the Almighty.²³ On one level, our attachment to Torah has an impact on Providence. This is the central message of the descriptions of the blessings and curses in the Torah, the sections referred to as the *tokhehab*: “If you follow My laws and faithfully observe My commandments...” (*Vayikera* 26:3), as opposed to, God forbid, “If you reject My laws and spurn My rules...” (*Vayikera* 26:15). A Jew expresses this faith every day and night in the second section of the *Shema*, and it runs like a thread though

²⁰ *Emunot ve-De'ot*, 3.

²¹ See *Kol Kitvei Ahad ha-Am* (Tel-Aviv: Dvir, 5707), p. 286.

²² *Bereishit Rabbah (Lech-Lekha)*, *Parashah* 42:8; Vilna edition, p. 172.

²³ See Ramban, on *Devarim* 4:6, who explains that the importance of the gentiles' admiration lies in its impact upon *kiddush Hashem* (the sanctification of God's Name).

the world of the prophets. Even with all the care taken to avoid simplistic applications and lightheaded dogmatism, this principle constitutes a fundamental pillar of our world outlook.

However, the significance of our Torah level is not limited to the workings of Providence. On a more fundamental level, it determines the degree of the *Shekhinah*'s presence in our midst and our definition as God's people. Its presence itself is guaranteed: "For the Lord will not forsake His people; He will not abandon His very own" (*Tehillim* 94:14). *Hazal* refuted the claims of the dissidents who were skeptical in this regard. The Talmud relates: "A certain apostate²⁴ said to Rabbi Hanina, 'Now you are certainly impure, as it is written, "Her impurity clings to her skirts"' (*Eikhab* 1:9). [Rashi: 'You are certainly impure, and the *Shekhinah* does not reside among you in a state of impurity.] He said to him, 'Come and see what it says about them: "... who dwells among them in the midst of their impurity" (*Vayikra* 16:16) – even when they are impure, the *Shekhinah* dwells among them'" (*Yoma* 57b–58a). The dispute among the *tanna'im* with regard to the dependence of our relationship to the Almighty on our conduct – ("You are children of the Lord your God" [*Devarim* 14:1] – Rabbi Judah says: If you act like [His] children, you are [His] children; otherwise, you are not [His] children. Rabbi Meir says: In either event, you are children of the Lord your God, and it similarly says, "The number of the people of Israel shall be like that of the sands of the sea" [*Hoshea* 2:1]"²⁵) involves the nature of the relationship, but not its very existence. Nevertheless, even if disregarding Torah and *mitzvot* does not erase *Kenesset Yisra'el*'s identity as God's nation, it clearly dilutes it. As "the measure of good exceeds the measure of calamity," the dissemination of Torah deepens it and empowers it.

Motivations of Love

At the outset of our discussion we noted that *harbatzat Torah* has two main roots: a sense of obligation, and love. Until now we have dealt with the first and delineated its four types. We are now obliged to discuss the second, the motivation of love, which does not contradict the first but certainly differs from it. Scores of pens have been broken over the subject of

²⁴ This is the text in *Dikdukei Soferim*, and it stands to reason that this refers to a Christian. In our editions the text reads "*ba-hu tzeduki?*" – a certain Sadducee.

²⁵ *Sifrei, Devarim, Re'eib* 96, ed. Finkelstein, p. 157. This debate is cited as well in *Kiddushin* 36a, but with two differences: the disputants cite different verses as proofs for their positions, and in place of "you are children" it says, "you are called children." However, the Gaon of Vilna, in his glosses, emends the text of the *Sifrei* to correspond to that of the Talmud.

love in general – its description, analysis, and breakdown – and a considerable portion of philosophical and literary work, particularly in Western culture, has been dedicated to it. It is not, of course, our concern here to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the concept itself, but it is worthwhile to enlist the help of several common definitions and distinctions relevant to our discussion.

In a word, love involves attachment or a longing for attachment. According to one version, such as prevalent romanticism, we speak of a connection founded upon a preexisting common denominator, on the one hand, and the desire, on the other, to deepen and strengthen that connection. According to another version, such as in Neoplatonic epistemology, we speak of a convergence, half mystical and half noetic, between a definitive predicate and its object. The nature of the love changes according to the identity of the beloved. The connection to an inanimate object or even to a living creature differs drastically from a mutual bond between two human beings. And, of course, from a religious perspective, man's love for God and God's love for man has an entirely singular status. However, as stated, everything is rooted in attachment.

But this root may produce differing, even contradictory, branches. One type is expressed through giving, through a powerful drive to shower all the goodness in the world on the beloved, with an expectation to provide all his needs and further his welfare. The paradigm of this model is the love of a parent for a child – the mother that gives her breast, the father that hovers and protects:

This is analogous to one who was walking along the way and his son led the way before him. Bandits came to capture [the son] in front of [the father]; he took him from in front and placed him in the rear. The fox came to attack [the son] from behind, so [the father] placed him in the front. Bandits in front of him and a fox behind him! He took him and placed him on his shoulders, as it says, "And in the desert, where you saw how the Lord your God..." (*Devarim* 1:31).²⁶

²⁶ *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishma'el - Mesikhta de-"ba-Hodesh," Yitro, 2*, ed. Horowitz-Rabin, pp. 207–208; see also Rashi on *Devarim* 32:11. On an entirely different level, we should note that the obligation to sacrifice one's life in situations of *yeihareig ve-al ya'avur* (the three sins that one may not commit even at the expense of his life) is derived from the imperative, "You shall love..." – see *Pesahim* 25a; Rambam, *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 5:1; the Netziv, *Meishiv Davar* 1:44.

At times, the drive to give not only expresses love, but also serves as its basis. A mother nurses a child because she is already attached to him. But there may be a drive to bestow that also forms the *foundation* of the attachment. In this regard, there are two different traditions in Western culture. In the Greek world, including its various branches and evolutions, love is extended to those who are worthy. Only the beautiful earns love. By contrast, Christianity glorified unconditional love, which not only expects nothing in exchange in the future, but even has no basis in the present. According to Christianity, the ideal love is expressed specifically towards the unsightly and the leper, whose positive qualities do not arouse love; only the lover's desire to give and sacrifice pulls towards them.

A second type is characterized by the opposite quality: not giving, but acquisition; not sacrifice, but control. Out of a powerful attraction for the object of love, the lover desires him/her; he desires, in the extreme level, to consume and, on the more moderate level, to acquire. As opposed to the preceding type, this one is by essence egocentric, and if we would search for a model in the system of human relationships, the bond between man and woman would be far more appropriate than parenthood. This bond is characterized by the element of ownership – and, at times, the struggle for it – which is prone to express itself in competition and strife. For good reason, jealousy appears as the central motif in this system of male-female relationships; and despite the claims that are heard in contemporary polemics, it is bilateral. Medea and Cleopatra showed domination that falls short of neither Othello nor Monsieur Bovary. But whatever our conclusion with regard to this detail, there is undoubtedly a kind of love that strives for ownership, of which the plane of marriage is characteristic.

If we come, on the basis of this simple outline, to assess the nature of the love of Torah as a motive for its dissemination, it appears to me that we will conclude that it has two aspects. At the root of the matter lies the declaration of King David: “O how I love Your teaching! It is my study all day long” (*Tebillim* 119:97). This is reliable testimony to the individual's bond with Torah, his association with it, his betrothal or marriage to it, the intertwining of his soul with the Torah's. As a result, he immerses himself in its study from two opposite directions. He studies it out of a sense that he thereby furthers its interests, as it were; not that he is obligated towards it or to give to it, but rather because it is the breath of life and the life of our soul, and in his fervent love and reverence for it he will painstakingly study it and teach it in order to serve it. At the same time, he engages in its study from an entirely personal angle: “She is more precious than rubies, all of your goods cannot equal her” (*Mishlei* 3:15); and he, in and of himself, is

intensely in love with it. Small wonder, then, that he will exert himself to purchase it, acquire it, and conquer it!

The duality of the lover who both sacrifices and masters is evident in the student but is expressed in the instructor, as well. On the one hand, he is prepared, to the extent that it becomes necessary, to sacrifice. True, his hope and wish is that this will not be necessary. He hopes that “to learn” and “to teach” will be simultaneously successful, for the joy of Torah creativity is interwoven with the furthering of the interests of one’s beloved. But he is infused with dedication; as a true lover, he will even sacrifice his Torah ambitions, his spiritual yearnings, on its behalf.

An inspiring expression of this preparedness, alongside the existential complications involved therein, appears in an impressive piece from the writings of a spiritual giant whose life was tragically cut short, but not before he enriched the worlds of *halakhab* and Jewish thought. At the height of his efforts in promoting a teachers’ seminary in Kovno, Rabbi Avraham Elya Kaplan ז”ל wrote the following to his wife:

For example, here I was summoned together with my colleagues to the education department, this desolate, sorrowful department without its children... desolate without anyone thinking of helping it – and we are involved in improving the courses for teachers, that is, providing funds, first and foremost, for this purpose... We need at least ten thousand marks to begin construction; for maintenance afterwards there is hope in funding abroad – here you have intensive work that devours days upon days. Immediately thereafter comes the work of arranging the courses themselves and all the massive planning involved, such as accepting students, testing, arranging support, lectures, etc. However, out of all this abundance of work my soul hears a voice speaking: “And what about Torah? This Torah for which you worked throughout your youth, for which you expended all your thoughts and that became your source of life and delight – will you now leave it and abandon it? This is Torah, and this is its reward?” Indeed, it is true that even this work in the [seminary] courses is Torah from beginning to end – beginning with giving Torah to the youngsters standing on the threshold of life, and ending with giving Torah to the children who will study from their mouths in the days to come – but, when all is said and done, there is no place here for that broad, enlightened, grand and exalted profession that we call *lomdus*, that sensational excursion aboard the ship of thought over the waves of the Talmud and its commentaries. Indeed, one must be a totally righteous and pious individual to manage to sacrifice the

Torah itself on the altar of Torah, to separate oneself from the Torah in order to work on behalf of the Torah.²⁷

The average disseminator of Torah lacks the personal talent and Torah capacity that would require his being a totally righteous and pious person to devote himself to the education of others at the expense of his personal study. But the basic dilemma and preparedness to sacrifice as required is indeed the lot shared by many.²⁸

The love of Torah stimulates its dissemination from its other facet, as well, the aspect of “*she-lo li-shemah*” – “not for its own sake.” There exists, of course, a dimension of acquisition and control in every form of teaching – from cracking and deciphering the material, through its organization and presentation, and until the gratification of teacher and student when their meeting is crowned with success. Clearly, though, the more we speak of teaching that combines, as one, material and values, and, what is more, that deals with matters of the most paramount concern, the sense of achievement and its significance increase.

Every topic that becomes clarified in a *shi'ur* turns into a focal point of spiritual force, in and from which inspiration is showered upon the student and internalized by the rabbi. Every teacher of Torah, even a beginner, can testify to the extent to which through his teaching the verse, “and Your Torah is in my inmost parts” (*Tehillim* 40:9) sees fulfillment, beyond that which occurs in relation to the Torah he studies individually. This entails both the acceptance of the Torah as devotion, and the acquisition of Torah as control.

Over the course of teaching, the love of Torah blends with the love of the student. On one level, teaching is entirely about giving. Immense efforts are invested in preparing and transmitting the material, and in the development of its recipients. Abundant energy and extraordinary patience are directed towards the giving over of Torah, towards the presentation of the ways to understand it and the inculcation of its messages. In this process, every rabbi, like Moshe in his time, works in the spirit of “the generous man is blessed” (*Mishlei* 22:9); in every *shi'ur*, a merging of inspiration occurs. “The teaching of Torah by a rabbi to a student,” the Rav *ztl* writes,

²⁷ *Be-Ikvot ha-Yir'ah* (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 5720), p. 200. The letter was written in 1920.

²⁸ My remarks throughout this concluding section are phrased in the masculine but should certainly be interpreted to refer equally to women who enter the field of Jewish education and undertake the task of Torah dissemination.

is a wondrous, metaphysical act of exposure of an impacting personality to an impacted personality. This exposure is also the attachment of rabbi and student. The student who understands the scholarship attaches himself to the wise. If he comprehends the rabbi's logic he becomes attached to the rabbi in the sense of the unity of scholar and scholarship. Latent in this principle is the secret of the Oral Law, that by its nature and essence has never reached objectification, even after it was written. *Torah she-be-al peh* (the Oral Law) means Torah that blends with one's personal uniqueness and becomes an inseparable part of the person. When it is transmitted, one's personal self is transmitted, as well.²⁹

On the other hand, even with respect to his students, the teacher possesses – motivated, we hope, by idealistic factors, though also influenced by personal considerations – an ambition for acquisition and control. True, it ought to be balanced by an awareness of the student's status and his destiny as a developing spiritual entity, not merely as raw material being molded. But this sense has certainly earned its place. The educator is enchanted by the wonder of the young, pure soul that thirstily drinks his words, and he is stirred by the desire to multiply it. He fulfills the dictum of the Men of the Great Assembly (*Avot* 1:1), “educate many disciples” – not merely out of obedience to their command or out of responsibility for the Torah being learnt, but out of a desire to create and influence, to shed light and acquire. In a certain sense, “and from my students I have gained more than from them all” (*Ta'anit* 7a) is realized not only in their becoming the source of inspiration, but also with respect to the output achieved. “The souls they made in Haran” (*Bereishit* 12:5) should be read, “they acquired in Haran,” for an artisan acquires ownership through the enhancement of the utensil [given to him for repair] – how much more so through the enhancement of a soul! Through dissemination of Torah, the teacher acquires both souls and the word of God. In fashioning centers of Torah, he expands his personal hegemony over both Torah and its embodiment. The love of control and the love of sacrifice together contribute towards the proliferation and glorification of Torah.

In conclusion, I return to my point of departure and the misgivings raised at the outset. From a certain perspective, this essay is undoubtedly both incomplete and superfluous. On the one hand, it is difficult to find anything novel in it. It seems that every detail concerning the value and

²⁹ “U-Vikashtem mi-Sham,” in *Isb ha-Halakbah: Galuy ve-Nistar* (Jerusalem: WZO, 5739), p. 229.

centrality of Torah in the life of the individual and community is clear and simple to the knowledgeable. On the other hand, its claims may appear exaggerated: is every teacher guiding third-grade students through *Sefer Shemot*, or every rabbi who dazzles high school students with an elucidation of a *Tosefot*, motivated by the array of factors enumerated here, or does he realize all the goals described?

The answer is clear, and let us not foster any illusions. Nevertheless, it is important – perhaps critically important – to gather the motivations under a single heading and engender an integrated awareness of their relationship and cross-fertilization. This can both lend some encouragement and chart some direction; and in the world of education, direction is critical. Naturally, the efforts in that direction are slow, winding, and long-term, but the awareness ought to be constant, and it has the capacity to instill a spirit of mission, already from the early stages.

In cultivating this awareness, the Modern Orthodox world lags far behind the *haredi* (ultra-Orthodox) community. In the *heders* and *Talmud Torah* schools, the sight of a *melammed* (school teacher) adorned with a *kapush* and wrapped in a *kapote*, who had spent many long years on the benches of the study hall, now practicing the pronunciation of Hebrew letters and vowels (*kawmetz-alef-aw...*) or reviewing the Mishnah of “*Arbah avot nezikin*” with his students, is very widespread. “This is because,” the skeptics will respond, “they have no choice, as other professions are inaccessible to them”; and this is partially true. To no less an extent, however, this results from their viewing their work as blending into a long, broad landscape; because in the mischievous youngster the *melammed* perceives, powerfully, the Torah giant who, in characteristic hyperbole, he preaches into his young ears that he is capable of becoming. When a person feels that embedded in his *melechet Hashem* is the guarantee of the eternity and redemption of Israel, teaching schoolchildren to read constitutes both a profession and a mission.

In the modern community, this motivation is less evident. On the one hand, on the ideological level, the thrust towards the realization of national and historical goals is presumably stronger than in the *haredi* camp (which distinguishes itself in its emphasis on personal spiritual development). Yet, the translation of the abstract outlook into the language of personal action is problematic indeed. If a Modern Orthodox yeshivah student is prepared to think of education as an occupation, he tends to hinge his involvement in this endeavor on the expectation that he will teach advanced classes. The hesitation lies, in part, in the ambition for an academic challenge, which only the advanced levels provide. But often it results as well from a disdain

for inferior positions, from an inability or unwillingness to weave that which takes place in class within the broader, historical framework of values.

Commenting on Zekhariah's question, "Who scorns a day of small beginnings?" (4:10), Rabbi Elazar remarks: "Who caused the table of the righteous to be squandered in the future? Their smallness, that they did not believe in the Almighty" (*Sotah* 48b). This does not, of course, refer to skepticism, as we deal here with the righteous. Rather, we speak here of a mentality that undermines the importance of the awareness of God's Kingdom in all its power and scope, and thereby weakens the faith in "His glory fills the earth" (*Yishayahu* 6:3). We can assess the full significance of educational activity of *harbatzat Torah* if we see it as intertwined in a broad, complex system – though, needless to say, we may not disregard the beautiful moments in their own right. Thus, anything that can encourage and arouse thought on a broad scale, anything capable of contributing towards exaltation in this endeavor, is worthy of being expressed and heard.

While disseminating Torah in Haran, Avraham dealt, presumably, with many trifles; "He would inform," the Rambam describes, "to each and every individual in accordance with his capacity" (*Hilkehot Avodah Zarah* 1:3). But in this activity, too, he exposed the wonder of creation – which is expressed in all *harbatzat Torah*, not only in conversion, in its narrowest sense, as noted in the *midrash*:

"And the souls they made in Haran" (*Bereishit* 12:5) – Rabbi Elazar bar Zimra said: if all creatures on earth would gather to create even a single mosquito they could not cast a soul therein; and the verse states, "the souls they made"? Rather, these are the converts that they converted. If, indeed, they converted them, why does it say "they made"? To teach that whoever brings an idolater and converts him is considered as having created him.³⁰

This involvement, too, is included in Avraham's historic mission, for which he was rewarded: "For I have singled him out, for he will instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is just and right, in order that the Lord may bring about for Avraham what He has promised him" (*Bereishit* 18:19) – the way of the Lord, in which He, as it were, walks; the way of the Lord, regarding which He commanded; and the

³⁰ *Bereishit Rabbah (Lech-Lekha)* 39:14; Vilna edition, p. 81.

way of the Lord, which progresses the building of the world and its establishment in accordance with His will.