

INTRODUCTION

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According to the Babylonian Talmud, “all that God has in the world are the four cubits of halakhah” (b. Eruvin 48a). The same might be said of people, at least from the perspective of many Jewish thinkers. But how does one navigate those four cubits? How does halakhah engage with subjective experience and the affective dimensions of human life? This issue of the JTR explores the complex interplay between embodiment, emotion, affect, and law by offering snapshots of moments in Jewish life throughout history. The authors consider contexts as varied as entering the Temple courtyard to the death of a family member in the home. While highly particular, each of these snapshots highlights a dynamic tension between prescribed norms for behavior, subjective experience, and the various avenues through which individuals communicate their desires, fears, and challenges to their broader community.

Affect and Halakhah

The first two essays explore the ways in which physical states, including blindness and illness, shape both interior qualities, such as

embarrassment or character formation, as well as exterior relationships, such as legal liability. In “Shame, Blindness, and the Face of the Other: Emotions In and Out of Rabbinic Legal Texts,” Sarah Wolf explores how rabbinic legal texts determine that an emotion, such as shame (*boshet*), has taken place. Such a determination is required because there are legal consequences for shaming another person. Wolf notes that, in order to accomplish this, shame is externalized; legally, we know shame has occurred because a specific, observable action that is known to *cause* shame has taken place. She then explores the liminal case of a blind person and traces rabbinic debates over whether such a person can be liable for causing shame. In so doing, Wolf reveals the ways in which sightedness (or lack thereof) points towards the need for visible, communicable indicators of interior states. For a person to be liable for causing shame to another, that harm must be rendered visible. What happens if the perpetrator literally cannot see the signs of the harm they have done?

The next essay, “If You Seek it Like Silver: Illness and Poverty as Metaphors for Obligation in Israel Salanter” by Sarah Zager, explores the question of how subjective experience shapes law from a very different angle. Zager illustrates the ways in which Salanter, the founder of the *musar* movement, anchored the notion of obligation in embodied experiences of restriction, specifically illness and poverty. Salanter argues that *musar* is the cure to a spiritual illness that affects all people; therefore, just as a person must seek to treat a physical illness, so too people must engage in *limmud musar* to treat their spiritual affliction. Physical suffering can also help make sense of the practice of *musar* and the motivation to engage in it; just as a poor person may be desperate to secure sustenance, even to the point of begging, so too a person who senses her soul is in danger may be more willing to abase herself and change her behavior in order to be rescued. This motivation does not come from some external lawgiver, but from within the self. For Salanter, even though the obligation to engage in *limmud musar* is incumbent upon all Jews, it is grounded in subjective experience.

While Wolf and Zager explore how specific obligations are grounded in (or undermined by) subjective experience, the second two essays focus

on proper conduct in specific ritual moments, such as entering a space of prayer and becoming a mourner. Both essays highlight moments in which one's internal or emotional state comes into conflict with behavioral expectations, and they explore different ways of addressing this tension. In "'Heaviness of the Head' and the Unbearable Lightness of Rejoicing", Erez DeGolan traces the way that bodily experiences epitomize emotional states, focusing on how early rabbinic teachings about *qalut rosh* (lightness of the head) and *koved rosh* (heaviness of the head) provide instruction about rejoicing and mourning. As DeGolan shows, certain modes of physical conduct help to construct an affective state. Mourning, he notes, is "heavy, spatially fixed, and slow" whereas rejoicing involves "excessive bodily affectation and constant engagement with other actors." These physical states shape mental and spiritual states, externally mapping or constructing an internal terrain. Thus, DeGolan argues, one enters prayer in a state of *koved rosh* (with a heavy head) not because there is something mournful about prayer, but rather because the kind of "embodied attention" that prayer requires mirrors the physical slowness and preoccupation of a mourner and cannot be maintained within the chaotic energy of *qalut rosh* (lightness of the head, or rejoicing).

If DeGolan maps the ways that halakhic prescriptions for how to move one's body interact with internal emotional states, Shira Billet traces the way that emotional states can resist or interrupt halakhic expectations, existing in tension with the prescriptions for behavior. In "'Do not grieve excessively': Rabbis Mourning Children Between Law and Narrative in Rabbinic Laws of Mourning and Soloveitchik's *Halakhic Man*," Billet explores how a set of narratives about rabbis continuing to engage in prayer or study, even after being informed that their child is on his or her deathbed, both create and resist normative ideals. While Billet considers several figures, she draws a striking contrast between the portrayal of R. Elijah Pruzna in R. Joseph Soloveitchik's *Halakhic Man* and in an account written by Shulamit Soloveitchik Meiselman, Soloveitchik's sister. In both accounts, R. Elijah is informed that his daughter is on her deathbed while in the midst of morning prayers. He asks how much time she has left before resuming his prayers, even undertaking the extra piety of laying

tefillin twice (once in the manner dictated by Rashi and once in the manner of Rabbenu Tam) before attending to her. For Soloveitchik, this focus on taking the opportunity to fulfill extra commandments before officially becoming a mourner is a sign of R. Elijah's stoicism and self-mastery, his "acceptance of the divine decree." In Meiselman's account, however, R. Elijah is distraught. Although his actions are the same, their performance communicates something altogether different. When he finishes his prayers, R. Elijah is so upset that his son must assist him in taking off his *tefillin*, and he rushes to his daughter's side the instant his prayers are completed. As Billet masterfully shows here, as well as in her discussion of R. Akiva continuing to teach Torah while his son is on his deathbed, external actions do not clearly reveal internal states. The same physical movements can be read as suppressing emotion or as expressing it. Silence may signal control over one's grief, or an inability to speak in the face of it. As Billet points out, whether intentionally or not, the narration of such moments productively allows for both possibilities at the same time.

While different in their foci, all four essays in this issue illustrate how arguably internal states, such as joy and suffering, are expressed through physical comportment, speech, and outward displays of emotion, but that such communication is multi-directional. Laws which dictate external conduct may ultimately be directed towards internal states or shape them in unexpected ways. Affective expression may simultaneously comport with halakhic guidance and resist the norms that such guidance seems to establish. Even the idea of legal obligation, so often thought of as something that comes from without and imposes itself on the individual, may be rooted in personal, subjective experience. Collectively, these essays offer a thicker description of how individual experience gets expressed within a normative halakhic framework, shaping it, resisting it, and refining it in new ways.

This issue also features reviews of two new monographs. In *Gendering Modern Jewish Thought* (reviewed by [Dustin N. Atlas](#)), Andrea Dara Cooper identifies the centrality of fraternal models of kinship in the canon of modern Jewish thinkers like Levinas and Rosenzweig. The effect, she

argues, has been to exclude women from this “fratriarchy” or tacitly to transform them into brothers. Dustin Atlas’s review calls attention to the underlying mechanics of the fraternal relationship in the ethical notion of the neighbor: “underneath neighbourliness is brotherhood. And brotherhood is hardly innocuous.” In *Understanding the Evolving Meaning of Reason in David Novak’s Natural Law Theory* (reviewed by Samuel J. Kessler), Jonathan L. Milevsky traces the development of the notions of reason and natural law through David Novak’s work and reflects on their significance for core theological themes like revelation and redemption. The diminished role of natural law in Novak’s later thought, Milevsky shows, corresponds to the larger role of redemption in his later writings. As Kessler’s review argues, Milevsky’s book explores perennial questions about the relationship between Jewish legal morality and purportedly universal morality that remain pressing, as in recent European debates about circumcision and *kashrut*.

The Future of the JTR

This collection of essays is the last one that I (Deborah) will oversee as an editor at the JTR, and it is a delight to end my time here on such a rich note. One of the things I have appreciated most about the JTR in my various roles as editor, contributor, and reader, is the ways in which the journal manages to bring scholars together in conversation in a way that evades the disciplinary boundaries of various subfields in Jewish Studies. There is a dialogic creativity that emerges when scholars of modernity feel permission to analyze and explore rabbinic texts, or when scholars of antiquity or medieval philosophy feel emboldened to engage contemporary questions directly. When placed alongside one another, each of the essays in this issue emerges as a case study, a data point in a broader conversation that is generated by the tension and overlap between them. I look forward to continuing to experience the richness of these unexpected dialogues as a reader of the journal and as a member of the editorial board. But it is easy to step down knowing that I leave the JTR in capable hands.

I (Mark) also wanted to express what a delight it has been to work with my dear friend Deborah and how sad I am that she will be stepping down. Deborah is an incisive and creative thinker with a generous spirit, an ideal partner and colleague whose tireless work as an editor has pushed the journal in new and exciting directions. Under her guidance, the journal has nurtured rich and sophisticated work by rabbinics scholars that speaks powerfully to contemporary questions.¹ The JTR's ongoing cultivation of cutting-edge rabbinics scholarship will be a big part of Deborah's legacy. Deborah, you will be missed!

Nevertheless, we are thrilled to announce that Nechama Juni, previously our Book Review Editor, will be joining Mark as General Editor. Nechama (or "Chumie") is Assistant Professor of Judaism at Carleton College, a brilliant scholar of modern Jewish thought with a particular interest in halakhah and gender. Her work focuses on subject-formation and embodiment, especially in halakhically-observant communities, showing "how gender-queerness happens in non-subversive spaces, and what that means for our broader understandings of both religion and gender."² Chumie has brought new energy to the JTR—she is already hard at work on a forthcoming issue, a symposium on the new English translation of *Dirshuni: Contemporary Women's Midrash*³—and we can't wait to see where the journal will go under her leadership.

With this issue of the JTR, we also inaugurate a "third act" for the journal itself. The JTR began in 1991 as the *Postmodern Jewish Philosophy Bitnet*, an early experiment in using new technologies like email and the internet to showcase the fruits of the practice of Textual Reasoning and to experiment with alternative forms and genres of academic production. Redubbed the *Journal of Textual Reasoning* in 1996, the journal was one of

¹ Besides the present issue, see especially "Talmud and the Ethics of Close Reading," *The Journal of Textual Reasoning* 11, no. 1 (May 2020) <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/jtr/vol11/iss1/> and "Rabbinic Texts and Contemporary Ethics," *The Journal of Textual Reasoning* 10, no. 1 (December 2018) <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/jtr/vol10/iss1/>.

² "Chumie Juni," <https://www.carleton.edu/religion/faculty/> (accessed Mar 8, 2023).

³ Tamar Biala (ed.), *Dirshuni: Contemporary Women's Midrash*, introduction by Tamar Kadari (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2022).

the first academic journals to operate entirely online and open-access. In 2002, we moved, along with our founding editor Peter Ochs, to the University of Virginia. For twenty years, with the generous support of the UVA library, we have published innovative Jewish thought at the intersection of philosophy and text study.

The JTR has not, however, kept pace with the significant transformations in online publishing that have occurred since 2002. With Peter Ochs's retirement in 2022, it seemed appropriate to consider other options for hosting the journal. Randi Rashkover, the Nathan and Sofia Gumenich Chair of Judaic Studies at William & Mary, offered to bring the journal to William & Mary under the auspices of their Judaic Studies Department. Over the past year, in collaboration with the W & M library, we have been in the process of migrating the JTR to William & Mary.⁴ This is the first issue published at our new home.

The move to W & M has made it possible for us to make substantial (and overdue) aesthetic and technical changes to the journal. Most notably, we are in the process of reissuing past volumes of the journal as high-quality PDFs with the look and feel of a print journal, including proper pagination. We will be assigning each article a unique DOI, greatly expanding our visibility on Google Scholar (where our recent issues already now appear prominently in relevant searches), and making the journal available on online databases. W & M's platform will also formalize and streamline our submission and review process.

We hope that these changes will better honor the excellent scholarship that it has been our privilege to publish. We are excited about the next phase in the life of the *Journal of Textual Reasoning*, and we hope you will be too!

⁴ The *Journal of Textual Reasoning* is now available at <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/jtr/>.