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I. ANNOUNCEMENTS

1.1. Welcome to the latest issue of TEXTUAL REASONING. As many of you may know, Peter Ochs has moved himself into the wings and behind the scenes, and a new editorial team has taken over from him. You will find our introductions below. Needless to say we are appreciative for Peter's giving us this opportunity, and will also be looking for him to continue to play an active role in upcoming issues and activities.

1.2. We will all be getting together at the upcoming AAR/SBL meeting in New Orleans, Nov. 23-26, for our annual discussion (Sunday night at 9pm, in the Marriott, Le Galerie 2). Jacob Meskin will be responding to the responses to his paper (featured in the last issue of this journal) on Levinas' Talmudic Readings. If previous years are any indication, and also judging by the responses to Meskin contained in the present issue, the conversation ought to be exciting and inter-disciplinary, inviting contributions from students of talmud, Jewish thought, Jewish studies, Jewish feminism, literary studies, social theory, history of religions, etc. Refreshments will be served, and a business meeting will follow.

1.3. And here is an important announcement:

ADVANCE REGISTRATION FOR TEXTUAL REASONING: AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POSTMODERN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY AND RABBINIC TEXT READING JUNE 15-17, 1996 – DREW UNIVERSITY, MADISON, NJ

As described in previous issues, you are all invited to this major conference, guided by your various editors, who are hosting such text scholars as D.Boyarin, Tikva Frymer-Kensky, Michael Fishbane, David Weiss Halivni, Norbert Samuelson, Elliot Wolfson, and many more. There will be limited space and rooms available, on a first come-first served basis. SO PLEASE REGISTER NOW. How to register:
1) To Guarantee a space, send a pre-registration check for $50 by Dec. 15,1996 to "TR Conf" c/o Pat Glucksman/Drew University/Tilghman 302/Madison, NJ 07940. Write check to "Drew University Jewish Studies." And indicate Housing Option (see below).
2) To hold NON-GUARANTEED space, send e-mail note to _____, stating: I WANNA COME to June conference: name, address, phone, I will send registration fee my March 15,1997.
Either way you do it, here is the cost schedule:

1) Conference pre-registration $50; registration after Dec. 15 – $70; registration fee includes attendance at all meetings, coffee hours, conference reading materials, and use of university atheletic facilities and library.
2) Housing options:
a. University dorm room for two nights plus all kosher meals for $150 Total (cheap!)
b. Elegant rooms at nearby hotel, two nights $200 (including van service to the university) food.
c. for commuters and hotel guests, three kosher meals a day, price TBA.
PLEASE REGISTER AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE. WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU.

II. INTRODUCTIONS BY THE NEW EDITORIAL BOARD

2.1. New Editor's Introduction: Aryeh Cohen

As a graduate student at Brandeis I participated in a seminar which turned out to be one of the most challenging and exciting experiences of my time as a graduate student. (Michael Zank was also a participant in the seminar, if my memory serves me, as was Shaul Magid, TR's Kabbalah editor.) The seminar, led by Michael Fishbane at his home, came to be known among its participants simply as the Fishbane seminar. While I learned a great deal from Prof. Fishbane, the excitement and intellectual energy came from the group as a whole. The unique aspect of the seminar was that though it was a seminar in Midrash, the participants came from a range of fields within Jewish Studies-Bible, Rabbinics, Philosophy. Everybody had their own axe to grind and also the openness to tolerate other people's agendas–at least to a point. The seminar was a real working seminar–at each meeting we struggled through texts and with each other.

Each week as I drove home from the seminar with Mike Carasik, we debriefed as much about the group dynamics as about this or that insight. Looking back now, the seminar seemed to have all the ingredients for an

ideal learning group: an intimate atmosphere (with refreshment), people who all came to the table with their own intellectual baggage, and a seminar leader who wanted to get to a point, and had a point to get to–but was just as interested in the journey.

Ideally, this is what I see TR becoming. A meeting place for scholars who are coming together from different intellectual locations (Bible, Rabbinics, Early Christianity, Kabbalah, Philosophy, Literature, Theology of many stripes, etc…) to struggle with texts and with each other towards a place and a language that we have come to see (with the help of our founding editor) as Textual Reasoning. The excitement of TR, for me, is generated by the feeling that this journal has come to house a serious ongoing intellectual and spiritual dialogue. The fact that it is so natural to continue that dialogue beyond the journal (at AAR meetings, at Princeton last summer, at the upcoming Textualities conference) is testament to the fact that the journal has gone some way to create the outlines of a community of scholars.

I would like to see the journal expand into some areas that haven't been sufficiently explored as yet. Critical pedagogy — the description of the pedagogical situation from both an ethical and an epistemological standpoint is, to coin a phrase, critical. (see Susan Handelman's article in Steven Kepnes' collection _Interpreting Judaism in a Postmodern Age_.) Discipleship, mentoring, teaching and learning collectively are at the heart of a discourse that reasons through and with texts. We need a language to talk about this.

I would like to see more engagement with non-Jewish scholarship (that is, of and by). As the New Testament and Rabbinic literature are two conflicting constructions of Biblical religion on a broad level, there is much to be explored in the way that those conflicting situations unfolded in specific sites–the Song of Songs, martyrdom, death, etc.

I have gained much from participating in this learning community already, and I am grateful to Peter for initiating the community and the journal, and for bringing me into it. I equally look forward to the unexpected turns we will take together in the future.

2.2. New Editor's Introduction: Jacob Meskin

In as much as a piece of mine was circulated in the last issue of this electronic journal, and much of this issue is devoted to excellent and acute responses to that piece, I will keep my introduction here brief.

My interest in and efforts on behalf of Textual Reasoning stem from my feeling that this forum may provide an opportunity for something vital– the forging of new, and ongoing connections between Jewish tradition and emerging modern intellectual forms and systems. Indeed, all of our input into TR may also be important well beyond the case of specificaly Jewish tradition, offering others interested in their own texts a similar kind of opportunity.

Many of us feel–sometimes blissfully and sometimes ruefully– caught between, caught within both the marvellous richness of transmitted tradition and the promising adventure of modern, post- Enlightenment culture. Tensions are often creative (if sometimes difficult); perhaps Jewish tradition has always been advanced on its way by individuals struggling with conflicts–in some cases, certainly, conflicts much like the one just mentioned. Yet it helps immeasurably if there are contexts for folks to converse about and struggle with these conflicts. I believe TR may be one such facilitating, productive context. I invite our readers and correspondents to take advantage of this chance to communicate with others, like themselves, who are engaged in the unending process of articulating, refining, re-articulating, and creating new models for joining ancient texts and modern thinking.

With a new and far more apt name, and a new editorial team taking over from Peter Ochs, Textual Reasoning and its associated communication network can be a great possibility for just the sort of cross-disciplinary collaboration, intellectual experimentation, spiritual reflection, and generous give and take that many of us in fact went into the academy to pursue. We are contemplating many projects (some of which Michael Zank mentions below in his editor's introduction), and look forward to input from all of you to help us make this venture everything it can be.

2.3. New Editor's Introduction: Rebecca Stern

Since I'll be working on this journal as a student-editor (a new and to-be-defined position), I thought I'd describe my own experiences as a student, and then my ideas about how I'd like to involve myself and others in this project.

At this point in my life, the most potent and visceral learning experiences I have had have been at Swarthmore College (PA) and at the Pardes Institute for Jewish Studies (Jerusalem). While I'm not at all sure if I am a post-modern, I can say without a doubt that I am post-Swarthmore and post-Pardes. To be post-anything means, I think, that first that something became so deeply a part of your core that it defined you, and then later you expanded yourself beyond, against, or inside it. That is, I have had significant moments of change in respect to the strains of thought I associate with these two institutions, but I do not necessarily reject any of the systems I found there.

At Swarthmore, I became deeply involved in feminism, and it informed my studies in psychology (feminist psychoanalytic thought, especially), and my relationship to ideas and teachers in general. The intellectual and the personal got fused in intense ways–suddenly the liberal idea of neutrality and free choice lost meaning for me. The hidden and subtle sides of power took on a life of their own in my mind, often preventing me from taking risks for fear of learning from the wrong person. I

expanded on this sense of disillusionment with freedom in a class which critiqued liberal individualism–posing community, tradition, and obligation as alternatives.

So, with these two years at Swarthmore behind me, I took off a year and went to study in Israel at the Pardes Institute, a coed, pluralistic yeshiva in Jerusalem. I came to Pardes with two things firmly in mind: 1) society needs community, stability, and obligation; and 2) feminism–and justice in general–can never be subsumed by this devotion to stability. I left Pardes with nothing firmly in mind….perhaps this was the start of my understanding of what post-modernism is all about.

Jewishly, I came to Pardes knowing I wanted to learn more about the tradition I had come to love through years in a Zionist/Jewish Youth Movement; I never once thought that my interaction with Jewish text would seriously challenge my firmly-held rational, modern way of being. But in fact, being part of the Pardes community shook everything in me–I studied the same texts I had planned to study, I had the Shabbat dinners I had imagined, but suddenly everything was intensified as I allowed myself to entertain the possibility of obligation and/ or text from G-d.

Things opened up as I asked myself if prayer, study, and practice might mean more than simply another way of creating a strong, working community. I found my mind working more, giving more play to interpretations I might have earlier dismissed, not ruling out the possibility of beauty in any ritual. My search for meaning instead of randomness had taken on a new dimension. Yet this sense of wholeness was not untouched. While I was at Pardes, I was engaged in an inner struggle: I was passionately egalitarian, and involved in looking for a philosophy of halacha which might allow for human change in a Divine system.

I was fully decentered when I returned to Swarthmore–dismayed by the ease with which my college peers dismissed the very idea of sanctity or

revelation, yet not fully at peace with the system which had claimed my heart and mind. For a time, I was very ideological–seeing a need to integrate every experience into the wholeness of my ideal Judaism, of which I had a clear picture. I felt distanced from the randomness which I saw dominate my liberal college campus, but uncomfortable in very traditional settings.

At the present moment–living in NYC, working for Pardes American office–I find myself in a very non-ideological frame of mind. I am more drawn to the individual human or text than to the sweeping statement. I find myself working in the present moment, rather than pining for an ideal found in Judaism, Zionism, or feminism. Yet, I hope there will be times that these ideologies claim me again–pushing me to act in accordance with systems, not only moments. This push and pull is perhaps the best sense of balance I can hope for.

In this journal, I want to give students like myself the chance to enter into the unique dialogue created in this journal–a place for a meeting of the traditional and the non-conventional in Jewish text study. Many students I know have had intense encounters with both Jewish text (in a yeshiva setting or a college classroom) and also with various forms of modern or post-modern thought. This combination can make us think until our brains hurt, but if we are not in graduate school or in a teaching/writing profession, we may have no formal outlet. I hope that various students and ex-students will decide to devote some time to writing an article for this journal and to informing other students about the existence of this journal. The learning process is interactive and possible only in relationship–to teachers, peers, and text. I hope this journal can help students in the process of finding and creating all three.

2.4. New Editor's Introduction: Michael Zank

This journal means a lot to me, and I welcome the opportunity to share with you some of the reasons why I am grateful for the chance to contribute to its future as a member of the new editorial team.

I am writing this on Yom Kippur 5747, September 23, 1996. I have eaten breakfast and am smoking a pipe, transgressing a whole host of halakhic and medicinal rules, presumably preparing an untimely death for myself as well as for my computer. I have no noble excuse for ignoring the long-term well-being of my body and of my elecronic servant. And I don't wish to boast that my spirit is particularly alive in its defiance of the laws of the Torah. Yet this situation indicates something about who I am vis-à-vis *Textual Reasoning,* the Journal of the Postmodern Jewish Philosophy Network.

Halakha, the body of spiritual and carnal symbols, the revealed legislation and hedge around a people migrating for millenia, is, to me, not a dead but a "second language." I occupy myself with it to the degree necessary in order not to lose the little proficiency I have acquired in it over the adult years of my studying Judaism. My childhood and youth were steeped in German Protestantism, ecclesiastical and revivalist, disturbed merely by the repeated intrusion of maternal memories of sin'at hinam that had led to a drastic decimation of live family members and to a multiplication of names without faces that populated my imagination.

For me, Judaism is a way of not being a Christian. By this I mean several things. Christianity seems to me a polyphonic, multi-track reality that is almost impossible to extricate yourself from once it has shaped your memory and mentality, your symbolic imagination and your judgments. I have experienced it as my tradition, my religion, and my intellectual culture, and I consider myself on a passage away from it on all three levels. In all respects, Judaism has been the catalyst for my process of extrication, a guide and companion to adulthood, responsibility, and an intellectual coming of age.

I am not a baal t'shuva. I am less enamored with Christians and Christianity than Franz Rosenzweig was his whole life, and have therefore not felt the need to embrace the traditional world of Jewish liturgy as a means of defiance. Yet, Judaism — tradition, religion, and intellectual culture — has been the center of gravity by means of which I have beeen trying to escape the gravitational pull of the Christian orbit.

Christianity aims at "the whole." It casts itself as universal and catholic. Its logic cannot accomodate the fragmentation of midrash or the paradox of Jewish particularism and Jewish monotheism. The deadly arrogance of the West is founded on the myth of Christ-Cosmocrator. A particular verion of this myth may lie at the root of what percieve as a German complex of superiority, that perfectionism that is as devoid of a genuine sense of humor and self-deprecation as seventeenth-century tracts of Protestant orthodox dogmatics and that found, with the certainty of the moon-struck, its outlet in the administration of death to the Jews. As someone who has lived and breathed (post-war) German culture, I am trying to rid myself of this legacy. There seems to be no safer haven from it than the world of classical Jewish literature and its contemporary appropriation that is paradigmatically exercized in postmodern Jewish thought.

In truth, like many before and around me, I acknowledge the gravitational pull of more than one solar system. I live in a land between two rivers and partake of the waters of both (or more!). If I am committed to an intellectual agenda, it is one of "critical reconstruction." We are coming out of a shattered world that cannot and mustn't be restored. Where to? Postmodernism, much maligned these days, has grown from the ruins of the myths of completeness that dominated the nineteenth century and took on destructive political shape in the twentieth. Postmodernism aims at liberation from bondage to the great edifices of modern idealism. It is a critical, and thus eminently modern, strategy of defiance against academic, cultural, and political ideologies and a defense of the logic of monotheism, as recently defined by Lenn E. Goodman. [One of the

forthcoming issues of this journal will be entirely dedicated to the introduction of Goodman's *God of Abraham* and responses to it by Menahem Kellner, Allan Arkush, and David Burrell.] Many of our fellow-academics fear deconstruction as if it meant destruction of values and meaning. Imho, the value of deconstruction lies in its ability to reveal not only the moral destructiveness of traditional strategies of self-assertion but also the beauty of difference, the strengths of the powerless. The postmodern paradigm is psychologically beneficent. The God of postmodern discourse is not jealous, though she is not indifferent either.

Among the ideas for future contributions to this journal is a series dealing with the forefathers and foremothers of our discourse. If we define our interest as a meeting between classical texts and postmodern philosophy and as a platform of exchange between scholars trained in classical texts and those trained in philosophy, then we will find ourselves in the good company of the luminaries of the German Jewish renaissance of the nineteen twenties. Gershom Scholem described these in his memoir, *From Berlin to Jerusalem,* as "that small group of men (…) who would set up a community devoted to spiritual and intellectual activity […] to engage without any reservations in a creative exchange of ideas [… and] perhaps, to put it clearly but esoterically, to shake the world of its hinges." [Cf. Gary Smith, "'Die Zauberjuden'" in JJTP vol. 4 (1995), p.229.] Among these forefathers of a new awareness for commentary as a classical Jewish form of thought and strategy of intellectual extrication from the dogmatic ills of the idealist tradition is Walter Benjamin. Martin Srajek, as one of our contributing editors, is soliciting essays on Benjamin as a commentator on (sacred) scripture that will explore this stimulating thinker as an inspiring source of ideas for and critical insights into the pursuits of Jewish postmodernism. [Gary Smith, the director of the Einstein Forum in Potsdam, will be one of the authors to reintroduce us to Benjamin.]

My interest as an editor of this journal is to keep it as open in form and content as it has been in the past, and to add to it new and hitherto unexplored possibilities of enriching our discourse. To me the academic

excellence of the contributions is a matter of course. The main point is evidently not how to impress your fellow scholars with big words or how to place another publication for the sake of the graveyard of one's curriculum vitae, but rather the continuation of the pleasantly stimulating vulnerability and intellectual risk-taking that has been the hallmark of the discussions on our network, a discussion which this journal should enhance and augment rather than displace. Hence, we also intend to make some of the past discussions from the network available in slightly concentrated and lightly edited version, Discussionns dealing with halakhah, subjectivity and moral autonomy, the meaning of talmudic studies, the holocaust, teaching Judaic Studies, and other topics. We also intend to expand our explorations, for example, into the field of new approaches to the study and teaching of Jewish mysticism [Shaul Magid, Subject Editor].

Finally, a journal is only as interesting and stimulating as its contributors. You as subscribers are encouraged to send us material, books for review, hints and ideas at worthwile topics and prospective authors, and whatever you may think of as a way to improve our work. We also hope to broaden the base of subscribers. Rebecca Stern's membership in our editorial team expresses, among others, our concern with bringing in younger authors and readers that feel close to our agenda. Good luck, Rebecca! — Peter Ochs will stay on as Founding Editor and has declared his readiness to assist the new team as long as we need his advice. I wish to thank Peter for launching this exceedingly worthy enterprise and hope that he will approve of its future development.

III. Responses to Jacob Meskin, "Critique and The Search for Connection: On Levinas' Talmudic Readings" (Textual Reasoning, Vol. 5, No. 2, July 1996)

1. Aryeh Cohen, University of Judaism (for Textual Reasoning, The Journal of the Postmodern Jewish Philosophy Network (All rights reserved by the author))

It is appropriate to situate Emmanuel Levinas' Talmudic readings somewhere near the epicenter of what "Textual Reasoning" might be. Jacob Meskin very forcefully articulates the reasons for this. "Levinas moves beyond the standard dichotomies of modern western culture." He does this by way of texts and readings. "The Talmudic readings force us to ask whether the methods of the disciplines suffice to fix, or even to delimit, the meaning of inherited religious texts." Elsewhere Levinas contrasts "true reading or study" with idolatry. That is, "[t]he reading or study of a text that protects itself from eventual idolatry of this very text, by renewing, through continual exegesis-and exegesis of that exegesis-the immutable letters and hearing the breath of the living God in them." ("Contempt for the Torah as Idolatry," ITN: 59) Levinas offers a two-fold critique of the academic text scholar, and then suggests a new model which "links Jewish spiritual achievement with ethics and with humility,b defusing the risk of self-righteousness that attends the religious quest."

The first critique of the western academic is that the academic text scholar is concerned with "how to emend a text" and not "how to emend a life." Therefore, the hand of the scholar is the "impatient, busy hand that is supposedly objective and scientific, the Scriptures, cut off from the breath that lives within them, become unctuous, false or mediocre words, matter for doxographers, for linguists and philologists." This is a hand that is "without regard for the new possibilities of their semantics, patiently opened up by the religious life."

While this characterization of a certain type of wissenschaftlicher scholar is true, as far as it goes, I would like to raise the possibility that Levinas' own reading methodology does not offer a better option. The critique of the "academic text scholar" is that he might dissect the text at arm's length but never let the text truly touch him. I suggest that Levinas is also keeping the text at arm's length. While the academic does this through history and philology, Levinas accomplishes the same thing through allegory. Levinas' translation of the Talmud into the Greek that "demystifies" is

actually, I would argue, an allegorization of the Talmud which leaves the "pots and pans" (to borrow a phrase from Jacob Neusner) of the texts behind.

The discussion of the shew bread, which Meskin explicates at length, is a good example of the problematic nature of Levinasian reading. Meskin says that "[f]rom the Mishnah [BT Menahot 99b], Levinas would seem to have determined an appropriate form for a non-historicist continuity, a tradition of values ceaselessly enhanced and preserved over time." Where, though, is the shew bread? The abstraction is almost immediate. In one paragraph there are sanctified loves which move from table to table, are replaced by new sanctified loaves, and are ultimately divided amongst the priests and eaten. In the next paragraph there are no more loaves, there is no doughy stuff sating hungry priests. There are values what are enhanced over time. The real material eating, which is stressed at the end of the Mishnah by two other examples, gives way to abstract concepts. The Mishnah is translated into "Greek," it is allegorized.

Let us contrast this with the midrash that is attributed to R. Ammi in the beginning of the sugyah in Menahot. R. Ammi starts from R. Jose's statement that the principle of having the loaves before God always (tamid) can be fulfilled through having one set of loaves removed just past morning, and another set be placed just before the evening. R. Ammi then reads this statement to say that "even though a man learns but one chapter in the morning and one chapter in the evening he has thereby fulfilled the precept of 'This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth' (Joshua 1:8)" The midrashic move that R. Ammi makes is based on the mouth. Torah must not move from the mouth. Just as the shew bread ends up being eaten by the priests. This ability for the Torah to sate physically is what connects it midrashically with the shew bread of the mishnah. The midrashic connection is the eating of the Torah. The intertext of this midrash is Ezekiel 3:1-3: "And he said to me, 'Son of man, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go speak to the house of Israel.' So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. And he said to me,

'Son of man eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it.' Then I ate it; and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey."

Levinas finds in R. Ammi "another understanding of the nature of non-historicist continuity." But R. Ammi finds in the words of R. Jose the physicality of the sacred, and reads that into the physicality of the Torah. As Daniel Boyarin has argued, midrash concretizes, while allegory (or "Greek" in Levinas' terms) universalizes, abstracts. The midrash reasons through the text, making it more concrete, more specific, more physical. Allegory leaves it at a distance.

Levinas' second critique is of academic historicism. "Relativizing each moment to its volatile place in a flux of change, the historicism of the modern West reduces reality to nothing more than momentarily identifiable patterns of coherence endlessly giving way to new patterns." Instead of this model, "Levinas contrasts history's relativized concatenation of moments with 'holiness,' moments none of which are lost, only deepened by future moments."

I would suggest that the "academic" corrolary of Levinas' "holiness" is "narrative." This is that which makes sense out of the distinct moments. The academic field of Jewish Studies, for example, is an argument for a certain narrative arc. This is an arc which connects the Bible to Rabbinic literature to medieval Jewish philosophy, poetry and mysticism to contemporary Jewish expressions in literature, philosophy, theology, art, etc. What the specific points on the arc might be is of course open to debate. The debate, however, takes place within the overall narrative understanding. In the academy, however, there is also a recognition that the narrative is contingent, that the textual history spanned by the specific arc of Jewish Studies might also be accounted for otherwise. This doesn't make the explanatory force of the academic arc any weaker or less meaningful personally, though perhaps less totalizing.

In sum, as we push towards realizing a manner of philosophizing which actually transcends the categories that have stilted the discourse of the modernist academy, by way of textual reasoning, there is a need to feel the pull of the "flesh and blood" of the texts themselves. The texts as pretext will not transform the dialogue in the way we wish it too.

NOTES

It should be understood that throughout this response "Levinas" refers to Meskin's very clear elucidation of Levinas.

See the introduction to _Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture_, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), see p.8ff.

2. Charlotte Fonrobert, University of Judaism

Among the many issues that Meskin's excellent comment on Levinas' critique of modern western culture raises I would like to address two critical moments, as it were, that at this point are central to my own work with talmudic texts. I understand these two points to be intimately interwoven with each other. For the sake of clarity, however, they need to be discussed separately.

A. Levinas' Romanticization of `Tradition'?

In the introduction of his analysis Meskin assesses Levinas' work as moving "beyond the standard dichotomies of modern western culture," primarily the dichotomy between "modern" and "traditional," but also such practices as as classifying Levinas' writings as either his Jewish or philosophical writings. In this assessment of Levinas work I agree with Meskin. However, I am perhaps less confident than him, that Levinas is successful with the attempt to transcend these "modern" dichotomies. The question that I feel compelled to ask in this context is whether or not Levinas' critique, particularly in his essay "Model of the West," does not in fact overly romanticize "tradition" or the "traditional." If that is, indeed,

at least one aspect of his critique, the question would be whether he does or does not, in fact, reinscribe and dichotomize even more the very categories that he set out to transcend. Levinas' critique of the historicism of modernity, its devaloratizion of every and any moment in time, which he juxtaposes with his concept of the "always" as discussed by Meskin, may perhaps illustrate my point. Levinas formulates:

"And instead of…some sort of coexistence of moments of time passing, do not this predilection and this signification of the always call for a whole structuring of concrete human reality and a whole orientation of social an intellectual life – perhaps justice itself – which would render only such a signification possible and significant?" [cited in Meskin, PMJTR]

Rhetorically this passage is dominated by the repetition of "whole," the dream of w/holiness, driven perhaps by the anxiety about the fragmentation of modern life or modern "Western" society. This insistence on the whole, however, seems to resonate with critiques of modernization in Europe earlier in this century, which were driven by anxiety over fragmentization and juxtaposed notions of community with society. The political consequence of such a critical stance could prove and did prove to be fatal. Let me emphasize that I am not suggesting that Levinas takes a the same stance that the radical left and the radical right in the 1920's did in Germany. However, the resonance needs to be taken into consideration for our thinking about the viability of Levinas' stance in the cultural-political context of America at the end of the twentieth century. Meskin comments on this passage in Levinas essay that "a whole society, carefully articulated and pursuing justice would seem to be the pratical condition through which permanence in time might become thinkable." However, I am not sure what Levinas, and with Levinas also Meskin here, might envision as such a "whole society," extrapolated from the readings of the talmudic text. Might such a "careful articulation," even if in the pursuit of justice, in the end risk to metamorphize into total regulation?

The strength and critical force vis a vis the "western culture" of talmudic and subsequently halakhic culture, textually as well as socially, lies in the fact that it refuses to universalize, that it refuses to transcend limitations set by specificity and concreteness, a specific people or ethnos, specific bodies, male and female. Within these limitations it creates permanence, creates Levinas' "always," in order to sustain them in the face of the universal. Here I am thinking also of Levinas' statement, quoted in Meskin's essay, that "the 'eternity' of Israel is not a privilege but a human possibility." To continue my point, I would argue that the "eternity" of Israel is not a human possibility, but a Jewish possibility. By the same token it is not a privilege either. The critical force would lie here in maintaining that as a Jewish possibility only it restricts the universalizing moment of Western ontology.

B. The Gender-Plot

Towards the end of his essay Meskin comments on Levinas' concept of blessing and the life of (study of) Torah as the ultimate model of continuity. In this context he writes:

"A life of Torah represents a kind of ultimate home, the place in which one resides and into which one may bring the outside world. The world, and Greek wisdom, find their highest realization in the open life of the student of Torah; he or she becomes a container, a home, a self with such secure boundaries as to be able to welcome all else within. All becomes `continuous' with the Torah that blesses it."

The metaphors chosen here have an important intertext elsewhere in Levinas' work, both in his essay on "Judaism and the Feminine" [in Difficult Freedom] and in his talmudic reading "And God Created Woman" [in Nine Talmudic Readings]. In the latter, Levinas comments – approvingly – on the eshet hayil of Proverbs: "she makes possible the life of men; she is the home of men. But the husband has a life outside the home: He sits on the Council of the city; he has a piblic life; he is at the

service of the universal; de does not limit himself to interiority, to intimacy, to the home, although without them he could do nothing" [NTR, p.169]. In the former text he elaborates: "`The house is woman', the Talmud tells us [based on mYom 1:1]. Beyond the psychological and sociological obviousness of such an affirmation, the rabbinic tradition experiences this affirmation as a primordial truth" [DF,p.29-30]. The in/adequacy of this assessment of the "rabbinic tradition" cannot be discussed here. Nonetheless, what needs to be pointed out in our context is that throughout his work Levinas associates "woman" or "the feminine" with the house, with categories of space, with the home. I can only refer to work of the feminist theorist Luce Irigaray who has analyzed and criticized the place of this association in the history of western culture.

I would like to suggest that what this points to is that given this metaphorical context in Levinas work there is perhaps a deeper issue here that cannot be glossed over by using inclusive language, as Meskin does for good reasons in the paragraph cited above. If the feminine is the home, and if a life of Torah creates a space of home, then the question needs to be asked, whether, in fact, the student of Torah in Levinas' ultimate model of continuity structurally has to be masculine. A similar issue has been raised by Arie Elon and by Daniel Boyarin in their respective study of the role of Torah study in rabbinic literature, and its gendering as female. Given this gender-plot the place of women-students of Torah is quite complex, both in rabbinic culture, but certainly in Levinas work as well. In terms of Levinas' work, it seems that the gendered sub-plot that thinks with does not preclude the possibility of women students of Torah. Nonetheless, in order to work constructively with Levinas' critique of western culture through his revalorization of "tradition" the issue of gender needs to be moved into the foreground, so as not to turn into "traditionalism."

3. Robert Gibbs, University of Toronto

Jacob's essay is challenging, insightful and points to a key issue for our conversation: the relation of historical/scientific study and that of 'committed' readings. As a statement of L's basic approach to the talmud it is not only accurate but also illuminating. There is little I would quibble with–instead I want to step to the side and back a bit and raise three related issues that point more to what I am trying to do with L on the more general question: Why read?

The first point, and the overarching one, is that I see reading as fundamentally an activity of exposure, exposure to a challenge, to an instruction (a torah), and to a surprise. I propose we call it not a hermeneutics of suspicion or of piety, but rather one of surprise. The basic thought is that we read not merely to acquire further information, but we read in order to learn something new, new in a way we cannot predict. To let a text surprise us is to be humble enough to know that we might change our minds. The challenge to historicist readings from L's is whether the text can surprise the historian, or like the famous arguments over spurious texts in Plato, whether we already know what the text (in its established historical context) could possibly say. Were a text to write out of turn about an idea that 'comes later' in history, then we can argue it must be a later emmendation, etc. But the text instructs us precisely through its surprises. It might take a pro-Greek position when we expect condemnation, or it might take a position that opposes philosophy when we hope for tolerance. Jacob and L both write about the creativity in the rabbinic tradition. That creativity is continually surprising us, its current readers. But the traditional readers also found the earlier texts surprising. The tradition can school us in reading for surprise.

Second, I want to briefly address the textuality of a surprise, using the language of knots. The Biblical and rabbinic texts are knotty–almost in a literalization of the metaphor. The textile, the fabric of these texts, is made up of scraps and ripped pieces basted together, re-knit into a text that does not flow smoothly. This knottiness is, I would suggest, the reluctance to become rhetorical that L and Jacob both discuss. A historian reads the

knots to analyse the text, to untie it and take it apart. A dogmatist, perhaps, pretends that there are no knots there. But in the rabbinic tradition of readings, much time is lavished on the knots. What Levinas called rhetoric or Greek makes sense of the knot and dissolves the knotiness of it. A problem has a solution. It maybe one of Derrida's greatest achievements to show us how to read the philosophical tradition as one also made of knotty texts. Thus the 'absence of rhetoric' in the talmud is merely the attention to knots in the Biblical and mishnaic texts–a counter-rhetoric of sorts. And from this attention, the ongoing interpretative creativity finds its greatest resource. New readings spring through the cracks. Paving them over, ironing out the text, much as untying the knots and taking it all apart, will not allow us to be surprised, to be instructed anew.

Finally, third, the question of continuity, or even connection, seems to require exactly the alternation of day and night, the break from reader back to text, and perhaps further back to author. I am not trying to render the old texts obsolete in their disconnection from us–but the whole knottiness of the texts, the anachronisms, the delight in rabbinic interpretation of the most obscure and oldest parts of the Bible, all display how the discontinuities generate ever more surprise for us. Jacob can call the the crowns and their life a non-temporal continuity. The continuity seems to allow the texts that are not our historical contemporaries to address us–and it culminates in Jacob's argument with that infinition of responsibility that is the hallmark of Levinas' thought. But while I don't want to diminish that responsibility, I am not sure how it produces this other contintuity. His own title, connection, seems to be more promising, as both a technical talmudic term, and also as a knot: for the connection requires a disparity, even a discontinuity. The connection is contentious, the upsurge of meaning follows the fault lines of the text. The power to instruct us lies in the creativity that is born from what L calls the discontinuity of the generations: dor l'dor.

4. Steve Kepnes, Colgate University

"Since what is holy we must raise (in honor) but not bring down. And within (the sanctuary) was a table of gold whereon the Shewbread lay continually."

What is permanently holy, "eternal," here is the "within" of the santuary, the "holy of holies" and the gold tables. The breadis the symbol of impermanence, of something that begins to gostale and spoil almost immediately after it is baked. The bread is the result of human action– growing, reaping, threshing, mixing, baking. Bread also allows us to act. It sustains us when we eat it, it keeps us alive. It represents us: our labor, our becoming, our living. It simultaneously represents our permanence and impermanence, our living and dying. By placing plain bread on holy tables in holy places we elevate it and by eating elevated bread holy people, priests, retain their holiness. This illustrates the primary purpose of all Jewish liturgy and all of halakhah. To elevate the mundane and impermanent to the holy and give it some permanence and thus make Jews a mamlekhet kohanim v'goy kadosh, a holy nation and kingdom of priests.

This provides a model for what we as postmodern Jewish thinkers are trying to do in our thinking and studying. We attempt to bring our Western philosophy into contact with Torah to criticize it, judge it, elevate, it bless it, and then "eat it" so that it is a part Torah. This is a process which George Lindbeck has called "absorbing the world." I think it is what Hirsch was talking out in his version of Torah im derekh eretz. It can be seen throughout Jewish history beginning with the Israelite absorption of Ancient Near Eastern cultural ideas, laws, and values, through the rabbinic absorption of Greek and Roman notions through the Medieval absorption of Arabic philosophy up to the modern period. And then we see the attempt to go at this process from reverse. To take modern Western philosophy and culture as the base and to try to infuse it with Jewish notions. And it is that method that we are calling a failure, a failure in rendering us a holy people. This is the crucial element that we have lost in modern Judaisms: the sense of kedusha.

What Meskin using Levinas offers us is the model of Talmud torah as the the process of rendering Western thought, something not holy in the Jewish sense, holy. So that the elevation, the crown of all knowing becomes Torah or kedusha. And then we have to ask how and why? How does Torah crown all knowing with kedusha? And why is kedushah to be considered the crown of all knowing? And Meskin's most beautiful point here is that Torah or kedusha is the elevation or crown or heigh of all knowing not because it is necessarily higher in the sense of more true but because it embodies methods of study and thinking that reveals the limits of knowing. It is the crown because it brings the knower down low enough so that knowledge flows over her. It agitates knowledge, stirs it up and spins it forward and back so that it is increased to the point of holy knowledge. Holy knowing is the knowledge of the infinite nature of knowing which first fills and then overfills the knower. But this elevation is only won at the price of studying continually, i.e. day and night and also dusk and dawn. Day and night, torah, which can then absorb the dusk and dawn of Greek wisdom and allow the humbled student to glimpse the infinite in and beyond the finiteness of our daily bread.

5. Liz Shanks, Yale University: "Cracking Open the Fissures: Testing the Limits of Continuity"

One thing that strikes me in Levinas' reading of the sugya (BT Men. 99b-100a), is that his overriding theme — notions of continuity or permanence — prevails upon symbols that actually seem to me somewhat diverse. He *superimposes* continuity among symbols (the permanence of the Shewbread before God and the permanence of Torah in our mouths) that in fact are not identical. He slides over subtle differences, but leaves them percolating in my subconsciousnesses. The total effect for me is of e-p-h-e-m-e-r-a-l, rather than SOLID, continuity. I only vaguely sense the connections he points me to, instead of firmly grasping them in the fore of my rational consciousness. While this may be the effect Levinas wants to achieve — for it mirrors the elusive way in which tradition renews itself,

garbing itself in the relics of the past, even while pouring new wine into the vessels — I want to return to the tentative semblances that link the different symbols. Looking at them more carefully, I may not only see the gaps between them, but also better understand the notion of permanence expressed by each.

The sugya explores notions of permanence by looking to the very spots where continuity is threatened. In typical rabbinic fashion, a concept (in this case "tamid" or permanence) is defined by testing the limits of what the concept can bear. How far can one push the notion of "tamid", how many holes can one punch in it –and yet still have it be "tamid." Depending on whether one considers the permanence of the Shewbread before God or the permanence of Torah in our mouths, the challenge comes from a different place.

When the Shewbread is laid before God, continuity is — for the most part — achieved by passivity. Most of the week, the bread is simply before God. No problem. As someone once said, 95% of life is just showing up. In this case, continuity is relatively easy to achieve, because 95% of permanence is in the passive presence before God. The only threat to permanence is deterioration. If the bread continues in its passive mode before God, it will become stale. Ironically, in order to preserve the sense of continuity, we must affect a change. The rules that Levinas so carefully reiterates from the mishnah, ensure that within the changes, permanence will nonetheless be achieved. (Raising up the old bread before it is removed, by placing it on the gold table comes to mind in particular. Continuity requires that we revere the earlier heritage.)

In the gemara, with R. Yose's baraita, the focus changes. ("Even if they took the old away in the morning, and put the new out in the evening, they have still fulfilled the command, 'Before me ALWAYS.' The main thing, is that the table should not remain all night with nothing on it.") How far can we push the window of the gap open? How much innovation can we allow, before the break is too big. R. Yose sets the limit on nightfall.

Whether nightfall diffuses the social connections that make continuity possible (as Levinas suggests), or whether it is simply the quintessential liminal space, or whether it is the true marker of the passage of time is unimportant. For any of these reasons, the danger of nighttime is clearly demarcated. A reasonable limit is set.

As the gemara moves on to discuss permanence in Torah study, our achievement of continuity becomes entirely dependent on active engagement. Unlike with the permanence of the Shewbread before God, there is no passive way for the command to be fulfilled. Torah study is rigorous and demanding. Only when we do in fact study Torah are we fulfilling the command. "Permanence" is, at best, sporadic. The rigorous nature of Torah study means that permanence must be understood in a symbolic sense. In this vein, R. Ammi offers his words: "Even if someone only studies a chapter in the morning and a chapter in the evening, he has fulfilled the command: 'The words of this Torah shall never depart from your mouth.'" The symbolic action suffices to establish permanence.

Once we move into the symbolic sphere, it is much more difficult to articulate the limits, or even to locate them. Even though R. Ammi bases his opinion on R. Yose discussed above, the gap between them is huge. For R. Yose, the permanence of the Shewbread before God is not at all symbolic, but quite physical. The space of the intervening day is allowed, because a certain amount of space, a break between the old and the new does not threaten their links. If anything, perhaps the break is restorative. For R. Ammi, the space between moments of Torah is fundamental. For him, the breaks do not renew, but bear down upon him, threatening to topple the house of cards. After all, the links of continuity and the feeling of permanence are but a metaphor.

R. Johanan deepens the metaphoric character of 'permanent study,' by even further lessening the requirements. ("One can even fulfill the command by saying just the morning and evening Shema — but don't say this in front of an 'am ha-aretz.") In the metaphoric realm, limits are so

fuzzy. We can scale back the symbol, and yet it still signifies. Is there a point, however, when metaphoric permanence becomes so imperceptible that it can no longer stand in for "real" continuity and permanence? Apparently not, acording to R. Johanan. Even so, Yohanan dares not flout the metaphoric nature of permanent Torah study, since this might encourage the weak-hearted to refrain from even their few symbolic actions.

When we deal in the metaphorical aspect of permanence, the only clear-cut limit is to be engaged in a contrary pursuit. While it seems the permanence of Torah study can bear much passivity, it *cannot* bear its opposite. ("Ben Dammah asked: May such a one as I, having studied the entire Torah, pursue the study of Greek wisdom? R.Ishmael answered, quoting the verse — 'May the words of this Torah never leave your mouth' — If you can find a time that is neither night nor day, then you may study Greek wisdom.") While the metaphorical permanence of Torah resists erosion in the face of our laziness, it has no tolerance for its antithesis. To the extent that we have energy, we must put it into Torah study. Thus the metaphoric permanence of Torah in our mouths is established and tested by different conditions than those employed to confirm the physical permanence of the Shewbread before God.

Though Levinas slides effortlessly between the permanence of Torah study and the permanence of the Shewbread before God, I sense fissures. Even so, Jacob does an excellent job in the last page of his piece of showing that the final image of Torah's permanence is not nearly as metaphoric as I make it out to be. He shows Levinas promoting a different image of permanence: a blessing bestowed by God. Still it is worthwhile to explore the discontinuities between Torah and the Shewbread because they irritate when they are ignored. Stepping into the liminal spaces, we can greater appreciate the mastery of Levinas (and Jacob, in drawing it out), who forges profound links even where the root conditions present a challenge.

6. Rebecca Stern, American Pardes Foundation

My central question in response to Meskin's paper is the following: How do the modes of justice which Levinas describes relate to each other? To explore this issue, I want to take a closer look at the theme of private vs. public space, as found in Meskin/Levinas' various descriptions of permanence (and impermanence). Meskin ties the idea of permanence to connection and continuity. What sort of connections are being referred to–closeness to the text; connection to those whom you know face-to-face; or a connectedness also, even especially, to those whose faces are most obscured from one's vision? By focusing on the motif of public and private space I want to explore the links made in Meskin's paper between permanence and justice. In other words, to what end might this concept of permanence lead? Is it appropriate to ask questions of outcome of a thinker as mulitfaceted and fluid as Levinas? Is it useful to bring social science to bear on a decidedly literary approach to morality? Meskin points out Levinas' insistence that religious text can live outside the well-lit, carefully patrolled precincts of individual disciplines. Levinas' writing itself seems to defy separations; here, between the academy and the society, by his placing justice in a central place in his thought. For this reason, I feel the imposition of the potentially political concepts of the private and the public can be helpful in exploring Levinas' abstract and beautifully described concept of permanence, that state of time held by moments of holiness, by moments which have a meaning or are so close to the goal–and where not one such moment is lost, or to be lost.

Meskin provides background for his discussion of permanence vs. history by giving us examples of Levinas' critique of modern western culture. Meskin cites Levinas' use of the cafe as a prime example. The example of the cafe is a particularly appropriate forerunner to the discussion of permanence. Levinas suggests that the essential quality of the cafe is its openness and levity. Every aspect of the cafe culture is chosen, not imposed, and thus open to change. As Levinas writes, one comes to the cafe without needs (lack of hunger, lack of thirst), but only with light

desires. Further, the cafe distracts us from the needs of others, leading Levinas to call it a place of forgetfulness. The impermanence of the cafe seems to be linked to the forgetfulness of the other which leads to injustice.

It seems to me that Levinas' use of the cafe heightens awareness that the categories of public and private have lost their place, thus making injustice the norm of society. The cafe is by definition a public space–one which is visited because of its social, out-of-the-house feeling–yet it is privatized. Private space has been transported into the public, and with it a lack of obligation or connectedness to others. Yet private space has also been violated by this mixing of categories: Levinas writes that one visits a cafe [a]ll because one does not want to stay in ones room. You know that all evils occur because one does not want to stay in ones room. The calm and stasis of the private sphere–where perhaps contemplation would in fact lead to connection–has been lost in the cafe setting. The restlessness which Levinas suggests is driving us from private spaces leads to a privatizing of places of gathering. Levinas reverses our usual sense of public and private spheres by positing the cafe as the ultimate example of privacy in public, while the room is positioned as a place of concern and awareness even within the space of the home. How might these observations inform a look at Levinas' concept of permanence?

Levinas himself brings the abstract idea of permanence attained through holiness into the practicality of action. He writes that perhaps justice itself is the necessary precondition for rendering the idea of always significant. I want to focus on what is meant by justice here, and how the public and the private spheres come into play. Levinas uses a text concerning Lechem Ha-Panim (showbread), which is to be always before the Lord, to fashion his concept of permanence. He makes use of the literal translation of lechem ha-panim, the bread of faces. The loaves are placed in facing columns, gazing at each other. Here, Meskin writes, Levinas finds his first understanding of the nature of this continuity or permanence: it takes place only within the small society of interpersonal relations, where one is present to another face-to-face, and the two work in solidarity, unlike the

impersonality of society at large. In this instance, justice is found within community and relationship, seemingly a private sense of justice motivated by personal connection. However, Levinas seems to work in a different frame when he explores a qualification of R. Jose that the showbread is always before the Lord even when it is left empty for a time, as long as the table is not empty overnight. Levinas reads this statement as a fear of evening as a time when all return to their own homes–the private space–and community is threatened. Is the private sphere the saving grace of justice or the ultimate threat to it? Can a justice which depends upon personal connection last from the day to the evening, ie be a universal justice?

A third model of justice is presented in the idea that Torah as the ultimate home is a type of permanence. Meskin presents this idea in the frame of blessing as continuity. Torah then becomes that which blesses all that comes from outside, it crowns what is not Torah, elevating it, thus leading to total inclusion within a frame of holiness. Does Levinas mean to relate the state of continuity attained through the blessing of Torah to the state of permanence attained in a just society? The permanence here seems to be within the individual or perhaps the unified community, but not within the public, governed space.

What can we make of these three models? To summarize my thinking: 1) In the cafe section, Levinas seems to suggest that our private enjoyment and light relations lead us to forget about all those outside of our view–thus equating injustice with privacy (and perhaps with liberal individualism?). 2) In the view of the small society–the lechem ha-panim when each one gazes at the other–the view of justice seems to be kind conduct towards those whom you know and interact with. 3) The mention of blessing seems an ultimately private, perhaps philosophical, morality: all is included and thus all is just. How is it that the three interact? Does one form of continuity lead to the others? How does being a mensch in personal conduct; or being spiritually alive and grounded; connect to the urgency of remembering the face of the other?

7. Michael Zank, Boston University (for Textual Reasoning, The Journal of the Postmodern Jewish Philosophy Network (All rights reserved by the author))

Jacob Meskin manages to focus our attention on a few of those fundamental issues that have concerned us for a long time but which we occasionally lose sight of. He does so in, for the most part, straightforward expositions of the ideas of Emanuel Levinas developed mainly but not exclusively in one of his talmudic essays called "Model of the West."

The concern of Levinas/Meskin is with historicism, that bete noir which, since Rosenzweig and his ilk, has been a major issue in Continental philosophy, namely in its attempt to forge alternatives to the modern or idealist mode of philosophizing. Levinas' contribution in this debate is that of an alternative model of thought that he associates with the talmudic paradigm in Jewish tradition.

The alternative is one between relations, namely a) the paradoxical relation between historical objectivity and the alleged meaning and telos of history that plagues the "Western model" of historicism, and b) the relation between continuity, change, and meaning that is achieved in talmudic culture. The first relation is associated with Hegelian dialectics that is supposed to end in nihilism due to the fact that here the fulfillment of history is either sought in a falsely realistic or in a falsely utopian messianism. The second, talmudic, type of history is one wherein the past moments and values are always elevated rather than overcome, and continuity and meaning is generated and experienced in the perpetuity and socio-ethical concreteness of communal study and liturgy.

This juxtaposition is meant as a critique of the Western model, a model associated with "humanism," here identified with "Greek wisdom, a "humanism" that is criticized as rhetorical rather than sincere. This judgment of "humanism" is achieved by contrasting it with an

exhilaratingly welcoming vision of traditional Torah study. This contrast follows the tradition of apologetics where the worst of the enemy is compared to the best of one's own and, thus, reveals Levinas' stance as rhetorical. It seems to me that if, when, and where Torah study "succeeds" according to Levinas' criteria, i.e., where it provides a sense of permanence, continuity, and elevation, it cannot possibly contradict the values of humanism but rather fulfills them in an eminently humanistic way.

What, then, is wrong with the picture drawn by Levinas/Meskin of contrasting relations between historicism and meaning on the one hand, and tradition and meaning on the other? For one, there are many things quite alright with it. In the first part, Meskin achieves a beautiful characterization of the fact that "successful" study of Torah can be distinguished from, say, Dilthey's methological ideal for the humanities that, in the wake of Schleiermacher's exegesis of Plato, he determined as "understanding." Midrash (and I would insist on "Midrash" rather than on the much more oblique reference to "Talmud," despite its implied reference to open-endedness) "succeeds" (pardon my returning to this un-Levinasian word so repeatedly) where the methodology of Dilthey cannot. The ideal of a method is to succeed completely (historicistically speaking), whereas Midrash succeeds where it makes any sense. It does not aim at a complete reconciliation between text and comprehension but at revealing ever new "faces" of the Torah without taking away from the sameness of the Torah.

The problem is where these two modes of reading are cast against each other, as I understand Levinas as doing, despite all assertions to the contrary. The contrast is, imho, one between history (indeed an inferior, if necessary, pursuit) and the operations of a "cultural memory" (Jan Assman, *Das kulturelle Gedachtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identitat* Beck, 1992). Casting these as opposites seems to confuse one discipline of scholarship with another, a category error. Yet, as Meskin asserts, the opposition is one that aims at the obliteration of certain

customary boundaries between disciplines. And here, indeed, may be the deeper concern of the discussion.

The "text" in question, the "text" that needs to be rescued from the throngs of historians and philologians, is the text of the Bible, and the Talmud (Midrash) is considered its savior and ours. Because without a meaningful and traditio-continuous access to the Bible, i.e. to the Tanakh or the Torah, Judaism is lost. And what seems to stand in the way of a continuous reading of the text in the light of tradition is the reductionist historical methodology of Old Testament scholarship.

The problem, a crucial concern for many of us, is certainly not new. And it seems to me that the proposed solution may not be original either. And even if it were a persuasive solution in pragmatic and psychological terms, i.e., in terms of rhetoric, it seems to be based on an optical illusion and on an understanding of the intellectual history of the Jewish position vis-a-vis modern scholarship on the Bible that is, at least, questionable.

In this view, it seems as if, despite Spinoza and Hegel, Judaism was never severed from its continuous history of study and prayer or from midrashic exegesis. Rather, the ancient scribal tradition of elevating tradition through innovation has been flourishing throughout and despite those thresholds in intellectual history that demarkate the emancipation of Europe from ecclesiastical domination. Spinoza's critique of the Old Testament is then ultimately a critique not of the rabbinic Torah (too bad for Spinoza and his contemporaries that they were not aware of that fact!) but of the Christian reading into their sacred scriptures of a divine sanction for their wielding of secular power. Spinoza unwittingly inaugurated Old Testament scholarship as a discipline while aiming at the demolition of certain parts of the Christian "cultural memory" and its strategies of self-preservation.

Liberally minded Europeans felt the need to fight against the very text that, in Judaism, had long been open to careful philological analysis, an

analysis that was never seen as irreconcilable with the more creative parts of appropriating the text as relevant for the continuity of the Jewish "cultural memory." As the flaws of Old Testament scholarship and the Protestant fig-leaf discipline of Old Testament Theology became apparent, Midrash is discovered even by Christians and seized upon as a way out of exegetical nihilism and the historicist fragmentation of meanings.

What is wrong with this myth of a Jewish continuity despite the rise and fall of Protestant Old Testament scholarship is that, in the wake of the same European Enlightenment, the post-modern exegete has long replaced care for the contemplation of G-d in the letters of the Torah and prayer for the speedy redemption of Israel by care for the text as a source of communal identity and meaning. The two are not the same, even though they may rank as mere stages in the development of a continuous "cultural memory" out of the sources of Judaism, so to say. If Jacob Meskin does not agree with me, all the better. Yet, in that case, I would ask him to explain why he emphasizes the guidance of "tradition" over the guidance by "religion" or "dogma" or "G-d."

A few more minor points that are not unrelated. The experience of continuity or permanence, described in sociological terms of concreteness taken from the talmudic texts about the "Shewbread" and reminiscent of Rosenzweig's reconstruction of time in sociological and liturgical terms, can easily be distinguished from the indifference to the "thicknesses" of time and the constitutive problems of concreteness that characterize poorly conceived historicist understandings of time and reality. But is this experience of continuity a "religious" experience? Couldn't it also be a combination of socio-moral and esthetic aspects of experience, wherein socio-moral stands for the "outside" of the experience, and "esthetic" for the way in which the "inside" of this experience is structured? And is this type of system of symbolic communications really unique to Judaism? Further, are we not also barking up the wrong tree when we cast Hegel as the father of a historicism without spirit, especially when, on the other

hand, the Levinasian term "elevation" is nothing but an elevation of Hegel's "Aufhebung?"

In short, while I share Jacob Meskin's concern with finding a way out of what seems a somewhat unfortunate and crippling opposition between "historical and dogmatic method in theology" (Ernst Troeltsch), I have as yet to be convinced that Levinas' talmudic readings are able to break the deadlock between historical scholarship on the Bible and the need to reconcile it with "our cultural memory."

IV. THE NEW TR-LIST: A CALL FOR SUPPORT

Dear Readers/Subscribers,
This Network/Journal is in a phase of transition not only regarding editorial responsibilities but also regarding production and distribution. This transition concerns also the management of the discussions in Postmodern Jewish Philosophy.

We are in the process of transferring the electronic operations of the POMO discussions as well as the publication of the journal from the combined resources of Drew University (Peter Ochs) and Jewish Theological Seminary (the node from which the POMO list has been managed by David Seidenberg) to Boston University.

The institutional sponsor at BU is the Center for Judaic Studies (Director Steven T. Katz). The name of the discussion list is 'tr-list', for "Textual Reasoning." To post items to the discussion list, you send them to tr-list@bu.edu. The operating software is called 'majordomo.' To subscribe to the discussion, post a message to majordomo@bu.edu, writing in the body of the message 'subscribe tr-list youremailaddress'.

We know that there is a number of subscribers to the journal who wish not to participate in the discussions. If you wish to receive the journal but don't wish to receive any messages posted by the subscribers for

discussion, please send a message to _____, saying that you wish to receive the journal only. You will then be unsubscribed from the discussion list and added to a list for distribution of the journal only.

Finally, we plan to have our own website, linked to the website of Boston University. To write such pages costs money (ca. $250.- per page). We would appreciate it if you considered making a financial contribution to the improvement of the operations of our journal and discussions.

The Editors