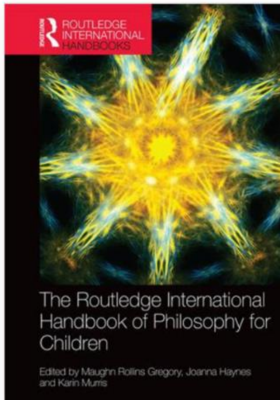

The Routledge International Handbook of Philosophy for Children

Edited by Maughn Rollins Gregory, Joanna Haynes, Karin Murris

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266 pages

NB: This is a longer version of the article than the one that appears in the Handbook. We have added curricula examples and further explanation regarding the hermeneutics of Jewish education to this version, which constraints of space did not allow in the published edition.

Education, Identity Construction and Cultural Renewal: The Case of Philosophical Inquiry with Jewish Bible

Jen Glaser and Maughn Gregory

Education, Identity Construction and Cultural Renewal

Language, culture and community both precede our individual lives and constitute necessary conditions for the construction of a meaningful life: a life that is comprehensible, and one that has direction and purpose. We are born into multiple and interconnected linguistic, ethnic, political, spiritual and other communities, each of which has habituated certain kinds of knowledge, meaning, value, cultural practice and institutional form. Every new generation constructs individual and collective identity by negotiating these inherited ways of life with personal proclivities and contemporary contingencies. As Alasdair Macintyre argues, the concepts of narrative, intelligibility, social accountability and personal identity mutually presuppose each other (2007, 218). "For the story of my life," he observes, "is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity" (2007, 221). A generation earlier John Dewey argued that human individuality is not an innate quality waiting to be discovered and expressed, but an achievement, a "release and fulfillment of personal potentialities which take place only in rich and manifold association with others" (1990, 150).

This is not to say that persons are entirely determined by the social, nor the present determined solely by the past. The unity and direction of a human life is a project to be worked out in a multitude of interchanges by means of which people appropriate, accommodate and transcend cultural meanings. This project can be dauntingly complex in a pluralist, media-saturated world in which we participate in multiple communities of meaning making that sometimes vie for primacy. Philosophy for Children was created, in part, to facilitate this project. Ann Margaret Sharp wrote that in creating their program, she and Matthew Lipman "assumed that full personhood is not given at birth but is something that emerges within the context of the community and is a result of the struggle of each child to see herself or himself in relation to others" (1994, 2).

Moreover, the encounter between the individual 'I' and the social 'we 'is always dynamic. The same interactions that enable individuals to (re)construct personal identity by their encounter with tradition always, at the same time, contribute to the ongoing (re)construction of tradition. To the extent that our inherited practices still lead to meaningful experience (consider grandfather's wheat bread recipe or the rules of evidence in criminal law), we try to find ways to protect them from dissolution and to share them with the next generation, whose needs and desires we can only predict from our own. But then, as Hannah Arendt explained, every tradition or cultural world is continually "becoming out of joint," because it was "created by mortal hands to serve mortals for a limited time as [at] home," and inevitably, "it wears out" (2006, 181). "To preserve the world against the mortality of its creators," she suggested, "it must be constantly set right anew," by means of "the new which every generation brings" (Ibid.). Like a language, the criterion of a tradition's vitality is not how well it preserves its historical forms, but how well it enables people to realize new possibilities for meaningful experience and human flourishing. (Grandpa's recipe may need to be creatively adapted as ingredients become un/available; changes in technology may necessitate new rules of evidence.)

This tension between conservation and creative adaptation is not a danger for traditions, but in fact what keeps them vital. Thus, MacIntyre argued that "[a] living tradition … is an historically extended, socially embodied argument … about the goods which constitute that tradition" (2007, 222), and that such a tradition is in "good order" if it can "grasp … those future possibilities which the past has made available to the present" (223). Keeping a tradition in good order requires forums for working out, not only how the tradition may address new problems and opportunities, but also how traditional meanings might be changed by doing so, and what kinds and degrees of change are still recognizable as

continuations of that tradition. MacIntyre notes that "[t]raditions, when vital, embody continuities of conflict," and warns that if traditions no longer practice self-reckoning, internal debate and exchange with other traditions, they are liable to "decay, disintegrate and disappear" (Ibid., 222). Of course, there is no guarantee that such inquiry will prevent a tradition from succumbing to external or internal forces of disintegration or ensure that individual growth will be compatible with the creative continuation of the living tradition. But an important task of education in democratic societies is to provide the conditions through which people can perform this simultaneous identity construction and cultural renewal.

The work of Dewey, Arendt and MacIntyre help us to understand education as a cultural practice for the ongoing, simultaneous growth of persons in relation to other persons and the communities in which they are embedded, such that latent possibilities of each are drawn out and mediated by the other. These authors also provide lenses through which to understand the value orientation of Philosophy for Children toward empowering children to take responsibility for the flourishing of their own, unique life projects and of the multiple communities of which they are part. We can also see how Philosophy for Children constitutes a cross-generational practice that helps to keep the traditions of *philosophy* and of *education* in good order by bringing them into mutual encounter and transformation. Indeed, Matthew Lipman called for philosophy to be reconstructed as a practice ("doing philosophy") of collaborative, self-correcting inquiry into philosophical concepts and methods, and education to reconstruct around "[t]he conception of the educated child as… knowing, understanding, reasonable and judicious" (Lipman 1993, 8).

Religious Education and Philosophy for Children

Tensions between the individual and the social, and between conservation and creative adaptation of tradition are intensified in the area of religious education for a number of reasons. Religion is the site of some of the most profound kinds of existential meaning-making many people engage in, and this meaning can be both deeply personal and powerfully communal. Religious beliefs, values and practices are often taken to have a special kind of warrant superior to that of ordinary human knowledge and cultural practice, whether intuitional (as in some schools of Buddhism) or revelational (as in most monotheist traditions). In addition, within many religious traditions, belief and practice are inextricably bound up with ethnic identity and peoplehood, so it is thought that one cannot be altered without perhaps endangering the other.

For these reasons, various forms of protectionism have arisen around religious education. Some

traditions stipulate that religious precepts require uncritical allegiance and that only religious authorities may interpret them for new human situations (posed by new technologies, medical options, and political conflicts, for example). Children, in particular, are often deemed to be incapable of interpreting religious ideas, even in relation to their own experience (Lipman, 1984a), and many parents are fearful of children questioning or thinking critically about their religious tradition (Gregory 2008). As Stephen Law observes, many religious leaders and parents prefer religious instruction that utilizes repetition, sentimentality and other "causal mechanisms" to *induce* belief in children, over dialectical approaches that engage them in *reflection on* their emergent beliefs (2008, 52).

Ultimately, however, protectionism restrains young people's ability to use their religious traditions to understand, navigate and enrich their experience. Consequently, it reduces the opportunity for traditions to have their undetermined possibilities explored so that their argument for a particular kind of meaningful human life might be continued into the future. Situated against this trend are approaches to religious education that offer students a generative space for hermeneutical encounter with religious traditions. These approaches seek to enable young people not only to become knowledgeable and skillful with religious texts, history, meanings, rituals, and institutions, but also to become conversant in the arguments about the value of the way of life these make possible. They draw on the plurality of voices and positions from within traditions and refer to the broader, cosmopolitan world of which they are part. In so doing they challenge students to engage in existential inquiry about the meaning and purpose of their own lives. They encourage uninhibited questioning, close reading, rigorous reasoning, open-ended dialogue and sound judgment. In Gallagher's words this kind of education provides opportunities for the "informing power… [of a tradition] to work (Gallagher 1992, 92). Rather than shielding young people from ambiguous and negative aspects of their tradition, or from internal and external criticism of their form of life, it provides them the opportunity to ask challenging questions and to express doubts and confusions, as well as insights and affirmations, thereby liberating them from that which has become unintelligible or oppressive within them.

In recommending this kind of religious education Matthew Lipman argued that religion is not different from the academic disciplines, in that their study must be "approached with the objective of wringing *meanings* out of them along with knowledge" (1984a, 28, emphasis in original). Philosophical inquiry in community enables young people to express their own religious curiosities and puzzlements, to explore and clarify religious concepts with others, to work with apparent tensions and contradictions

in religious belief and practice, to evaluate the epistemological status of religious ideas and the worth of religious values, to resist adult authority and peer pressure to assent to beliefs they do not understand or actually accept, and to work out and justify their own religious positions (DuPuis 1979, Glaser 2012; Hannan 2012a & 2012b; Lipman 1984a; Jenkins 1986; Sharp 1983, 1994a, 1994b; Iversen, Mitchell, & Pollard 2009).. This was, in fact, Lipman's response to religious educators who are "apprehensive with regard to the effect of … thinking skills upon religious belief" (1984b, 28). He pointed out "the danger lies not in the skills, but in the failure to foster them constructively by encasing them in the context of humanistic disciplines and self-correcting communities" (Lipman 1984b, 9).

In religious education and in the academic disciplines, communal inquiry has two axes, which we shall refer to as a 'vertical conversation' across successive generations of inquirers within a cultural or intellectual tradition and a 'horizontal conversation' among peers who seek to interpret their tradition in light of contemporary vocabularies and concerns (Peirce, Glaser 2009). The classroom community of philosophical inquiry provides a practice in which these axes intersect, so that the historical development of traditional meanings over time informs how they are used to illuminate and negotiate new situations, and vice versa. Therefore, we argue that the thesis presented above, of education as a hermeneutical practice of identity construction and cultural renewal, obliges educators to locate the paradigm(s) for vertical and horizontal meaning- making within their traditions, that can be integrated with the community of philosophical inquiry in educational settings.

Philosophical Inquiry with Bible : A Case Study in Jewish Education

Background: Hermeneutics and Jewish Education

As noted above, there is no way of being 'a person' outside having a particular way of being a person – a 'way' that is situated inside a culture and language (an interpretative system). Recognizing the relationship between language, cultural situatedness and identity shifts the focus of Jewish education in significant ways. From the 1920's to 1980's the ongoing debate around the purposes of Jewish education focused on whether the educator's central task was to transmit Jewish content (a wish-list of what the ''Educated Jew' was expected to know and do) or attend to the Will (instill a love of Judaism that would create an autonomous will to learn about one's culture and participate in it).[1]

[1] This was often framed as a tension between the demands of 'authenticity' and 'relevance'. Those in the camp of Jewish content emphasized authenticity (focusing on the transmission of Canon and religious practices as

The hermeneutic turn challenges this dichotomy by shifting our understanding of the task of education to be that of making-meaning – the active construction of a world view. On this account, cultural literacy, as an educational ideal, focuses less on acquiring an extensive knowledge of the 'Jewish bookshelf' (what one should have read, what knowledge and beliefs acquired) and more on developing the skills, capacities, dispositions and practices that enable learners to construct meaning through participation in the 'ongoing conversation' that constitutes Judaism as a form of life - a living, multilayered, tradition. Indeed, not only to take part in it as it now is, but to develop the capacity to take it forward into the future (through conservation and generative action). This requires both a hermeneutic method that treats 'coming to know' as reflexive, whereby it is never completely objective but is, at the same time, coming to know something about myself (about the relationships between myself, others and the world) and a pedagogy of meaning-making by which learners come to appropriate this process of meaning-making for themselves.

The Jewish hermeneutical tradition: Midrash.

Developing an approach to Jewish education along the lines we have been developing entails looking within Jewish tradition itself for a hermeneutic that involves students directly in the 'ongoing conversation' that constitutes Judaism as a multilayered form of life. Within Jewish tradition, the hermeneutics of *midrash* offers a paradigm for this mode of meaning-centered education. The term 'midrash' literally means 'understanding', 'to search out or inquire', or the act of 'giving an account' (Kugel 1986, 77-109). While commonly identified with a body of literature (primarily commentary on Torah starting with the Rabbinic period in the 2nd century BCE)[2], midrash can also be understood ontologically and existentially as an interpretative stance in which participants 'give an account' of a text for the sake of making meaning in the contemporary moment. In this regard, midrash is more "a form of life (in Wittgenstein's sense) than a method of exegesis (in an epistemological sense)" (Bruns 1992, 105; see also Kugel 1986 and Heinmann 1986). As a hermeneutic method, it relies on a complex dialogical relationship between oneself, one's peers, a canonical text and tradition. As a form of life, midrash employs a mode of attentiveness marked by close reading that seeks, first, to understand the

preserved within the interpretative tradition) whereas those in the camp of the will emphasized relevance (focusing on affective education, making Jewish content relevant and meaningful, for if the message or values didn't resonate with the student, they would have no desire to continue to engage with it).

[2] Torah is the first five books of the Jewish Bible, including Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Kugel (1986) locates the beginning of midrash in the 2nd-3rd century CE and continuing through the prophets.

multiple layers of meaning within the text, and second, to connect the rich and complex system of traditional meaning revealed in that process with the meaning system of the interpreter in his/her time and place.

Midrash is a particularly apt mode of engagement for philosophical inquiry with canon, for several reasons. First, as a form of life, it involves a mode of attentiveness marked by close reading of canon in which attention is given over to understanding the multiple layers of meaning conveyed by units as small as a word, or a single concept, and seeks a dialogical engagement that connects the meaning system that permeates the tradition with the meaning system of the interpreter in his/her time and place. Second, the midrashic hermeneutical tradition does not aim at a "single or settled, official construction but a series of often conflicting and disputed expositions." (Bruns, 1992, 106). It seeks to both uncover and expand upon the possibilities of meaning conveyed by a text. In this way it is ideally suited to the educative task of reclaiming a literacy that provides participants access to the ''multiple layers and multiple channels of meaning traveling through the length of a language formed by the breadths and depths of culture and… its politics" (Schoolman, 2008, 22). Third, in midrashic discourse, points of interest in the text are not predetermined but left open to the emergent possibilities and questions that surface in the act of reading, at the point when text is turned back into speech.

> ...the task is to address whatever becomes an issue when the Torah is studied or recited or when understanding of Torah is called for. Insofar as there is never, in Jewish tradition, a situation in human life in which such understanding is not called for, midrash can be said to have a great range of application (Bruns, 105).

This attention to emerging interests in the text is also found in the way text is read in Philosophy for Children, where the interest in the text is not predetermined but open to emergent possibilities brought to it by the reader at the point of reading. Fourth, midrash always seeks to put the meaning of the text "into play," in the lives of the interpreters, not as a 'conclusion' or final answer to their questions, but as a resource for thinking about the matter at hand.

> ...what matters in midrash is not only what lies behind the text in the form of an originating intention but what lies in front of the text where the text is put into play. The text is always contemporary with its readers or listeners, that is, always oriented

> toward the time and circumstances of the interpreter. It lays open paths to the future (Bruns, 106)
>
> > Let the Torah never be for you an antiquated decree, but rather like a decree freshly issued, no more than two or three days old... [Indeed,] Ben Azzai said: not even as old as a decree issued two or three days ago, but as a decree issued this very day
> > (*Pesikta de-Rab Kahana* 12:12, cited in Bruns, 106-7).

One important difference between a midrashic reading of text and the kind of reading in Philosophy for Children is the authority carried by the text. Midrashic interpretation emerges from the reading of canonical text (Bible or liturgy) which gives it special status. In considering what kind of status that may be, Paul Ricoeur's account is particularly helpful. He defines canon as those works which, through our engagement with them, sediment down structures by which we interpret our own lives. (1995). For Ricouer, what constitutes canon is not antecedently given, but a product of both the intentional hermeneutic attentiveness we bring to the text (to its vocabulary, narratives, internal structure, etc.) and the intentionality of engagement carried by the form of life of the culture in which we are situated. This understanding of canon is not in conflict with the fact that certain communities also give authority to the text by virtue of its authorship (this is part of what constitutes the form of life of those communities) but locates the philosophical meaning of canon in the dynamic of an intentional relationship between the subject and the text. That intentionality places the subject in a position of obligation to the text: to attempt to understand its possibilities of meaning (recognizing that this itself is not independent of our act of reading), and to approach this act of meaning-making as something which is potentially formative of who we are (wherein we come to interpret ourselves in light of the text).

This obligation to the text intersects with an obligation to one-another within the inquiry. While MacIntyre speaks of this in relation to personal narratives within community, it is equally applicable to the obligation we have to give an account of our own meaning-making within the community of inquiry as a whole.

> To be the subject of a narrative that runs from one's birth to one's death is … to be accountable for the actions and experiences which compose a narrative life. It is, that is, to be open to being asked to give a certain kind of account of what one did or what

> happened to one or what one witnessed at any earlier point in one's life …. (217) The other aspect of narrative selfhood is correlative: I am not only accountable, I am one who can always ask others for an account, who can put others to the question. I am part of their story, as they are part of mine. The narrative of any one life is part of an interlocking set of narratives. (218)

Such obligations exist independently of any particular claims denominations within Judaism make in terms of theology or Truth (with a capital 'T'), though they may shape further boundaries of possibility within the act of interpretation according to the commitments of those denominations (for instance if we think it is of divine origin, inspired by the human encounter with the divine, or a founding mythology of a complex culture).[3]

Ricoeur's understanding of canon is consistent with the practice of midrash and underscores the connection between hermeneutic engagement and identity construction. It also elucidates the presentation of philosophical canon in the IAPC materials created by Lipman and Sharp. These materials carry sediments of meaning from the (largely) Western philosophical tradition that, through inquiry, become resources through which students come to interpret and transform their own lives (without limiting their responses or imposing one set of interpretations as the 'correct' ones).

Philosophical Inquiry with Bible in Action

Between 2012 and 2014 the project Thinking Together: Philosophical Inquiry with Bible was developed in response to a call by Jewish educators in Cleveland to develop a program in Philosophy for Children for Jewish education.4 This project involved the development of a new curriculum using Torah as the primary text and philosophical discussion plans and exercises modeled on the IAPC curriculum, which also drew on the Jewish intellectual tradition. It also involved professional development for educators from across the spectrum of Jewish cultural and theological commitments (Reform, Reconstructionist, Orthodox, Conservative, and Secular) in facilitating philosophical inquiry.

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[3] This is to say that philosophical inquiry is not just a possibility for 'liberal' streams of Jewish life, but rather, has a long tradition within Jewish life in general. What may differ is more likely to be theories of childhood and philosophies of education, and thus whether it is a good thing for children to be engaging in this form of discourse. These differences cut across denominational ones.

[4] This project was initiated by the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland and funded by the Covenant Foundation. The entire curriculum unit discussed here can be viewed and downloaded from: https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bx54mtyXcEL2ZEZyelNqQVhQdDg/view?usp=sharing.

As with Philosophy for Children, inquiry in this program begins by sitting in a circle and engaging in a shared reading of a text. However, before reading, students repeat the traditional blessing said before Torah study. This acknowledges our obligation toward the text in the way outlined above and situates our activity in a historic continuum of interpretation that goes back thousands of years. Students may read in English or in Hebrew (or both); however, the Hebrew text is always present as a reference and a reminder that the English is a translation and often an approximation of concepts and language whose contours are shaped within a meaning system that is both different from, and ontologically prior to, the contemporary vernacular meaning system students bring to the text.

Bereshit 12:1-9 (Lech L'cha)

1. God said to Avram, "Go, take yourself
from your land
and from where you were born,
and from your father's house
to the land that I will let you see:

2. I will make you a great nation
And I will bless you,
I will make your name great.
And be a blessing.

3. I will bless those people who bless you
And those that curse you, I will curse;
And all the families of the earth shall find
blessing through you.
…
4. Avram went, as God had told him,
and Lot went with him.
And Avram was seventy-five years old
when he went out of Haran.

5. Avram took Sarai, his wife,
and Lot, his brother's son,
and all their belongings that they had gained,
and the people they had made their own in Haran;
and they went to go to the land of Canaan.

בְּרֵאשִׁית יב ׃ה -א

א וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם, לֶךְ-לְךָ מֵאַרְצְךָ
וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ
וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ,
אֶל-הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר אַרְאֶךָּ.

ב וְאֶעֶשְׂךָ, לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל,
וַאֲבָרֶכְךָ,
וַאֲגַדְּלָה שְׁמֶךָ ;
וֶהְיֵה, בְּרָכָה.

ג וַאֲבָרְכָה, מְבָרְכֶיךָ,
וּמְקַלֶּלְךָ, אָאֹר ;
וְנִבְרְכוּ בְךָ, כֹּל מִשְׁפְּחֹת הָאֲדָמָה.

ד וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם, כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֵלָיו יְהוָה, וַיֵּלֶךְ
אִתּוֹ, לוֹט ;
וְאַבְרָם, בֶּן-חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה,
בְּצֵאתוֹ, מֵחָרָן.

ה וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם אֶת-שָׂרַי אִשְׁתּוֹ
וְאֶת-לוֹט בֶּן-אָחִיו,
וְאֶת-כָּל-רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכָשׁוּ,
וְאֶת-הַנֶּפֶשׁ, אֲשֶׁר-עָשׂוּ בְחָרָן ;
וַיֵּצְאוּ, לָלֶכֶת אַרְצָה כְּנַעַן,

The collective reading of canon aloud is both a hermeneutic act and an essentially Jewish act of returning the written text of Torah back to a ‘telling,’ that echoes the giving of Torah at Sinai and is also reenacted in the reading of the Torah scroll in the synagogue. Thus, the act of turning text back into speech in the classroom further grounds the students’ work of figuring themselves out in relation to the tradition in a historic continuum. After reading, students raise questions that capture what they are curious about, or what they see as ripe for exploration. Starting with the formation of questions engages students in the philosophical activity of finding an interest and turning puzzlement into a question. From time to time students are asked to say a bit more about what interest led to their question, thus recognizing that questions often mark the end of a thinking process rather than its beginning, and that this prior interest is often richer than the question itself. Here is a sample of comments and questions 4th grade students raised from the text above. The comments in brackets are further elaborations the students made when prompted with, “Can you say a little more about that?”

1. Verses 2 and 3 are good to talk about – God is giving Abraham “a great opportunity” (Noah)
2. What does it mean to “find blessing through you”? (Beth)
3. It says, “I will make you a great nation,” but what kind of people are in the nation? (Zacharia)
4. Could the people be great together but not individually great [because in a nation not *everyone* is going to be great]? (Ruth)
5. “Why is God making Abraham leave?” (Naomi)
6. What is the difference between being blessed and being a blessing? (Sophie)
7. “How can just one person make a whole nation great?” [doesn’t being a great nation depend on the other people?]
8. “How can he know they will be great?” [God seems pretty sure, but if people have free will, how could God know?)
9. “Why would God curse anyone?” (Isabelle)
10. What about the people who did neither? [who didn’t curse or bless Avram] Did God just ignore them? (Ruth)

The students then look for connections between the questions and selected one interest with which to begin their inquiry. In this case, they identified the issue of Abraham’s journey and then the nature of

blessings and whether this might be somehow connected to becoming a great nation. While located in the text, the interests of the students are general and philosophical (what makes a nation great? How is greatness achieved? The concept of free will, and of blessing - what it means to be a blessing or to have others be blessed through you.

Discussion plans and exercises are used to scaffold students' thinking by directing their attention to different dimensions of the issue or concept under investigation. As with conventional Philosophy for Children curricula, these materials are informed by (i) *alternate philosophical orientations* toward the concept and (ii) *the language in use* - those nuanced possibilities of meaning which reflect how the concept or word already operates in the world of the student. However, in the context of Jewish education, it is also important that students explore possibilities of meaning drawn from the 'ongoing conversation' that constitutes Jewish life. Our curriculum therefore includes resources from two additional sources: (iii) *intertextual* resources that lead students to examine how the same word, concept, issue or literary structure appears in different passages of the Bible, and (iv) the *body of interpretative literature* that constitutes the Jewish intellectual tradition over time, from early Rabbinic commentary to contemporary blogs by Rabbis, teachers and others. [e.g. midrash, as above].

Both of these are worth further comment as they relate to the hermeneutics of midrash. In the case of inter-textuality, there is a difference in the linearality of the text in the corpus of Philosophical novels written for children and a midrashic reading of Bible. In philosophical novels (such as the IAPC novels) the narratives present concepts iteratively throughout the span of the novel, but the texts themselves are linear, with the idea of reading progressively from beginning to end over time. If choices are made and only parts of a story selected for reading, the readings are regarded as complete units in themselves. It would be highly unusual for a word or concept used in one episode to be closely compared to the use of the same word in other contexts in the larger narrative (even in cases where within that episode the word or concept is consciously explored in multiple ways), or the use in other places seen to shed light on the meaning in the case at hand.[5] In the Western tradition, this kind of inter-textual literary exploration is usually reserved for poetry or novels where the text is treated as a unified whole (a 'hermeneutic circle'). In the midrashic mode, however, every verse of Bible is viewed as equi-

[5] For example, when, in chapter two of *Harry Stottlemeir's Discovery*, multiple forms of exchange are presented (stamp swapping, friends taking it in turns to pay for ice cream, a kiss as 'fair exchange' for paying for a movie.), we don't generally also go back to Lisa and Jill sharing a sandwich in chapter 2 as a form of 'exchange' to think about in regard to it.

distant from every other verse. The narrative might unfold, but it unfolds in consequential time rather than historical time. Because the whole text is seen as synchronously present, the range of meanings of a concept is given by the range of meanings across the text as a whole, with any single instance of its use gaining its particular significance in light of other usage (and thus the midrashist, in seeking to understand the significance of a term as it is used in one context, will look to the meaning of the word in other contexts to see how this opens up possibilities of understanding of the verse they are exploring). This means that in exploring layers of meaning of 'being blessed' (as raised by the students after reading the Abraham narrative above) an exercise might direct students to look up other instances when people receive blessings in the Bible to see how this informs their understanding of what it means to be blessed (becoming more sophisticated and nuanced in their own meaning-making around this idea in the process) and to apply this more nuanced understanding both to what it means in this particular textual context and as a sedimented set of possible meanings by which they are able to interpret their own lives.

In midrashic interpretation synchronicity not only holds across the text but also extends between the text and the reader, wherein the whole text is treated as synchronously present. It is an 'other' time that existentially intersects with our own, rather than being 'history' of which our own time is a continuation.

> **The Bible's time was *other* time, discontinuous with later events and yet, because of its special character, one which was constantly about to impose its mark on the present. Bible-time was forever looming.** The reading of the Torah's history itself became cyclic, indeed, eventually an annual event: Creation, Exodus, Sinai, Moses' death were regular occurrences, and at the end the accumulated roll of scroll was unwound from one spindle and rolled back onto the other as it was in the beginning.... **what happened in Scripture happens again and again, unfolds over and over, it is because the Bible is not "the past" at all.** (Kugel, 88-89, our bold added)

In Jewish tradition, this kind of synchronous meaning-making takes place not only at various points in the text, but also between the text and the reader, for whom the whole text is treated as synchronously present. Removed from linear, historic time, each verse of Bible is viewed as equidistant from every other. The text as a whole intersects with our own time, thereby providing us with a set of possible meanings by which we can interpret our own lives. This is the point of intersection between textual exegesis and identity formation.

Discussion plans exploring different nuances of the meaning of blessing might thus integrate layers of possibility around blessing as presented through the text (e.g., drawing on 'blessing' as it is used in different places within the Bible as a whole) into the set of questions that explore the existing meaning structure and semantic field of 'blessing' in the student's world (for instance questions 1 and 4 in the discussion plan "Giving and receiving blessings above), and questions 1,4,5 &6 in the following discussion plan.

The following discussion plans explore the existing meaning structure and semantic field of 'blessing' in the student's world, thereby connecting a biblical concept to students' everyday lives.

Discussion Plan: Everyday uses of the term "Bless"

What is meant in each of these cases?
Does "Bless" mean the same thing in each case? If not, explore the differences.

"Sam was blessed with children"

"Sam blessed his children"

"Sam's children thought they were blessed to have him as a father"

"Sam was blessed with kindness"

"Sam saw kindness as a blessing"

Sam said to his friend: "Being late to the party is a blessing in disguise"

Discussion Plan: Giving and receiving blessings

1. Can you 'give a blessing' without *blessing someone/something*?
2. Can *anyone* receive a blessing?
3. Can you ask for a blessing? If so, what do you think happens when you are 'being blessed'?
4. Can *anyone* give a blessing?
5. Can you give a blessing without realizing you have done so?
6. Can you ask for a blessing? If so, what do you think happens when you are 'being blessed'?
7. Can you demand or force someone to bless you?
8. Can you believe in blessings without believing in curses?
9. Can you believe in blessings without believing in God?
10. Is there a blessing you would wish for?
11. Is there a blessing you would like to give someone else?

In the first discussion plan alternate philosophical orientations toward the meaning of the concept ‘blessing’ are explored by taking each occurrence of ‘blessing’ in the three verses of the Biblical passage and translating them into a contemporary context. This scaffolds students’ exploration of the differences between these orientations in a systematic way, leading to a deeper understanding of the meaning of ‘blessing’ as it presents in their own lives and offering resources for a more nuanced reading of the possibilities of meaning in the text.

The second discussion plan incorporates intertextuality through the range of questions posed. For example, the question, “Can you demand or force someone to bless you?” alludes to the blessing Jacob demanded from the Angel (Genesis 32:25-27). This intertextual work can also be done explicitly by having students look up multiple references that show the concept ‘blessing’ in use, each of which adds a new layer of meaning

Inter-textual activity: Divine and Human blessings.

Look up the following references – How does each situation add to our understanding of the meaning of being blessed?

Genesis 17:15-21 [God tells Abraham he will bless Sarah, she will have a child]
Genesis 32:25-27 [Jacob demands / extorts a blessing from an angel]
Genesis 2:3 [God blesses the 7th day]

Genesis 27:30 [Jacob receives Isaac’s blessing through deception]
Genesis 48:15 [Israel blesses Joseph son’s, Ephraim and Menasheh]

Because part of our vision for Jewish education is for students to live a midrashic mode of life, it is important that they encounter the voices of others within the ‘ongoing conversation’ as they figure out their own responses to questions of meaning. In the IAPC curriculum, philosophical voices from the past are paraphrased by characters in the novels and line items in discussion plans. This enables students to consider historical positions as possibilities for meaning in their contemporary community, but it does not situate them as interlocutors in the historical community of philosophy as a living tradition. For this reason, in our curriculum, important interpretations of words and phrases from Torah are presented explicitly as secondary texts representing ‘voices’ in the hermeneutic community.

For example, in the following exercise about journeys, students are presented with four interpretations of the words *Lech l'cha* – the directive given to Abraham to leave Haran. These words are often read as a simple imperative: 'Go forth!' But Jewish tradition offers four different readings of the phrase, giving attention to subtle differences of meaning between each word. *Lech* on its own means 'go,' and *l'cha* generally means 'to you' or 'toward you.' Therefore, *Lech l'cha* might mean 'Go forth' (in the sense of 'leave where you are'); 'Go *for* yourself' (for your own benefit, for a better life); 'Go *to* yourself' (to greater self-understanding); and/or "Go to whom you will become" (the idea that we are all on a journey of self-formation). The point of the exercise below is not that students learn to correctly categorize each situation, but that they have the opportunity to critically explore ways of thinking about journeying offered through Jewish tradition, which can then become resources for negotiating different kinds of *Lech!* in their own lives.

> *Which kind of "Go Forth!" do you think is invoked the sentences on the left? You may mark more than one, but make sure to explain what you mean in each case.*

	Go forth! (from where you are to another place)	Go for yourself! (for your own benefit)	Go to your yourself! (to greater self-under standing)	Go (to the person you will become)!
Ronnie: "Going to basketball practice in the afternoons is great – one day I want to be a professional player!"				
Kate: "I'm going to miss you when you leave, but I know the job in Boston pays a higher salary."				
Eli: "Our family moved here to be near my grandparents."				
Zak: "I went on this silent retreat to get in touch with the 'real me' – it was very cool. I learned lots about myself.				
Lisa: "Going to summer camp last year was really important – I became more self-confident and independent. I felt I really grew up.				
...				

While this kind of exercise helps students internalize different meanings of 'going', it doesn't develop a sense of being present within the ongoing Jewish conversation. It presents meanings as 'propositional contents' rather than as living voices 'sitting in the circle' alongside the students. For this reason, our curriculum also presents possibilities of meaning of '*Lech l'cha*' through direct quotes accompanied by biographical material and images or photos of the persons who gave voice to particular positions. Care is taken to provide alternate voices from across the spectrum of Jewish life – men, women, scholars, rabbis, social activists, lay leaders, and teachers, from diverse times, cultures and denominations. Providing such supplemental texts adds to the possibilities of meaning in the inquiry at hand and provides exemplars of participation in an ongoing disciplinary conversation that can prompt and scaffold student participation.

לך לך

(i) Rashi:

Go forth: Heb לך לך , literally go to you, for your benefit and for your good, and there I will make you into a great nation. If you stay here I won't give you children. Moreover. If you go, I will make your character known in the world.

Rosh Hashanah 16b, Tan.

***Rashi** (רש"י) **is shorthand for RA**bbi **SH**lomo **I**tzhaki). Rashi was a medieval French rabbi who wrote many commentaries on the Talmud and on the Tanakh. His writings are still widely read and thought about today.*

Picture: By Guillaume de Paris, Public Domain: http://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=41460972

(ii) Avivah Zornberg *was born in London and grew up in Glasgow, Scotland, where her father was a Rabbi. She studied with him from childhood; he was her most important teacher of Torah. For the past thirty years, she has taught Torah in Jerusalem.*

Photo: http://www.avivahzornberg.com/

"Lech L'cha" – start travelling – this is a travel narrative. Not to go to a particular place to do business, but as an open-ended travel. To discover something about the place you are in – like in Gulliver's Travels or the Odyssey – it seems the journey itself offers you something you wouldn't get by staying home… You can never know how it will change you, but the journey itself changes you. (Matan lecture: http://www.matan.org.il/eng/show.asp?id=35416)

Conclusion

Because the cultural traditions in which we are embedded make it possible to understand and direct our lives, education should promote the kind of hermeneutical engagement with these traditions that generates reflective commitment and creative reconstruction. Hermeneutic religious education seeks to make religious traditions available as resources for students' identity construction while at the same time providing the means for the traditions themselves to be creatively renewed and 'kept in good order.' Our project of philosophical inquiry with Jewish Bible has illuminated ways in which Philosophy for Children and the practice of midrash provide resources for this kind of hermeneutical encounter in the context of Jewish religious education. Our hope is that educators in other religious traditions will look inside them to find hermeneutical practices that can be used to affect this kind of mutual encounter between students and those traditions.

We have shown how philosophical engagement with a religious tradition enhances this hermeneutic approach to religious education. On the other hand, our work in religious education has also suggested new ways to bring about the hermeneutic encounter between students and the tradition of philosophy. The point has repeatedly been made in Philosophy for Children that 'doing philosophy' does not mean 'learning about philosophers.' However, this is, in some respects, a false dichotomy. Our work in Jewish education shows that young people can take up canonical text, intertextual resources and the voices of particular figures in the intellectual tradition, as part of their open-ended, interpretive inquiry, without losing their own voices or becoming estranged from the tradition. We suggest that bringing such resources into Philosophy for Children would, in fact, make the philosophical tradition more available to students' meaning making and help them to recognize themselves as participants in philosophy as an 'ongoing conversation.' Of course, this use of the tradition requires a certain kind of 'letting go' by educators, so that resources from the tradition are not taken as 'authoritative answers' that close down the inquiry, but as means to open up and expand possibilities of meaning. But we suggest that the conventional curriculum and pedagogy of Philosophy for Children provide the structure for the more direct kind of engagement with a canonical tradition exemplified in our project, and that this would constitute a further advance of Lipman's agenda for the reconstruction of philosophy.

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