

Review Essay

Modern Scholarship in the Study of Torah: Contributions and Limitations edited by Shalom Carmy, Jason Aronson Books, Lanham: 2005, 297 pp.

Yirat Shamayim: The Awe, Reverence and Fear of God edited by Marc D. Stern, Yeshiva University Press, New York: 2008, 402 pp.

By: HESHEY ZELCER

The above books are products of the Orthodox Forum, which meets annually to consider issues of concern to the Jewish community. The first book (hereinafter, “*Modern Scholarship*”) analyzes whether and to what extent practicing Jews should utilize the techniques and conclusions of academia when studying and teaching Torah. The second book (hereinafter, “*Yirat Shamayim*”) deals with instilling *yirat Shamayim*—awe, reverence and fear of Heaven.

The first section of *Modern Scholarship* (ch. 1 - 5) deals with textual or lower Bible criticism (i.e., determining the correct text of Tanakh), and understanding Tanakh based on our knowledge of history, linguistics and archeology. The second section (ch. 6 - 8) deals with higher Biblical criticism, i.e., the documentary hypothesis, which suggests, *has veshalom*, that Tanakh is a composite of documents written in different historical periods, with different world-views, and containing redundant and conflicting passages. Sections one and two combined thus deal with the totality of Biblical criticism. The third section (ch. 9 - 11) deals with modern scholarship in the study of Talmud and is not part of this review.

The fourth and fifth articles in *Yirat Shamayim* discuss whether the use of modern techniques of Bible study in our yeshivot would increase or decrease the awe, reverence and fear of Heaven.

The subtitle of *Modern Scholarship* employs the phrase “Contributions and Limitations.” Why should there be any “limitations” in using sci-

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entific methods in the study of Torah? Orthodox Jews accept scientific conclusions based on empirical evidence. Why the hesitation to accept academic answers as they relate to the study of Tanakh? Aren't we committed to the truth?

The short answer is that the conclusions we derive from our study of Tanakh depend, to a large degree, on the assumptions we make about it. Prof. James Kugel,¹ for example, lists four assumptions that observant Jews have always made about the Torah: it is a Divine text; it is a book of lessons directed to readers in every generation; it is a cryptic text that needs to be interpreted; and it contains no contradictions or mistakes. When religious Jews are faced with a "problem" in the text of Tanakh they assume that there is a reasonable explanation. Even when we are unsuccessful in finding an answer we assume that, nevertheless, the Torah is Divine and perfect, and that one day an answer will be found. On the other hand, an academic who does not accept the Torah as Divine and perfect will look at the same "problem" and will likely conclude that the text is flawed.

Why then should we be concerned about what goes on in the university?² There are a number of reasons:

¹ *How to Read the Bible, A Guide to Scripture Then and Now*, New York: Free Press, 2007, pp. 14-15.

² On March 26, 1903 Solomon Schechter decried the common roots of higher Biblical criticism and higher anti-Semitism. "But the arch-enemy has entered upon a new phase... the philosophic 'Hep-Hep'... [W]hen I emigrated from Romania to so-called civilized countries I found that what I might call the Higher anti-Semitism is partly, though not entirely... contemporaneous with the genesis of the so-called Higher criticism of the Bible. Wellhausen's Prolegomena and History are... full of venom against Judaism, and you cannot wonder that he was rewarded by one of the highest orders which the Prussian Government had to bestow... But this Higher anti-Semitism has now reached its climax when every discovery of recent years is called to bear witness against us and to accuse us of spiritual larceny." *Seminar Addresses and Other Papers*, Cincinnati: Ark Publishing, 1915, pp. 35-39, available from Google at <http://books.google.com>.

In part, it was Schechter who inspired Dr. J. H. Hertz, the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, to create his popular *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* commentary. Hertz's overriding motivation for writing his commentary was to counter the charges hurled against Orthodoxy from both "within," the liberal Jews presided over doctrinally by Claude Goldsmith Montefiore, and "without," the gentile academic Biblical scholars.

1. Academics pose valid questions about Tanakh. Many of these questions have never been asked in the yeshiva, much less answered. When yeshiva graduates leave the confines of their *beit midrash* and come across these questions in their university studies they are liable to feel betrayed that these questions were hidden from them by their *rebbeim*. They may further suspect that their *rebbeim* failed to discuss these questions because they were unable to provide satisfactory answers consistent with our tradition. This has been known to cause students to suffer a crisis in faith.

2. Recently, a number of popular books on Biblical criticism have appeared that are aimed not at the scholarly community but at the general public.³ These books, whether we like it or not, will be read by many observant Jews who will search in vain within these books for solutions that are consistent with Orthodox Jewish beliefs.

The ideas of Biblical criticism are also readily available on the Internet and are widely discussed on Orthodox blogs. For example, when Gil Student posts about Biblical criticism on his *Hirburim* blog he gets hundreds of responses and comments. What is interesting about these comments is their tone. The comments, on the whole, are not “Biblical criticism is stupid. Why are you posting this stuff?” but rather “How are Biblical Criticism and Torah mi-Sinai reconciled?” or even “Can Torah mi-Sinai be redefined so that it accommodates Biblical criticism?”

3. The tools that are used and the many insights that are formulated in academia often provide new insights into various passages of Tanakh. When these ideas are not in conflict with our Orthodox beliefs and traditions there is no reason they cannot be accepted.⁴

The books we are reviewing do not explain why some of the reasoning, proofs and conclusions of academia are incorrect. This is not

See, Meirovich, Harvey, *A Vindication of Judaism: The Polemics of the Hertz Pentateuch*, New York and Jerusalem: JTS, 1998. Today, however, the anti-Semitic element of Biblical criticism, as studied in the university, is mostly absent.

³ See, for example, Kugel, James L., *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now* and Friedman, Richard Elliott, *The Bible with Sources Revealed*, New York: Harper Collins, 2003.

⁴ As to learning Torah from a heretic, however, see *Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh De'ab* 179:19.

meant as a criticism of these books. After all, we cannot blame the authors for what they choose not to address. But if we as a community had successfully addressed the claims of academia there would be no concern that using academic techniques would undermine anyone's *yirat Shamayim*.

Text Criticism, History, Archeology and Linguistics in Bible Studies

The first section in *Modern Scholarship* deals, among other issues, with Biblical textual criticism, i.e., determining the correct text of Tanakh.

The most substantial article in this section is "Rabbinic Midrash as Evidence for Textual Variants in the Hebrew Bible: History and Practice" (pp. 101-129) by Yeshayahu Maori. He notes that some midrashim quote Biblical texts that differ from our Masoretic Text ("MT"). These midrashim fall into two categories: 1. when a midrash quotes a verse differently than our MT; and 2. when the entire point of the midrash makes sense only if based on the variant text. Maori then contrasts these two types of variant texts. In the former it does not necessarily follow that the author of the midrash had a different text. It may mean simply that a scribe copied the verse incorrectly. The type of variant that is much more significant is the latter type in which the entire point of the midrash makes sense only if based on the variant text.

R. Hai Gaon,⁵ the first to discuss such differences, used three approaches to discredit midrashic proofs of variant texts: it is a scribal error; the Sages never erred about a verse in Tanakh but rather a student transmitted the quotation incorrectly; and it is not a direct quote but rather a paraphrase of a verse.

The Tosafists, however, were willing to admit that the Gemara had Biblical texts that differ from our MT.⁶ Others, including R. Me-

⁵ "Teshuvot Ge'onim Kadmonim, D. Cassel edition (Berlin, 1848), responsum 78. This responsum is cited in its entirety by B. M. Lewin in *Otzar ha-Ge'onim on Berakhot*, response on 48a (pp. 113-114) based on the Berlin ms..." (Maori, p. 106, n. 14).

⁶ מעבירים כתיב. הש"ס שלנו חולק על ספרים שלנו שכתוב בהם מעבירים [צ"ל מעברים] וכן מצינו בירושלמי בשמשון והוא שפט את ישראל ארבעים שנה מלמד שהיו פלשתים יראים ממנו כ' שנה אחר מותו כמו בחייו ובכל הספרים שלנו כתיב כ' שנה (שופטום טז). (תוספות שבת נה:).

naḥem Azaria mi-Pano and R. Menahem de Lonzano, were not. R. Ḥayyim Heller also refused to accept such evidence.⁷ He argued that when a verse is quoted differently in a midrash, even when the whole point of the midrash is based on this different reading, it does not prove that there was a variant text—it is simply the style of midrash.⁸

How did the Sages who accepted the reality of variant texts deal with them? Ramah (see Genesis 25:6) in his *Masoret Seyag la-Torah* writes that we should emend our text, and Rashba “established the principle that ‘the variants found in the Talmud which affect law... certainly should be altered,’⁹ and many rabbis accepted this position.¹⁰ In the final analysis, however, the rabbis determined that one should not emend the MT... even when it is clear from the content of the *derasha* that our Sages had a different reading, and even in those cases from which laws are derived.” Maori then suggests five possible reasons why Rashba’s opinion did not prevail (see pp. 123-129.)

Tosafot here acknowledge two textual variants. In the first case the *yud* is in a different position within the word. In the second case MT has עשרים while Yerushalmi has ארבעים. Both of these cases are hermeneutically significant. Another case is from Niddah 33a:

והנשא כתיב. חסר וי"ו. תימה דבמסורת הוא מלא מיהו מצינו שהמסורת הוא חולק על הש"ס במסכת שבת (דף נה:): גבי בני עלי מעבירים כתיב ובמקראות שלנו כתיב מעבירים מלא. (תוספות גדה לג.)

⁷ “[G]losses to his Peshitta edition... to Genesis... and Exodus..., and in the appendix to his study on ‘The Septuagint References in Mandel- lian’s Concordance, in the *Hakbel ha-Kodesh Concordance* (New York, 1943)... (pp. 54-67)” (Maori, p. 114, n. 48).

⁸ “[E]very *derashah* that appears to exhibit a contextual variant from the MT may be harmonized with the MT by showing that our Sages employed the “methodology of the Talmud” to abridge, add to, and intermix verses, to switch consonants (and vowels), and even to cite (and base *derashot* on) paraphrased verses, in the light of their (simple or midrashic) intent” (Maori p. 114).

⁹ *Responsa of Rashba Attributed to Ramban*, 232.

¹⁰ See for example Meiri, *Bet ha-Beḥirah*, *Kiddushin* 30a, and responsa of Radbaz, 4, question 1020 [594].

Higher Criticism and the Documentary Hypothesis

The second section of *Modern Scholarship* deals with R. Mordechai Breuer's approach to higher Biblical criticism. The first article is an introduction to R. Mordechai Breuer's works, the second is an article by Breuer titled "The Study of Bible and the Primacy of the Fear of Heaven: Compatibility or Contradiction," and the third is a critique of Breuer's works by Prof. Shnayer Z. Leiman. It is interesting to note that both the introduction and the critique have less to do with Breuer's article herein and more to do with his acceptance of, and his approach to, the documentary hypothesis. We do the same.

Of the three sections in *Modern Scholarship*, it is this middle section that is most problematic for Orthodox Jews. While purists will point to Maimonides' eighth principle of our faith to argue that every letter of the Torah as we have it today was handed down from Moshe at Sinai, nevertheless, many Orthodox Jews could accept the premise of Biblical textual criticism—that the text of a Tanakh manuscript with a different reading from our MT could theoretically be correct. This is especially so when dealing with words that can be spelled with or without a *yud* or *vav*. The Gemara in *Kiddushin* 30a that declares **אינהו בקאינין לא בקאינין**, "They were experts in defective and *plene* but we are not" is well known and supports this assumption.

The subject matter in the middle section of this book, however, is more controversial. In higher Biblical criticism, academia points to redundant passages and conflicting texts within Tanakh, among other evidence, to proclaim that Tanakh is a composite of different documents, with different world-views, written at different times. How did the Orthodox world respond to these claims? R. D. Z. Hoffman¹¹ and R. Umberto Cassuto¹² after him went to great lengths to discredit

¹¹ *Die wichtigsten Instanzen gegen die Graf-Wellhausensche Hypothese* (1903/1916). This work was translated to Hebrew by Eliezer Barishansky and is available at www.daat.ac.il. It was also translated to English by Carla Sulzbach of McGill University and is available at http://digitool.library.mcgill.ca:8881/R/?func=dbin-jump-full&-object_id=24106&local_base=GEN01-MCG02.

¹² In 1934, in response to the claims of Biblical criticism, Umberto Cassuto published his *La Questione della Genesi* in which he seeks to systematically demolish the pillars that support the Documentary Hypothesis. The same concepts he develops in the above-mentioned work he also conveyed, in a much abridged form, in a series of lectures. These lec-

many of the proofs for the documentary hypothesis.¹³ R. Mordechai Breuer, however, takes a different approach.¹⁴

R. Breuer responds that the documentary hypothesis is correct and that, yes, Tanakh speaks in multiple and often contradictory voices. To show that this assumption is compatible with Orthodox thought, Breuer quotes the *Shaagat Aryeh* who wonders why *Divrei ha-Yamim*, proclaimed by the Sages as having been written by Ezra, nevertheless contains contradictory passages. *Shaagat Aryeh* explains that Ezra “copied historical accounts from the various books he had at his disposal... though he found the events depicted here one way and there another, he copied the texts precisely as he found them... preferring not to alter them.”

Breuer then applies this same logic to the Torah but with a different twist. Originally there were different Torahs written by God in

tures were then transcribed into Hebrew and published in 1941 by Magnes Press as *Torath HaTeudoth*. This abridged work was then re-translated into English by Shalem Press in 2006 as *The Documentary Hypothesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch*.

¹³ To this list we should also add Benno Jacob. “Accept the Truth from wherever it Comes” published in *Milin Havivin*, vol. 1, 2005, and available at <<http://www.yctorah.org/content/blogsection/8/53/>> contains a translation of a letter from Prof. Nehama Leibowitz to R. Yehuda Ansbacher in which she writes: “Benno Jacob was an extreme Reformer, who served in the *Sontag Gemeinde* (A Reform congregation that held prayers on Sunday instead of Saturday) and certainly transgressed an enormous portion of our holy Torah’s *mitzvoth*... Yet I learned from his books more than from many books written by bona-fide God-fearing Jews. His claims against biblical criticism and his proofs of their frivolousness and their errors—no one has ever written things better than them, even Rav David Hoffman, ז”ל (as difficult as it is to mention the name of this *gaon* together with B. Jacob)... Prof. Umberto Cassuto ז”ל, who was God-fearing and scrupulous regarding the *mitzvoth*, said a number of things that are very far from my belief in Torah meSinai, and I won’t be part of their dissemination. And therefore I will not pay heed to **who** said it, but only to **what** is said.”

¹⁴ For a synopsis of R. Mordechai Breuer’s work see, for example, his פרקי בראשית, כרך א: פרשיות בראשית—לך-לך, הוצאת תבונות, אלון שבות, תשנ”ט which contains an English introduction, pp. III-XIV, explaining his approach to the documentary hypothesis.

His different attributes of justice and compassion.¹⁵ God then combined these versions into a single Torah, copying them exactly as they were. This combined Torah served as a blueprint¹⁶ for Creation and it is this Torah that He dictated to Moshe at Mt. Sinai.¹⁷

As an example, Breuer discusses the two conflicting accounts of Creation. The first account (Gen. 1:1-2:3), written in the attribute of justice (Elokim¹⁸), states that vegetation was created before man. The second account (Gen. 2:4-25), written in conjunction with the attribute of compassion (the Tetragrammaton¹⁹), states that vegetation was created after man.

Breuer explains this contradiction. During Creation God “looked” at the conflicting passages in the Torah and created the world so that it conforms to both passages. It then becomes the role of midrash (i.e., the Sages) to flesh out how God reconciled the conflicting accounts—that vegetation was created before man (as related in the first account of Creation) but that it remained below the surface of the earth and did not spring forth until after man was created (as related in the second account).²⁰

Breuer then explains that, similarly, when we find legal passages in the Torah that contradict each other, we need to classify each of

¹⁵ ה', אלהים, למלך שהיו לו כוסות ריקים אמר המלך אם אני נותן לתוכן חמין הם מתבקעין, צונן הם מקריסין, ומה עשה המלך ערב חמין בצונן ונתן בהם ועמדו, כך אמר הקב"ה אם בורא אני את העולם במדת הרחמים הוי חטייה סגיאין, במדת הדין היאך העולם יכול לעמוד, אלא הרי אני בורא אותו במדת הדין ובמדת הרחמים, והלואי יעמוד. (בראשית רבה יב:טו)

¹⁶ כך היה הקב"ה מביט בתורה, ובורא את העולם (בראשית רבה א:א)

¹⁷ Breuer explains that when we speak of Moshe being inspired by God and writing the Torah, we are faced with the problems posed by higher Biblical criticism—how could it be that one person, Moshe, wrote conflicting and redundant passages in different styles? If we assume, however, that God wrote the conflicting passages in different attributes and dictated these conflicting passages to Moshe, there is no problem.

¹⁸ Elokim, which symbolizes God revealing himself through nature, has Creation developing in a natural sequence, i.e., vegetation before man.

¹⁹ The Tetragrammaton (i.e., the four letter name of God, also referred to as הוי"ה), which symbolizes a Creation in which man is the focus, has God creating man before vegetation.

²⁰ R. Mordechai Breuer's approach to the documentary hypothesis is actually a refinement of the view of his uncle, R. Isaac Breuer (1883-1946), one of the founders of Agudath Israel and a grandson of R. S.R. Hirsh. See Kurzweil, Zvi, pp. 80-81 in "The Modern Impulse of Traditional Judaism." Ktav, Hoboken: 1985, pp. 80-81.

the conflicting statements based on the attribute it represents. We can then go on to the next step and explain how the Sages synthesized these conflicting passages.

Prof. Shnayer Z. Leiman's "Response to Rabbi Breuer" (pp. 181-187) is a short, seven-page article. In it Leiman sums up the current status of the documentary hypothesis and offers a critique of R. Breuer's approach. Leiman's words are honest, biting and convincing. Concerning the documentary hypothesis he writes:

"It is particularly refreshing to see an Orthodox rabbi [R. Mordechai Breuer] who recognizes that the documentary hypothesis is alive and well, not dead and buried. Some well-meaning Orthodox defenders of the faith delight in repeating the canard that through the efforts of Rabbis David Hoffman and Hayyim Heller, the death knoll was sounded for the documentary hypothesis decades ago... Nothing could be further from the truth... Wherever Bible is taught critically, that is, at Harvard, Yale, Oxford, and the Hebrew University, it is accompanied by the documentary hypothesis even as the twentieth century draws to a close."

Regarding Breuer's acceptance of the documentary hypothesis Leiman writes:

"While I agree fully that the documentary hypothesis still lives, and even dominates discussion in some quarters, it remains a hypothesis. Indeed, in the eyes of some modern Bible scholars it is a beleaguered hypothesis... Suffice it to say that while by and large the documentary hypothesis still remains the centerpiece of higher Bible criticism, it is now accompanied, at least in some academic circles, by a healthy dose of skepticism..."

Leiman also notes that even if we accept the documentary hypothesis, as Breuer does (i.e., that the Bible was written in different voices, but that they represent God's different attributes of justice and compassion), it still does not answer the other challenges posed by Biblical criticism.

"It also treats textual (or: lower Bible) criticism, biblical history, biblical archeology, modern literary theory, and more. Each of these disciplines comes with its own set of problems for traditional Jewish teaching."

Finally, Leiman's concluding paragraphs sound an important warning:

“Meanwhile, other strategies will need to be explored in order to respond to the challenge posed by modern Bible study in general, and in order to blunt the sharpness of the documentary hypothesis in particular. Some of the more promising strategies have been suggested by modern scholarship itself...”

“While we reject Rabbi Breuer’s central thesis, we applaud his readiness to confront modernity, including the modern study of the Bible. There are undeniable risks in any such confrontation. Not to confront modernity, however, is more than risky for Orthodoxy, it is suicidal.”

In *Yirat Shamayim* we find a debate of sorts between R. Nathaniel Helfgot, who is in favor of using modern techniques of Bible study in modern Orthodox yeshivot, and R. Moshe Lichtenstein, who is against it.

R. Nathaniel Helfgot in *Between Heaven and Earth* (pp. 81-134) decries the lack of serious Tanakh study in our yeshivot.²¹ He argues that a meaningful and sophisticated type of study, combining traditional and modern methods, will help foster *yirat Shamayim* in modern Orthodox students.²²

²¹ Not only are the Prophets and the Writings almost totally ignored in our yeshivot, but even the teaching of *Humash* is totally inadequate. The words of R. Judah Lowe (MaHaRaL mi-Prag, c. 1525-1609) are as relevant today as they were then: בדורות הראשונים נתנו גבולים ועתים להנג נער על פי דרכו, בן חמש למקרא בן עשר למשנה בו ט"ו לתלמוד (אבות ה, כא), והכל כדי לתת לנער משא כאשר יוכל שאת לפי טבעו... אך הטפשים בארצות אלו, דרכיהם היפך זה, מלמדים עם הנער מקרא מעט מן הפרשה, ומפסיקין ומתחילין בשבוע אחרת פרשה שניה קצת מן הפרשה, ובכלות השנה לא ידע הנער, כי נשכח ממנו הראשונים, ואז יחזור בשנה השניה... וכן שלישיית ורביעיית וכמה שנים, וכאשר נעתק מן המקרא, מאומה לא ישא בידו, יציאתו כביאתו. (גור אריה השלם, מכון ירושלים, יהושע דוד הרטמן, תשנ"ד, ואתחנן ו:ז).

²² In the conclusion to his article, Nathaniel Helfgot summarizes why modern methods of Tanakh study can help increase *yirat Shamayim* in modern Orthodox students: “This paper... defended the legitimacy of integrating “modern” methods together with classical modes of *Talmud Torah*, often noting the well-worn precedents for these methodologies in our traditional sources... These benefits include a greater, more sophisticated understanding of *devar Hashem*, the inculcation of greater *ahavat Torah* and ensuring that our Torah study remains infused with a desire to arrive at truth, which is the seal of *Ribbono shel Olam*. [T]hese elements... foster... greater *yirat Shamayim* in our young... modern Orthodox students. These are the same young students who are so heavily involved in many aspects of popular culture that do not foster *yirah* or

R. Moshe Lichtenstein's article, *Fear of God: The Beginning of Wisdom and the End of Tanakh Study* (pp. 135-162), argues for a more traditional approach to Tanakh study, one that relies heavily on midrashic interpretations. His article opens with a jarring account of a Shabbat meal discussion:

A few years ago, a friend of ours was in *miluim* (reserve duty in the IDF) in early December. We invited his wife and children to eat with us on Shabbos morning, which was *parshat Vayishlach*. During the meal, the mother requested that I discuss the *parsha* with her girls, since her husband usually did so. I obviously obliged and began telling the story of the meeting between Yaakov and Esav in a manner that seemed to me most appropriate for a second grader. As I was reaching the climax and began to dramatically recount the story of Esav breaking his teeth as he attempted to sink them into Yaakov's neck, I noticed the look of shock on the mother's face. Upon inquiring whether I had committed any grave error, I received the following reply: "*Anachnu,*" she sternly told me, "*lomdin peshuto shel mikra!*" (We learn the simple meaning of the text!)

Lichtenstein then goes on to make the case that when children are young they should be taught *Humash* with midrashic interpretations, since they paint a vivid portrait that appeals to the imagination of young children.²³ He explains that the imaginative style of the midrash will have a more profound effect on the mind of a young child than the plain meaning of the text. Apparently, as evidenced by the appendix to his article (pp. 154-160), when R. Lichtenstein pre-

ahavah. Elements that help enhance Torah study, help students see its beauty, and open their eyes to its glory should be welcomed and embraced..."

²³ Despite Lichtenstein's advocacy of teaching midrashic interpretations to young children he admits that when children get older "much work will be required to expose him receptively to differing interpretations. Indeed, there are many who remain throughout life with their first reading of *Tanakh* as their primary (or only) knowledge of it" (p. 138.) R. Yaakov Kamenetzky זצ"ל bemoaned the consequence of this: "Were a thirty year-old to go out to a *reshut ha-rabim* on Shabbos wearing the training *tzitzit* he wore as a three year-old he would be in violation of a Biblical commandment. So too a thirty year-old who understands *Humash* the way he did as a three year old, is in violation of a Biblical commandment" (as related by Sheldon Epstein).

sented his paper at the Orthodox Forum, he got a lot of negative feedback on this.

Actually Lichtenstein's article is quite nuanced. He, of course, understands that it is the style of midrash to paint a vivid imaginative picture to convey a vital point, and that midrash tends to exaggerate the virtues of the righteous and the shortcomings of the evildoers (p. 142). I wonder, however, why Lichtenstein chose to contrast the straightforward meaning of *Humash* (*peshuto shel mikra*) with the literal interpretation of midrash. Is there no middle ground? Can't, even a second grader, be made to understand that the midrash is trying to teach us that although Esav hugged and kissed Yaakov he actually had ambivalent and perhaps even murderous intents toward him, and that despite this enmity Yaakov was saved from Esav's wrath?

Is Lichtenstein privy to a study that analyzes how an educational approach that stresses a fairy tale version of *Humash* affects modern Orthodox children? What percentage get turned off from Judaism, lose their faith, or leave Orthodoxy? And what about the insult to *Hazal* that such a literal interpretation implies?²⁴ R. Yeuda ha-Hasid in *Sefer Hasidim* (p. 239) gives sound advice regarding teaching midrash to children:

אין מגלין אגדה תמוה לקטנים פן יאמרו אין בו ממש ומדהא ליתא שאר דברים
נמי אינם.

One does not reveal a strange Aggadah to children lest they say, this is nonsense, and if this is meaningless then so is all the rest [of the Torah].

***Hareidi* and Modern Orthodox Approaches**

R. Moshe Lichtenstein notes (155-158) that there is an interesting distinction between modern Orthodox Tanakh education in Israel and that in America. In Israel a significant portion of modern Orthodox yeshivot stress *peshuto shel mikra* (the straightforward meaning of

²⁴ הכת הראשונה... מבינים אותם כפשטם... עד כדי שאם תספרנו כפשטו להמון העם כל שכן ליחידיהם היו גדהמים בכך ואומרים היאך אפשר שיהא בעולם אדם שמדמה דברים אלו וחושב שהם דברים נכונים, וכל שכן שימצאו חן בעיניו. והכת הזו המסכנה רחמנות על סכלותם לפי שהם רוממו את החכמים לפי מחשבתם ואינם אלא משפילים אותם בתכלית השפלות... וחי ה' כי הכת הזו מאבדים הדר התורה ומחשיכים זהרה, ועושים תורת השם בהפך המכוון בה... (רמב"ם הקדמה לפרק חלק)

Humas) and use modern Biblical techniques to study Tanakh. In America, however, this is almost nonexistent. Part of this may be due to the effect in America that *haredi rebbeim* have upon modern Orthodox students. In America the distance between *haredi* and modern Orthodox is not insurmountable, and the movement between the camps is fluid. Many *haredi* yeshivot in America expect a portion of their graduates to eventually attend university. It is also common for intermarriage between students of *haredi* and students of modern Orthodox schools. Modern Orthodox schools thus tolerate and accept *haredi rabbeim* (through the converse is rare).

In *haredi* schools in Israel, however, a secular high school education is almost unheard of, much less college, and intermarriage between *haredi* and modern Orthodox occurs less frequently. I wonder if perhaps this great distance between *haredi* and modern Orthodox in Israel accounts for the greater tendency in the schools of the latter group to reject the method of Bible studies of the former, and to pursue instead *peshuto shel mikra* and modern Biblical techniques. The *haredim* in Israel have so removed themselves from modern Orthodox society that they are incapable of having any effect on the way modern Orthodox yeshivot in Israel teach Tanakh.

In almost all of the articles discussed, the same questions arise. Sometimes they are asked explicitly and other times they are implicit. The questions are: should we teach about Biblical criticism in our yeshivot and colleges, or should we ignore it? If we do address it, when and how should it be done? Whatever we choose has its risks and rewards.

The *haredi* world has chosen to ignore Biblical criticism and that is probably the right decision for them; *haredi* individuals live in a sheltered environment and are less likely to be exposed to and affected by it later in life. Modern Orthodoxy, especially in Israel, has made a decision to address Biblical criticism and that is probably the right decision for them. Their members will likely be more exposed to university and academic exegesis and more likely come across higher Biblical criticism later in life.

As the *haredim* see it, avoiding Biblical criticism will likely prevent exposure to it—perhaps indefinitely—and is thus less risky than addressing it head-on at a young age. If an older person has a crisis in faith they may be forced to rethink some of their assumptions, but it is unlikely that such a person will be lost to Orthodoxy. When a

youngster, however, loses faith that person is at risk of being totally lost to the Orthodox community.

Our division between modern Orthodox and *haredi* is, of course, simplistic. There is no yardstick that classifies an individual or a group as either modern Orthodox or *haredi*. Many people and groups identify with each camp in varying degrees. Should we expose these people, or should these people expose themselves, to Biblical criticism? There are, of course, no easy answers, and caution is always advisable.

Conclusion

The books reviewed herein are an important American Orthodox contribution to thinking about modern Biblical studies.²⁵ That, however, is a symptom of the problem. These books are important only because so few American Orthodox thinkers have written about this topic. Furthermore, some of the articles in our books are not even American voices.

Some may point to this near-silence of American Orthodoxy as a self-confidence that is dismissive of Biblical scholarship, but I am afraid that beneath this dismissive attitude is a deep insecurity. And if Orthodoxy is insecure about its approach to Tanakh, that implies that our Orthodox views cannot stand up to the modern challenges of academic presuppositions.

More than a hundred years ago, R. Dovid Tzvi Hoffman wrote his monumental work against Wellhausen and the documentary hypothesis,²⁶ and then R. Umberto Cassuto, the Orthodox chief rabbi of Italy, mounted another successful attack. We also had R. Hayyim

²⁵ For example, Allan Cooper, “Biblical Studies and Jewish Studies” *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, Oxford: 2005, pp. 32-33 writes, “Carmy... has a stimulating discussion of recent attempts by Orthodox scholars to come to grips with biblical criticism.”

²⁶ No doubt, R. Hoffman and others like him were following the tradition recorded, for example, in *Yerushalmi Berakbot*, chapter 9, 12d of forcefully and honestly responding to the challenges of the pagan (or Christian) “Biblical critics” who cited verses in the Torah that seem to imply a multiplicity of gods.

Heller who vigorously attacked the assumptions and conclusions of lower Biblical text criticism.²⁷

And then, while Biblical criticism moved forward in the university, Orthodoxy, especially American Orthodoxy, shrugged its shoulders—as if there was nothing more to be done. One of the most recent voices dealing with the documentary hypothesis is that of R. Mordechai Breuer (d. 2007), an Israeli voice, who more or less accepted the documentary hypothesis but put an Orthodox “spin” on it.


In Israel there are modern Orthodox institutions and works that deal with Biblical criticism—Yad Herzog, Yeshiva Har Etzion, *Da’at Mikra*, and works by R. Yoel Bin-Nun.²⁸ In America, however, our efforts are negligible. We need our best Orthodox minds to address these issues or we may one day pay the price in lost Jewish souls.²⁹ R. Abraham I. Kook’s words should keep us focused on the difficult—but necessary—path that lies ahead:

“The greatest deficiency in the quality of *yirat shamayim* ... is that fear of thought replaces fear of sin, and because a human being be-

²⁷ “Five times within recent weeks the Jewish public, scholars and literati in New York were treated to a singular phenomenon in the cultural life of the Jewish community in America. On five separate occasions more than two thousand Jews attended a cycle of lectures by Dr. Chaim Heller, known as “Reb Chaim Gaon,” on the fallacies of modern Biblical criticism. More than five thousand people were turned away for lack of accommodations.” *The Jewish Criterion* 9/15/1944, “Reb Chaim Heller—One in Generations” by Dr. Aaron Rosmarin, p. 175, available on-line from The Pittsburg Jewish Newspaper Project at <<http://diva.library.cmu.edu/pjn/index.jsp>>

²⁸ For an introduction to the works of R. Bin-Nun see for example, *Tradition*, vol. 40, no. 3, “*Torat Hashem Temima: The Contribution of Rav Yoel Bin-Nun to Religious Tanakh Study*” by R. Hayyim Angel. See also “Return of the Pashtanim” by Yaakov Beasley in *Tradition*, vol. 42, no. 1 for a review of two recent Orthodox works that utilize modern techniques to study Tanakh.

²⁹ Atid has a number of quality articles on Orthodoxy grappling with Biblical criticism. According to their Web site, Atid enables talented Orthodox men and women, with a rich background in Torah study, to develop the tools to make informed decisions about Jewish education. See www.Atid.org and especially Goldstein Saks, Ilana, “Encounters between *Torah Min Hashamayim* and Biblical Criticism.”

gins to be afraid of thinking, he goes and drowns in the morass of ignorance, which robs him of the light of soul, weakens his vigor, and casts a pall over his spirit.” (*Orot ha-Kodesh*, vol. 3, p. 26)³⁰ 

³⁰ As quoted by Helfgot p. 82.