

ENGLISH ABSTRACTS

THE *PESHAT* VS. *DERASH* POLEMIC

Neria Guttel

The *peshat* (plain or literal reading) of a biblical text is often understood as representing its objective meaning, while the *derash* (homiletical or exegetical reading) is perceived as a subjective interpretation. Thus, while all kinds of educational motives and intentions are heaped upon the *derash*, the *peshat* is regarded as the true intention of the text. Accordingly, scientific scholarship is characterized as a quest for the *peshat*, while the rabbinical world is portrayed as seeking *derash*. Only a short distance separates such views from an approach that consigns all *derash* to the level of triviality in relation to *peshat*.

Closer examination shows all of these assumptions to be unfounded. While they do contain some element of truth, they are far from the whole truth.

In terms of methodology, the present article draws on the categories supplied by commentators themselves. We assume that if they claimed that a certain approach represents “*peshat*” or “*derash*” then that is how they perceived it, in accordance with their own definition of these concepts. We do not accept the dictates of critics who arrogantly define, conceptually, how these commentators “should” have defined them. Substantively, the article points to a range of definitions, including some that serve to shatter conventional wisdom in this regard. We address the possibility that it is the *derash* that may be objective while the *peshat* is subjective, and that it is the *derash* rather than the *peshat* that expresses the primary intention of the text. The discussion presents a rabbinical school of thought that emphasizes adopting the *peshat* in isolation from *derash*, and contrasts it with a school of scientific enquiry that regards the two readings as interdependent. The range of views even includes a scholarly approach that, while joining the quest for the *peshat*, nevertheless recognizes the unique value and importance of *derash*. Thus the inaccurate delimitation of the proper locus of the *peshat-derash* polemic is brought to its knees.

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THE COMPUTERIZED SERMON-MAKER

*Yaacov HaCohen Kerner, Tal Siman-Tov Avigzar,
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This paper describes the construction of the prototype of the first computerized system used to create Torah sermons. The system was applied to the subject of honoring parents and Jewish sages, creating sermons automatically without demanding prior knowledge from the user. The sermons are created using various characteristics of Torah sermons, and different rules for writing sermons and for the transition between the different parts of the sermons. The system uses rules, such as: paronomasia, search in another place, notarius, various numerological methods, word-exchanging, letter-exchanging, and integration of excerpts from existing religious sources. It uses various Torah databases, patterns of sermons, parts of sermons and rules of writing in Hebrew. The system's algorithm is based on ideas of Artificial Intelligence, and is able to give commentary and explanations on the sermons.

A SYMMETRY PRINCIPLE IN RAMBAM'S HALAKHIC RULINGS

Abraham Weisel

In this paper we consider a symmetry principle that we believe is a fundamental principle of rabbinic thought. We define the principle and show that its implications are sometimes regarded as having biblical force. We also analyze two *sugyot* that depend crucially on this symmetry principle and consider the special significance that Rambam assigns to its consequences.

SCIENTIFIC ADVANCE AND THE GIANT-DWARF METAPHOR IN HALAKHAH

Kopel Rabinovitch

In halakhah, the opinions of early sages are generally given priority over those of later sages. This is based on the principle that early rulings can only be overturned



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by superior sages but that later sages, being further removed from Sinai, are inferior by definition. But halakhic rulings often depend on scientific knowledge. Thus the question arises: when scientific knowledge changes in a fashion that would seem to contradict earlier halakhic rulings, what should be done? Should halakhah be adapted to the new understandings or should the priority of early sages remain decisive? In this paper, we consider three different ways in which such conflicts might arise and possible manners of dealing with each.

KEEPING PESACH FROM MOVING TOWARDS SUMMER

Ely Merzbach

It is universally acknowledged that the festival of Pesach must occur at the beginning of the spring. However, following the fixed Jewish calendar, there is a slow drifting of Pesach towards summer. In this paper we explain the nature of this drift, and offer several suggestions of mathematicians and astronomers to change the Jewish calendar in order to prevent the Pesach drift. We will present four different solutions to this so-called problem proposed by *Hazal*.

RABBIS AND PSYCHOLOGISTS:
CONFRONTATION AND COOPERATION

Seymour Hoffman

This essay criticizes the unfortunate situation in Israel where too many religious functionaries – rabbis, teachers, arbiters and judges, whose charge and responsibility are to teach, guide, and counsel people – are poorly equipped, because of their lack of knowledge and awareness of psychodynamics, psychopathology and psychological treatment. Many are suspicious and wary of mental health practitioners and don't consult or refer their constituents to them, forbidding them to seek psychological help. At times, their counseling and advice produce unfortunate results.



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Clergyman and clinicians have something of value to offer each other that would enhance the quality of their assistance to the people they serve. Therefore, it is important that both professions recognize the limits of their own professional competence and consider the benefits of working and consulting together. Several examples of the latter are presented.

To improve the present situation, it is recommended that religious functionaries participate in courses that would provide them with a basic knowledge of psychopathology, and psychiatric and psychological treatments, in order to develop a greater appreciation for the complexity of the human mind and psychotherapy, and to be in a better position to counsel their parishioners and make more appropriate referrals.

A COMMENT ON THE INTERACTION
BETWEEN JUDAISM AND PSYCHOLOGY

Aaron Rabinowitz

This article examines the interaction between Torah and Psychotherapy, and points out that the recent development of Spiritual Psychotherapy brings the two closer together. The author shows that there are common denominators to Judaism and psychology, such as the realization that humans are beset by internal conflicts and that the concept of self-image is important in both. Finally, he demonstrates that the concept of the unconscious can be divested of the content assigned to it by the Freudian approach.