

# Sigal Achituv

Contributed by Administrator

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What Did the Teacher Say Today?

State-Religious  
Kindergarten Teachers Deal with Complex Torah Stories

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Abstract

This article deals with the way in which kindergarten teachers in state-religious kindergartens tell the Torah stories to the children. The state-religious educational stream is part of Israeli state education and run by the state; unlike the independent ultra-orthodox stream run by private networks (despite being financially supported by the state). At the same time this stream enjoys legal autonomy regarding religious content to be taught, thus representing the

complexity of Religious Zionism: democracy vs. religious law, tradition vs. modernism, responsibility to the state vs. responsibility to religious law, etc.

## Kindergarten

teachers in state-religious kindergartens are part of Israeli Zionist society. They belong to different communities at the same time, and function at a crossroads of identities. It is to be expected that their identity will be complex, reflecting the built-in dissonance of their lives. In their educational work in the kindergartens, these teachers represent to the children, among other things, the educational and religious establishment. Through them the children meet the cultural elements outside of the family for the first time, facing a complex identity.

## The

Torah stories are central in the state religious kindergarten, being the departure point for the children's formal Torah study. The stories of the patriarchs and matriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel) told in kindergarten include an additional complexity based on the characters. The present article deals with the teachers' manner of dealing with the above-mentioned complexities.

## The

study, which included interviews with eight state-religious kindergarten teachers and observations of their story-telling, exposed gaps between the teachers' comprehension of the biblical characters and their attempts to hide this complexity from the children and even from themselves. The article presents the different explanations the teachers offered for these gaps, and an attempt to provide additional interpretation is made.

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## The

article deals with the way in which kindergarten teachers in state-religious kindergartens tell the Torah stories to the children. It is part of a large study dealing with the ethical identity of kindergarten teachers in state-religious kindergartens in Israel[1]. The present study was written as part of a PhD dissertation under the guidance of Prof. Alexander. At the same time as being a researcher, I am also a supervisor of kindergarten teachers in state-religious kindergartens, working for the Ministry of Education. For the past fifteen years I have been working with kindergarten teachers, following their personal and professional development, guiding them, helping them solve their problems, and assisting them in constructing a better-established and safer educational path. As a graduate of state-religious education and a member of Religious Zionism, as well as a former kindergarten teacher, I was given the opportunity to reflect on this movement as part of the present study. The article is based on the claim that Torah stories in kindergarten are placed at a crossroads of educational approaches and perceptions of religious commitment. While telling the story, the teacher deals simultaneously with educational, hermeneutical, religious and cultural issues, discussed below.

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## Theoretical Background

## Religious

## Zionism

In Religious-Zionist circles people tell the story of how Yosef Burg, one of its main leaders from the 1950's to the 1970's, when asked what the most important part of the movement was - Zionism or religion, would say: the most important thing is the hyphen! This anecdote is the essence of this movement's complexity, a complexity which was one of the main reasons for the many divisions which have taken place in the movement over the past 40 years. The complexity characterizing Religious Zionism goes beyond the familiar American confrontation between modernism and orthodoxy, since it also includes a confrontation between Zionism, which forces movement members to give the state of Israel and the actions leading to it an existential value, and religion, which can be interpreted as confronting the authorities and indifferent to questions of responsibility for state leadership.

This reality was created at the beginning of the 20th century, with additional elements added after the state of Israel came into being: the large immigration wave from Arabic-speaking countries which brought a large population with a traditional culture, different from that of the European religion previously known (Deshen, 1994). In addition, the absorption of this population in Israel and the confrontations created during this time between the (then) weak population of new immigrants and the veteran population of former Europeans left behind a residue of anger and feelings of inferiority which have begun to be expressed in the last generations (Hertzog, 2005).

Over the past decades, since the 1970's, the variety and division in Religious Zionism have been growing, so much so that some researchers choose to refer to "Religious Zionisms" instead of one Religious-Zionist movement. Studies have shown the ideological division of Religious Zionism through the "continuum model", with the national-ultra-orthodox population on the right side and modern orthodoxy on the left (Moses, 2009).

The present study focuses on women, a fact which also reflects tensions between awakening and changing orthodox feminine identity and traditional orthodox approaches placing men at the center[2].

The state-religious educational stream, belonging both politically and sociologically to Religious Zionism, is part of Israeli state education, thus run by the state, unlike independent ultra-orthodox education run by private networks (despite being financially supported by the state). At the same time, this stream has legal autonomy regarding religious content. State-religious kindergarten teachers are therefore bound by regulations set by the Pre-school Department at the Ministry of Education; while pedagogically they are under both this Department and the Religious Education Department. Kindergarten supervisors and the pedagogical advisors working for them serve for the teachers as a mediating and integrating factor regarding these two sources of authority.

State-religious kindergarten teachers, like all kindergarten teachers, are constantly torn between the traditional approach and the constructivist approach (Achituv, S. 2002): According to the "Traditional approach" the role of school is to transfer to the student the bodies of knowledge that were created in the past. The student is considered passive and his aim is to absorb a copy of the

knowledge which exists within the teacher or within the written subject matter. The source of the knowledge which the teacher passes to the student is the tradition, and the teacher is considered a source of authority for its transmission.

The progressive approach, or as it was called later, The Constructivist approach, recognizes the central role of the student himself in organizing the subjects to be learned and in constructing them. In this approach, the child himself, chooses, arranges and interprets the knowledge which is perceived from interactions with his surroundings. The purpose of education is to stimulate the child and to provide him with an environment where he can study by himself. The origins of this approach is the claim that the human organism is active and intentional by its nature. His actions are directed by inner will and autonomic development, and not just as a response to outside stimulation (Dewey, 1938, pp. 9-23).

The fact that they belong to the state-religious sector adds to this tension. The study regarding religious perceptions in Christian religious schools claims that they "adopt a didactic, teacher-focused approach, as opposed to a constructivist-pedagogic student-focused approach". A religious belief in an absolute truth matches positivistic educational approaches, and does not go hand in hand with the personal interpretation of reality characterizing the constructivist approach (Berliner, 2002; Knowlton, 1997; Lederhouse, 1998). The problem emphasized by researchers focuses on the question of education: how can the educator pass on his/her values and belief to the children, and at the same time leave them with some independence, as demanded by the constructivist approach? The situation state-religious kindergartens in Israel exist in, includes the additional issue of Jewish religious education concentrating on the Mitzvot, which can also be seen as contradicting the constructivist approach (Achituv, S. 1999).

Torah stories in the state-religious kindergarten

A pamphlet named "From the Beginning: Genesis stories for pre-schoolers in state-religious education - A guide for kindergarten teachers" was published in 2001. The pamphlet represents the point of view of state-religious education leadership regarding Torah stories in kindergarten. The Introduction section of the pamphlet explains the importance of Torah stories in the state-religious kindergarten.

Torah stories are given a central, significant place in educational action in state-religious kindergartens. This significance stems both from the humanistic, historic and national values inherent in them, and from the religious perception that God is the creator of the world and its leader, and his Torah is the Torah of life, in the sense of "it is a tree of life for its holders" (From the Beginning, 2001, p.7). Are kindergarten teachers working according to this perception able to use a constructivist educational approach? This question will be addressed later on.

Teachers in state-religious kindergartens in Israel tell the Torah stories using one of two methods: some of them tell the story based on part of the section of the Torah read in the synagogue (Parashat Hashavua). According to this method they tell the children a collection from the five Torah books, beginning with the

story of the creation till the middle of the book of Numbers, which is held in the synagogue at the end of the school year. The rationale of this method is connecting the children to the section of the Torah read in the synagogue (Parashat Hashavua) which the adults around them are dealing with, and the connection formed by discussions of this section around the family Sabbath dinner table, with the kindergarten child contributing the knowledge s/he learned in kindergarten to the family conversation. The disadvantage of this method is the missed possibility of taking more time and delving deeper into the Genesis and the beginning of Exodus stories, which are "dramatic, with simple story lines, suitable for pre-schoolers and close to the children's social experience" (From the Beginning, 2001). Instead of this deeper study, the teachers spend more time dealing with texts which are irrelevant to young children's lives, such as texts from Leviticus, and others.

#### Other

kindergarten teachers tell the stories of the book of Genesis and the beginning of the book of Exodus one after the other, at a slower pace, dividing the stories into small story units. According to this method the teachers begin telling the story after Simchat Torah, at the same time as the Torah begins to be read in the synagogues, and reach the story of the exodus from Egypt towards Passover and the story of the giving of the Torah towards Shavuot. These teachers overcome the disadvantage of not relating to the section of the Torah read in the synagogue (Parashat Hashavua) in several ways: dealing with a small idea from this section on Friday, inviting the local Rabbi to relate an idea from the section, or having an activity with the Genesis worksheets, intended for study of the Torah section by children and parents together in kindergarten. It is important to mention that yet other kindergarten teachers make do with the Genesis worksheets, and do not integrate the Torah stories into the curriculum at all.

#### The

recommendation of the national supervision of state-religious kindergartens is to tell the Torah stories in the kindergarten one after the other, and the "From the Beginning" guide was written according to this recommendation and structured accordingly. At the same time, please note that the guide does not explicitly state its point of view regarding the issue[3].

#### One of

the reasons for selecting the participants of the present study was the fact that they tell the Torah stories one after the other. Observations of their work showed that keeping the story-based continuation is important to them. All teachers' stories noted in all the observations began with a reminder of the story told previously and its connection to the present story. All teachers completed the story unit by mentioning and providing hints regarding the continuation of the story the following meeting.

#### In most

instances the main kindergarten teacher tells the Torah stories to the children, but there are other models in existence where the story is told by the other teacher (replacing the main teacher on her day off).

"The Bible at eye level"

#### In 2002

the newspaper Hatzophe carried on a debate which became known as "The Bible at eye level" (Baerzak, 2002; Ben-Nun, 2002; Neventzal, 2002). The debate dealt with the question of whether it is permissible to study the Bible while

relating to its characters as ordinary people with needs and sins, even if their personality is the greatest - or should the Bible always be regarded in awe. In the same way, the question of whether it is permissible to read the Bible separately from the interpretation of the Sages also came up (Aviner, 2002; Tau, 2001). The kindergarten teachers' guide, "From the Beginning" (2001), published by the Ministry of Education, says:

The characters in the book of Genesis are not presented in an ideal manner, but rather as human characters with virtues and faults. Sometimes the characters make mistakes and even fail. The Torah stories provide the children with the legitimacy to have similar thoughts or feelings, such as jealousy, anger or fear. Due to these stories they have better comprehension of their inner world: if the Torah characters sometimes fail, they can do so as well. The children get to know these "heroes", partly through these problematic situations, necessitating a critical attitude. They activate a system of criticism and judgment suitable to their age and their personal value system. Moral and religious judgment develops gradually, not through reproof but rather through familiarity and identification with characters who have feelings and who act like all people (p.8).

Unlike this perception, Farjoun-Kadosh (2005) says that "The child's moral judgment is not independent; therefore we must avoid confronting him with moral conflicts and the need to judge the actions of the greatest of our nation" (p.37).

The educational debate between "From the Beginning" and Farjoun-Kadosh reflects the general discussion of "The Bible at eye level". The first tends to prefer the approach represented by Ben-Nun and Bazak, and the second tends more towards the approach of Rabbi Tau and Rabbi Aviner, forbidding the comparison of biblical characters and present day ones.

Both of the above sources make didactic suggestions regarding Torah teaching in the state-religious kindergarten. These suggestions include, among other things, a chapter regarding the inclusion of the children in the story in different ways. This point also shows the gap between the different approaches: Farjoun-Kadosh (2005) recommends: "Provide the children with the opportunity to ask questions and raise problems, and try solving them together. Finally, the teacher summarizes the right answer according to traditional religious interpretation" (p.36). The guide also suggests "Include the children in the story, stop once in a while and allow them to think, react, answer or ask questions" (From the Beginning, 2001, p.12). This does not include the teacher's role of determining the "right" answer.

## Hermeneutics

### Hermeneutics

is the philosophical domain dealing with the field of interpretation. The kindergarten teacher telling Torah stories to the children is interpreting them whether or not she is aware of it. A discussion of hermeneutics is necessary in order to relate to the affinity between the teacher's identity and the manner in which she tells the Torah stories.

### Schwandt

(1994) divides hermeneutical theories into two main types: objective

hermeneutics and philosophical hermeneutics. According to objective hermeneutical theory, the teacher must represent the intentions of the biblical text's author. However, according to religious belief this author is none other than God himself, and how could man represent Him faithfully? The traditional approach deals with this issue based on the saying of the Sages: "Even that which a veteran student will in the future teach his teacher, has already been told to Moses at Mt. Sinai." (Yerushalmi, Pe'ah, 82, 55). That is, sacred traditional interpretation is the only way to comprehend the giver of the Torah. The practical conclusion from this debate is that the teacher must tell the Torah story through the Sages' traditional interpretive prism, relating to the text and its interpretation as one unit. This is the way to understand Rabbi Tau's and Rabbi Aviner's approach mentioned earlier regarding "The Bible at eye level", demanding the teachers approach the biblical text with great respect, forbidding its reading as separate from the Sages' interpretation.

According

to philosophical hermeneutics the desire to represent the Torah giver's pure intentions is unrealistic. Man cannot and is not required to sever his personality from the interpretive act. In the kindergarten the teacher is the Torah's main interpreter. According to philosophical approaches her role is to try as much as possible to discover the truth in the text, with no guarantee that she reaches it. How can a kindergarten teacher reach the truth? She has no choice but to create and present the children with the fusion of horizons between her and the biblical story[4]. A kindergarten teacher adopting this approach will relate to the expression of her own world during the telling of the biblical story as a legitimate, even necessary, act. Scholars espousing the "Bible at eye level" approach also represent the idea that every interpreter may approach the biblical text directly and interpret it based on his/her own world (Eliyahu, 2003).

The

article deals with the choices kindergarten teachers make when dealing with the complexity described in the stories. One might assume that analysis of situations dealing with complexity may allow for a clearer understanding of the behavior or opinion that must be upheld regarding these situations. We can thus expect that the choices kindergarten teachers make when telling the stories will inform us regarding their approach to Torah stories in kindergarten, and thus regarding their religious identity.

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Methodology

The

article describes a phenomenological study (according to the definition offered by Van Manen, 1990), integrating two branches of narrative research - listening to the teacher's life story and listening to the Torah stories she tells the children.

There

is much academic literature dealing with life stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995; Tzabar-Ben-Yehoshua & Dargish, 2001) - an autobiographical story which the interviewee tells about him/her self. Through his/her life story the researcher constructs an understanding of the participant's identity in the context of culture, time and place. Therefore, this research paradigm is suitable for investigating the teacher's ethical identity.

## Listening

to the teacher telling a Torah story also suits the definition of narrative research. Story is one of the most basic forms at the service of the human race in the creation of meaning. Every culture offers a number of options in constructing a story line, and the people of that culture learn these possibilities from an early age and are able to manipulate them in a creative manner (Sutton-Smith, 1995). This listening must emphasize the teacher's place as processor and designer of the Torah story.

## One of the

important differences between the teacher's life story and the Torah story stems from my role as a researcher - the life story is told as part of an interview carried out at my instigation and told to me. However, the Torah story is told to the children and my role in it is that of privileged observer. That is, an observer known to the other participants, with my actions severely limited (Tzabar-Ben-Yehoshua, 2001, p.119). Another significant difference is in the objects of the stories - in the teacher's life story she talks about herself, whereas in the Torah stories she talks about the biblical characters.

## The

study included eight kindergarten teachers from state-religious kindergartens.

## Seven

criteria were considered while choosing the participants:

1.  
Teachers of children ages 4-6. Telling the stories to children this age allows teachers to tell the stories in a more complete way, thereby allowing the teacher to express her identity in a deeper way.
2.  
Teachers tell the Torah stories one after the other, at a slow pace, which enables the expansion and deepening of the stories and therefore gives a fuller expression to the teacher's identity.
3.  
Difference among the participants. The teachers come from differing cultural backgrounds.
4.  
Teachers were chosen according to their willingness to talk openly about their identity.
5.  
Teachers were chosen according to their ability to express themselves clearly.
6.  
Teachers were chosen according to their willingness to participate in the research.
7. None  
of the teachers chosen work under my supervision.



The teachers come from middle-class backgrounds. Six of the eight teachers are of Sephardic origin and two of Ashkenazi origin. Five of the teachers went to state-religious schools throughout their childhood. Two studied in the independent ultra-orthodox system for some of their school years. One teacher studied in a secular state school. Three of the participants studied to be kindergarten teachers in a state-religious teacher education college, two in an ultra-orthodox college, two in a state secular college and one is a university graduate. Most of the teachers were exposed during their professional lives to the constructivist educational approach, an exposure which might affect their professional identity (Achituv, S. 2002).

I carried out two open interviews with each teacher, based on life story narrative research. This research methodology allowed me to examine the participants' ethical identities and discover their influence on the teachers' professional perceptions. In addition, I carried out two observations of each teacher while she told the stories of Genesis to the children. In this manner I examined the influence of the teacher's identity on the way in which she told the stories.

The participants were also asked to document the telling of the story from their point of view, during the planning, implementation and reflection stages. This documentation was carried out in varied ways - taking notes and even writing on small pieces of paper the story planning, the teacher's independent ideas, activities following the story, and the children's questions following the story. Some of the documentation took place via electronic contact with the researcher.

The teachers' choices amongst different ways of telling the stories had a central place in the analysis of the data. An educator's choice to act in a particular manner reflects his/her ethical identity. In order to identify the teachers' choices, the educational and interpretive alternatives they had and did not choose are explained.

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## Ethical Issues

The fact that I am a supervisor for the kindergartens, thus representing the educational establishment for the participants, raised an ethical issue: my status may have caused me to take advantage of my authority to further my research on the one hand and allow me to misuse the research materials on the other. In order to overcome the ethical problem, the research was guided by the "covenantal ethics", placing the researcher's responsibility towards the participants above all else, emphasizing the fidelity and care necessary in the researcher's attitude towards them (May, 1980). According to Weber's (1986) ideas, the researcher's care for the development of trust and commitment with the participants is based on the ethics of caring characterized by mutual respect, trust, attentiveness, comradeship and compassion (Noddings, 1986). In addition, the researcher acted according to Dushnik and Tzabar-Ben-Yehoshua's (2001) ethical demands related to qualitative research: informed consent, privacy and anonymity, reciprocity and partnership.

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## Findings

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research findings show that the teachers, both during conversations with them and during observations of them telling Torah stories to the children, demonstrate embarrassment and confusion regarding their stance in the ideological argument called "The Bible at eye level". The teachers telling the Genesis stories deal with the need to explain both to themselves and to the children the story of Hagar's banishment, the story of Rebecca and Jacob's stealing of Esau's blessing, the story of how Joseph's brothers behaved towards him and how he behaved towards them, etc.

When

studying these stories and others from the book of Genesis, ethical questions regarding the characters' behavior come up. These questions are particularly strong when dealing with the behavior of the nation's patriarchs and matriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel), in which cases they relate to the manner in which the teacher sees these characters and the way in which she chooses to present them to the children.

During

the interviews most teachers demonstrated a positive attitude towards the fact that the Torah presents its characters in a human light, not hiding their weaknesses. It would have been reasonable to assume that the observations of Torah story telling in the kindergartens will reflect this awareness, including discussion with the children about this complex behavior exhibited by the Torah characters. Surprisingly, it turned out that seven of the eight participants did not initiate a discussion with the children regarding the Torah characters' immoral behavior, despite the fact that it was possible to do so vis-à-vis the story contentÂ that day. Only one teacher, Heftzi, developed a critical discourse with the children, relating to the characters' behavior, during the two observations I carried out in her kindergarten. I relate to this teacher later on, first presenting the other participants' stances.

The

presentation of the teacher's attitudes is divided into four parts:

1. Presenting the common tendency among some of the teachers to glorify the Torah characters, presenting them as completely saintly.

2. Examining the teachers' attitudes towards complex situations faced by the biblical characters. I demonstrate how the teachers present these characters as acting faultlessly, and confront this presentation with their theoretical statements admitting the complexity of the biblical messages. Following this section I also present the teachers' attitudes towards moral conflicts involving characters other than the patriarchs, and show how in these cases the teachers have no problem presenting the characters' complex behavior.

3. Presenting three different answers to the question of the gap between the teachers' declarations and the manner in which they present the Torah characters.

4. Demonstrating the way in which Heftzi, as opposed to the other teachers, includes the children in a discussion dealing with the complex behavior of Torah characters.

1.  
"A righteous girl" - Glorification of Torah characters

As part of the teachers' agreement with the perception of Torah stories as a source of education towards values, they tend to glorify the characters, emphasizing their good deeds, sometimes with the help of interpreters and sometimes through use of directed questions. Emphasis of the Torah characters' good deeds by the teachers did not usually take place where there was doubt regarding their behavior, but close study of character glorification by the teachers is necessary in order to comprehend their attitude towards the characters' complex behaviors. This is demonstrated by part of the story of Rebecca and the slave (Genesis, 24), told by Liat to the children[5].

Liat: She doesn't have to bend down, the water rises towards her. The water rises towards her... he looked and saw that all the girls, all the girls have to bend down to draw the water, and this girl...

Girl: She stands erect. She managed to stand erect.

Liat: She stands erect. And the water rises towards her without her bending down. Because she was very -

Girl: Righteous.

Liat: And Eli'ezer began to understand this... And Eli'ezer saw what good qualities this girl has. What qualities do we discover here? That Rebecca has? She has the quality of -

Children: Giving.

Liat: She has the quality of giving. Did she have to draw water?

Boy: No.

Liat: He only asked -

Boy: For very little, but she brought him a lot.

Boy: A hundred times.

Liat: And she could have said: "I can't. It's very difficult." She didn't say: "Oh, this is difficult." She went to draw water... she went back and forth a hundred times. She first gave Eli'ezer a drink, and then who?

Girl: And then the camels.

Liat: That's right. And why did she have to go and draw water a hundred times? What did Eli'ezer have? What did he bring with him?

Boy: Ten camels.

Liat: Ten camels. So why did she have to draw, to go and draw water a hundred times?

Boy: Each camel has to drink ten jugs.

Liat: Each camel has to drink at least ten jugs... She replied like you said: the first question first and the last question last. This shows that she was very -

Girl: Smart.

Liat: What kind of woman, what kind of girl do you think Isaac needs?

Boy: A kind girl.

Liat: A kind girl, a girl that what?

Boy: A girl with much charity.

Liat: With much charity, a girl that what?

Boy: With much feeling.

Boy: And a righteous girl.

Liat: A righteous girl. Why would such a woman be right for Isaac?

Boy: A girl with good manners.

Liat:Â Â Â Â Â Â A girl with good manners, that's right.

Liat:Â Â Â Â Â Â Why does Isaac need to marry such a righteous woman like you said, with good qualities, who has good manners?

Boy:Â Â Â Â Â Â Because he is righteous too.

Liat:Â Â Â Â Â Â Because he is righteous too.

Boy:Â Â Â Â Â Â They suit each other.

Liat:Â Â Â Â Â Â Certainly. Very good.

Liat emphasizes

Rebecca's special qualities: charity, giving, hard work and wisdom. Combining the interpretations of the Sages and of Rashi in the story is meant to emphasize those qualities[6].

According to her these qualities suited Isaac, who had, again according to her, similar qualities. This version creates a complete, harmonic picture of the Isaac and Rebecca - the future couple.

A conversation with her reveals that Liat does not avoid criticism of Isaac and Rebecca, and does not see them as perfect. Liat, herself a mother of twins, was busy during the research period planning the writing of a paper (as part of her studies towards a BA degree) about Isaac and Rebecca as parents of unidentical twins. Her criticism of the two related to this paper:

I took Isaac and Rebecca as parents of twins who are completely different from each other, so I began with Isaac and Rebecca and their actions as parents in general, first of all it was important to me that it comes from my belly, and it did, quite literally... I was really bothered by the verse: "And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebecca loved Jacob." What's this? Is it a good steak that does it for him? Again, like we said, the patriarchs were human, and he was, he had them when he was sixty years old, so by the time they grew up and became teenagers he was at least...At the very least he needed a foreign care taker to look after his physical needs, and Esau provided those needs. Also, Rebecca's coping with a problematic child; Esau, just between you and me, had ADHD. In the paper I reached the point that they provided equal education to different people. They sent them both to Beit Hamidrash, he probably disturbed Shem and Ever, and was sent to stand in the corner, and that's it, then he went out to the field. There was nothing for him in the classroom.

Liat, a mother of twins, observes Rebecca and Isaac's behavior as parents of twins. She is writing a paper on the topic of Rebecca and Isaac preferring one child over another and her critical comments about them come "from her belly", literally... Liat's criticism is based on the literal meaning of the text: "And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebecca loved Jacob." (Genesis, 25, 28) She interprets the verse independently, saying that Isaac loved Esau as he provided his physical needs. The rest of her criticism is based on the Midrash describing how Jacob and Esau went to school for the first 13 years of their education[7]. Liat adds her critical comment regarding the fact that they provided two

different children with equal education, which is the reason Esau could not fit it and eventually found himself outside "the classroom walls".

## 2. Dealing with conflicts

In light of the tendency of some of the teachers to glorify the patriarchs, the issue of their dealing with cases of moral conflicts related to their actions comes up. What do the teachers do in such cases? How do they deal with the conflicts?

An attempt to glamorize

The main way of dealing with the complex behavior of the Torah characters I found in the teachers' actions is an attempt to glamorize their behavior. This 'glamorization' is done through emphasis of the positive sides of the characters' behavior and minimization of the negative sides. Some of the teachers are aware of their own biased orientation. Gila says, regarding the story of Isaac's blessing to his sons (Genesis, 27), I tried to glamorize... His mother ordered him and he did it, his mother asked him and he did it. Gila's attempt at glamorization is expressed by her justification of Jacob's cheating, as he was only doing his mother's bidding.

In another place Gila relates to her own awareness regarding the Fathers' and Mothers' complex behaviors, testifying that she does not glamorize these stories: It's true, they're not all perfect... Rachel lied about the idols... there are a few others. I bring it as is, I don't glamorize, it's true that there's nothing to... glamorize here. On the one hand Gila is aware that the patriarchs and the matriarchs were not always "perfect", and claims that she tells these stories as they are, and on the other hand she recounts her attempts to glamorize the characters' behavior when telling the stories to the children. The inconsistency in her words testifies to the confusion and embarrassment she feels when dealing with the stories.

This confusion also appears in Gila's life story. She is in the midst of her graduate studies in Bible Studies, and exhibits resistance to approaches to Bible study she has been exposed to:

I grew up in a very naïve manner regarding the Torah stories... this is the way it is and that's it... It was obvious to me, and suddenly I see things in a completely different manner... At some stage at the beginning, I began to doubt the myth I grew up with... this is very difficult for me... I read things that seem to contradict what I was raised on.

Gila calls the approach she was raised on "naïve". It seems that this definition appeared following her exposure to Bible studies, as it probably did not exist previously. She admits that while telling the story, the new approach she has

been exposed to resonates in her mind: Previously it looked to me like a young child, very naïve, very obvious, and suddenly, it's as if I open my eyes more. Another awareness, from a different place.

We can find a connection between Gila's life story and her attitude towards Torah stories. The general question about the connection between life stories of the kindergarten teachers and their attitude towards Torah stories will be discussed in a separate paper.

Tahel, like Gila, admits that she 'cuts corners' and 'does not go all the way' when telling the children stories of biblical characters' complex behaviors: Some things it's really easy. You know, you've been dealing with it for years. And some things you cut corners a bit. It's true I don't go all the way.

On the other hand, she also reports another, parallel, approach:

There is another way to see that the Bible also had things that are difficult, difficult, and it's OK to show them. It's not frightening to show them. Guys, the Torah doesn't only come to show us that everything is good and beautiful, everyone is righteous... it does open the door for another view. You say: 'One minute, how did King David do what he did?' And then you hear that yes, he did do those things. Yes, OK, it happened. So let's see what we can learn from this about ourselves.

Gaps between declarations and the actual story-telling to the children regarding dealing with the biblical characters' complex behaviors were also found in Yarden's case. At the declaratory level, she also admits the existence of complexity in Torah stories, as well as the importance of presenting this complexity to the children.

The Torah also tells things that are not always holy, bad things that happened, so that we can learn how not to act... and the important characters are people as well. And people have drives. And this is also a very important thing... You see the child in kindergarten, I also tell them about my difficulties... we are first and foremost people. We deal. And it's very important to show the child... these big people also made mistakes and we won't, we won't repeat the mistakes and that's why they are written. We are not ashamed of the mistakes.

Yarden admits that the Torah characters were also people with drives who made mistakes. In her opinion it is important to show the child the difficulties adults deal with. Less important, according to her, is who the role models are: if they are Torah characters or the teacher herself. Yarden also declares that the Torah is an educational resource specifically because it does not present its characters as perfect.

I think the whole story of the family, what's beautiful about these stories is that they are really extremely human. Dealing with sibling envy, murder. As if - why not take this out and our Torah will be beautiful!

On the other hand, in the kindergarten Yardena adopts a similar approach to that used by Gila and Tahel. Her phrase for the way she acts is 'emphasizing the beneficial messages', and she exemplifies it through the story of Hagar's banishment (Genesis, 21).

First of all, I don't change (the story, S.A) I tell the story as is, and sometime give some sort, some sort, I emphasize the beneficial messages. This is what I do... First of all he listens to his wife. There is a husband here who listens to his wife, and I emphasize very much, this is a real message that she actually gave him her slave because she felt sorry for him. Because she wanted him to be rebuilt by her.

The 'beneficial message' of the husband who listens to his wife is comparable to Gila's glamorizing of Jacob who listened to his mother. While Yardena emphasizes the 'beneficial messages' - a husband listening to his wife, a wife feeling sorry for her husband, she ignores the non-beneficial messages (in this case Hagar's banishment). This is similar to Gila who ignores Jacob's dishonesty because he listened to his mother.

Denial of the existence of a conflict

In addition to the technique of searching for the positive sides of the patriarchs' behavior, called 'beneficial message' or 'glamorizing', or 'cutting corners', an additional technique was discovered, denying the existence of a conflict. This is exemplified by Tahel's discussion of the story of Isaac blessing his sons (Genesis, 27).

I tell them: 'Do you remember that he bought the lentil stew? That means he turned, what did he turn into? The eldest son. If he turned into the eldest son then he deserves the blessing. So he took it because he deserved it'.

The explanation Tahel gives herself and the children regarding Jacob's actions is that it was actually his right to receive the blessing, as he turned into the eldest son in return for the lentil stew. Thus Tahel ignores the text which specifically describes how the identity of the blessing receiver was hidden from Isaac who wanted to bless Esau, not necessarily the eldest son.

Relating to the "other" Torah characters

We saw the effort the kindergarten teachers make to glorify the patriarchs and the Mothers, and their varied attempts to "improve" their actions, when those are morally complex. How do the teachers relate to the Torah characters who are not the patriarchs' and Mothers, and do not belong to the people of Israel? Some of the teachers admit that it is easier for them to tell the children stories of immoral acts done by Torah characters who are not the patriarchs' and Mothers.

Amalia



relates to the way in which she can tell the story of Lavan the Aramite. With Lavan, well Lavan the Aramite it was easy for us to tell, because he did it...

[original emphasis].

Yardena also admits that her level of criticism is different when Hagar is being discussed. It is a little easier for me to talk of Hagar as she is ungrateful, than to talk of Jacob or such. It is interesting that the reason Yardena mentions the ease in which she criticizes Hagar is her being, so she says, ungrateful, and not her position outside the lineage of the patriarchs and the matriarchs.

Tahel

compares the way in which she relates to the patriarchs to the way she relates to Joseph's brothers.

There [regarding Joseph's brothers] I have no problem saying that they behaved badly, and they are no less righteous, yes, so I must be using these places where it's convenient for me to portray this one as a righteous person and not touch him, and there are places I can bring this in an unequivocal fashion. Because it isn't simple, you are dealing with the patriarchs here.

Tahel

admits that when she tells the stories of the patriarchs she "portrays them as righteous", and on the other hand, regarding Joseph's brothers, despite their being "no less righteous" in her opinion, "she has no problem" criticizing them.

We

can speculate that the reason for glorifying the biblical characters is related to national identity. Possibly this boundary was meant to mark the pride of belonging to "the good guys" rather than "the bad guys".

As

Grossman (1995, pp.160-162) says, Rashi, in his commentary on the Torah, stresses the love of Israel and his expectations of the fall of the Christian world. Possibly the teachers, who use Rashi quite a lot, are influenced in this matter by his work, perhaps even subconsciously. However, it is important to admit that this is only a supposition, the present study did not discover any clear statements to this effect made by the teachers, and thus the discussion ends here.

3.

Why "cut corners"?

Below

I discuss in detail different explanations given by the teachers (those who were aware that they were "cutting corners") for why they "cut corner". Each explanation is followed by the teacher's positive attitude towards the complex presentation of the Torah characters, so that the contradiction between the different theories she presents is made clear. Three reasons were found which may explain this phenomenon.

I. A value-based reason

Since

the aim of the story is, as explained above, is to present the ideal values of

morality and religion to the children, it is only natural that the characters representing these values be presented in an ideal fashion, even to an extreme. In the study we uncovered three different ways in which this is expressed, and they are presented below as explained by the teachers.

"Our patriarchs were righteous, many levels above us - but they were also people".

Some teachers identify and internalize these perceptions of the patriarchs so deeply, going as far as attributing qualities of sainthood and special spirituality, at a super-human level, to the patriarchs and matriarchs. These perceptions do not allow them to even consider their immoral behavior. However, sometimes even such an extreme perception of the patriarchs does not prevent the teacher from admitting the existence of moral problems. This is exemplified through Amalia's words regarding Rebecca's behavior in the story of Isaac and the blessings (Genesis, 27).

In this case I tell them that Rebecca is a very spiritual woman. She is extremely righteous and sees more things that Jacob doesn't see, and God spoke to her and told her... they didn't lie, she only did what God told her to do, because, there are many interpretations for this. We can find a way out.

Amalia believes, based on traditional interpretation, that the act Rebecca committed is based on her righteousness and the direction she received from God; therefore, as far as she is concerned, this could not be immoral[8]. It seems that what motivates Amalia is to "find a way out", that is, manage to escape the need to criticize Rebecca in order to construct her image as a righteous woman. She believes that what the Torah says is at a level above our comprehension, and the solutions to the difficulties and the complexities of the text can be found at hidden levels.

Generally speaking I know that everything is defensible, and we simply don't understand exactly what happened there. Indeed, when they [the children] asked about Esau, about Jacob, why she [Rebecca] does it, why she gives him Esau's clothes, and why she lies, and why she cheats, so, I have some answers, I also study a lot of Kaballa so I answer them... everything has an answer.

Amalia based her words on the assumption that "everything has an answer", and "everything is defensible", only we don't know the answers. The aim is, as explained above, to manage to "find a way out" in the kindergarten, and for this purpose she also uses Kaballa solutions which she hears in the lessons she takes.

In opposition to the clear approach that the biblical characters were holy and pure, Amalia also expresses herself in the opposite manner.

The truth is that this is the beauty of the Torah, that even if there are things that the Torah tells us, also bad things, this is the beauty of the Torah. I say that I'm not afraid to say this, despite the fact that they are children...

Unlike

other teachers, who exhibited a gap between their personal opinion and their educational approach in the kindergarten, Amalia faces a problem and a contradiction between her own different perceptions regarding the Torah characters - in practice we see how Amalia not only glorifies the characters of the patriarchs and the matriarchs in her kindergarten, but also gives a reason for this that does not allow one to question their behavior. Liat also attributes to the patriarchs a special spiritual level, but at the same time recognizes their humanity. Our patriarchs were much more righteous than we are, but they were also human.

When

telling the children stories, Liat does, indeed, emphasize to a great extent the special spiritual level of the patriarchs and matriarchs, as can be seen in her story of Rebecca and the slave. Again, we see the gap between Liat's belief that "our patriarchs were righteous", and the rest of her words "but they were also human". In the kindergarten she describes the patriarchs in a glorifying manner suited to her belief regarding their righteousness, but outside the kindergarten she declares the characters' imperfection which allows one to identify with them.

The very fact that the Torah characters are not presented as perfect characters, angelic characters, heavenly characters, already means that we need to and can identify with them... What do I do in situations where I need to tell a story about our patriarchs and matriarchs who do things which are not clearly perfect, that are clearly imperfect, as there is cheating and killing and envy, but this makes them human and allows us to identify with them, as again, if you bring an angelic, heavenly character with no connection between it and you, then you will have no reason to identify with her.

Not damaging the educational task - an educational constraint

A

group of explanations of the gap between the teachers' comprehension of the Torah stories and the way in which they are told in kindergarten explains it as an educational constraint. According to the teachers providing this explanation, the teacher must avoid telling the truth in kindergarten in order not to do damage to the educational task. Hanna, for example, specifically says that the act of stealing the blessing is immoral.

And then I said that's right, what Rebecca told Jacob to do was really not so, doesn't look so good, lying to your father is not a good deed...it's terrible, terribly difficult. It's difficult that it's really cheating...

She

does not ignore the difficulty, and unlike Amalia and Liat she presents a clear perception admitting Jacob's "cheating", but in the kindergarten she "cuts corners" in the story, explaining it as part of her role of educating for values.

Why cut corners? Because I think that if we see here that the mother actually says to her son not to honor his father, that is, to lie to him and cheat him, I cannot support this in a way, that is, tell the story in a very direct manner and that's it. I have to make it softer, make it

softer that Rebecca told him that only because she knew that Jacob is a good man, he studies the Torah... I had to somehow bring the story a little, not with all its weight, soften it a little and cut corners, in order not to emphasize the fact that there was cheating here.

Clearly

Hanna differentiates between her own misgivings and the way in which she feels she ought to educate the children, citing their tender age as a consideration in making a decision regarding the issue. I think they are still too young for us to emphasize the possible negative aspects of our patriarchs and matriarchs.

Educational responsibility

An

additional explanation provided by the teachers relates to the responsibility they feel for shaping the children's perceptions of the Torah characters. Yardená, for example, expresses this responsibility clearly.

I feel the children need to come out respecting these figures. Because I feel these characters are to be followed... Especially at a young age we wish to enrich them, to show a spiritual figure... A child where they [the parents] don't tell stories at home and he will know what he's told in kindergarten, perhaps he'll know only what Yardená tells him here, and perhaps he won't study in a religious school, and perhaps he, I don't know what will happen to him later on, and there's no Sabbath table... it's a responsibility. And sometimes what you have left... what you learn when you're young is very difficult. I see this song when I was a child, and I sing it with a child's errors. You know how difficult it is for me to eradicate this. I don't want them to be left with, because the stories are very strong. We have a very heavy responsibility.

Yardená

shows the children "a spiritual figure" so that it will stay with them. She knows that many children in her kindergarten, as in other state-religious kindergartens in cities, will attend secular state schools. She sees her role as a state-religious kindergarten teacher as a window of opportunity allowing her to shape the children's religious perception.

II. "God allowed this to happen" - a reason relating to God's image

Unlike

the former reason, which was based on the values represented by the Torah characters, the reason exemplified by Shiri relates to the image of God himself as responsible for biblical history.

We also find it a little difficult to understand, but this is what the Torah says, and I can tell them that if God allowed this to happen then it must be OK, everything God does is for the best, this is what has been meant to happen, I can add this sort of answer, a religious answer.

What

does Shiri mean by the concept "a religious answer"? It seems that Shiri differentiates between her own opinion of the Torah characters' actions, which includes doubts and criticism, and the way which she feels she should educate towards, which she calls the "religious" way. Indeed, in other places Shiri

expresses a critical opinion regarding the actions of the Torah characters. For example, she criticizes Jacob's behavior prior to meeting Esau (Genesis, 33, 1-7).

It really bothers me when I tell them that Jacob divided his beloved family and put his beloved Rachel last and the wives first, Zilpa and Bilha, and then Leah... The female slaves and their sons are separate in my opinion, if I remember correctly. Like they were cannon fodder, they were the first.

Unlike her critical stance, Shiri chooses the "religious" way when addressing the children, presenting them with the approach that "everything God does is for the best". The problem Shiri sees in these cases is not related to the patriarchs' morality, but rather to theodition - the question of God's justice. Assuming that God is behind the Torah stories, how can we present the stories if we see them as stories of wrongdoing and injustice? Shiri's conclusion is that we must change our understanding of the stories and see them as stories of exemplary figures. The basic assumption Shiri's question relates to is God's absolute control of the actions described in the Torah. Thus, at least in the biblical context, the responsibility lies with God and not with the human characters[9].

### III. Defending the child's emotional well-being

The third reason the teachers provide for the gap between the way they see the complex Torah stories and the way they present them to the children is related to their perception of some of the stories as threatening the children emotionally, thus particularly problematic as they might awaken difficult, threatening feelings in the children. Yardena exemplifies this through her attitude to the description of the relationships in Rebecca and Isaac's family (Genesis, 25, 28).

The fact that Rebecca prefers one child and Isaac prefers the other, the father who wants to bless Esau and the mother Jacob. How do I even begin to say this thing in kindergarten? You know how difficult this is for me. What do I say, how do I say this. I mean, what a riddle. This is really difficult for me. So I say that the father loves the quality. Because think of a child whose parents are often angry with him at home. How will this child go home and what will he think of himself with the situation at home? Even when they are angry at him for a specific reason it doesn't mean they are angry at his personality. Of course not - they love him.

#### Defending

Isaac and Rebecca who each prefer one son is presented by Yardena as defense of the children's emotional domain, as they may connect the story with unpleasant experiences of anger in their own homes. This is not related to Isaac and Rebecca's characters, but rather to the teacher's responsibility for the children's emotional development, as part of her "caring" perception which is based on attention and compassion and is interested in the child's welfare from his own point of view (Noddings, 1984).

Â The clearest example brought by the teachers regarding protecting the children's emotional well-being is their attitude towards the story of Isaac's sacrifice (Genesis, 22). The teachers deal with this story in different ways, from complete avoidance, through telling it in a softened version, all the way to telling it as is. This is all related to the

need to protect the children emotionally. Not one of the teachers touched upon the moral issue of the story.

4.

"I also think it's unfair" - recognition of imperfection

As

mentioned earlier, Heftzi was the only one of the participants who did not hesitate in raising moral dilemmas inherent in the Fathers' behavior when telling the children Torah stories. This is exemplified by quotes from two different Torah stories she tells the children.

The

story of Sarai and Hagar (Genesis, 13).

Heftzi: "And

Sarai said to Abraham..." Sarai knew that she has no children, and she really wanted a child, but couldn't have children. So she says to Abraham take our servant, Hagar, and have a child with her and I will raise it.

Boy: Who will raise?

Heftzi: Who will raise the child? Sarai. Sarai will raise the child.

Boy: But this isn't fair.

Heftzi: Why isn't it fair?

Boy: Because then Sarai will be the servant.

Heftzi: You're right, she's not the one having the baby, but this was really accepted, in those days it was accepted. In those days it was possible to have the servant have a child and someone else will raise him. And you're right that it isn't fair. I also think it isn't fair. But this was acceptable then. And we spoke about the things that were acceptable then and we really don't see today.

Boy: It really isn't fair. Because then, if a female slave makes an effort to have a child, then the child won't be hers.

Heftzi: That's right, maybe that's why they stopped it, because it's so unfair. It's so unsuitable, that's why they stopped it.

The

story of stealing the blessing (Genesis, 27).

Heftzi:Â Â Â Â What  
do you think, how did Jacob feel? What did Jacob say? How did Jacob feel when  
he heard that his mother is trying to do something to him that isn't so  
honest?...

Boy:Â Â Â Â Â Â Bad.

Heftzi:Â Â Â Â Not  
so good. How does Jacob feel, does he feel bad? Why do you think he feels bad?  
Think for a minute.

Girl:Â Â Â Â Â Â Â That  
he'll do it.

Heftzi:Â Â Â Â Do  
you think he'll do exactly what his mother says? Won't he say anything?

Boy:Â Â Â Â Â Â Yes.

Girl:Â Â Â Â Â Â Â I  
think he's sad.

Heftzi:Â Â Â Â He's  
sad? Why?

Girl:Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Because  
his mother, his mother does that, lies to her husband.

In  
the first observation Heftzi speaks of Sarai who gave Abraham her slave Hagar  
to give him a child. The moral judgment regarding this act originates with one  
of the children, who claims that this is unfair, and Heftzi agrees with him,  
but also provides an explanation - the act suited the spirit of the times, and  
perhaps its unfairness was the reason they stopped acting this way.

In  
the second observation, when Heftzi tells the story of the stolen blessing, she  
opens the discussion with a question - how did Jacob feel when his mother did  
something "not so honest"? Heftzi expresses her opinion regarding Rebecca's  
actions openly to the children, and does not express her opinion regarding  
Jacob's actions, instead initiating a discussion with the children about his  
feelings.

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Discussion

The  
findings have exposed that the way the participant kindergarten teachers  
conduct themselves in this world is full of conflict, characterized by gaps

between their theoretical statements and their de-facto actions in the kindergarten. All the teachers related in the interviews with understanding and in a positive light to the fact that the Torah presents its characters in a human light and does not hide their weaknesses. In practice, seven of the eight teachers did not initiate a discussion with the children regarding immoral behaviors exhibited by the Torah characters, despite the fact that they could have done so as far as story content is concerned. In addition, the findings show that these seven teachers found varied ways of "cutting corners" regarding the immoral behavior of the patriarchs and matriarchs when telling the stories to the children. The considerations the teachers cite as motivating them to cut corners are value-based considerations, considerations relating to God's justice and developmental-educational-emotional considerations.

The findings show that the reasons for this "corner cutting" by the teachers can be explained by three categories of discrepancies:

1.

The first category includes the gaps between the teachers' familiarity and identification with modern academic approaches reflecting Western thought on the one hand, and their affinity to, connection with and belief in the Jewish tradition they grew up with on the other. These gaps reflect the inner turmoil the teachers feel regarding their different identities, which they themselves have to cope with and do not feel they have managed to bridge.

2.

The second category includes gaps between the "truth" as perceived and declared by the teachers on the one hand and the way they choose to present this truth to the children on the other. Thus, this category deals with the manner in which the teacher deals with the gaps, taking into account the practical aspects belonging to the professional-educational world. The gaps are explained by Hanna and Yarden as stemming from their wish to protect the children who are very young, caring for their proper emotional development, exemplified by the teachers' ambivalent attitude to telling the story of Isaac's sacrifice in the kindergarten.

The

gap between the declared "truth" and the way it is presented to the children is also explained as part of the educational responsibility the teachers take upon themselves as representatives of state-religious education for shaping the children's religious perception, an explanation exemplified by Yarden's words.

This

category takes us back to the issue discussed at the beginning of the article regarding education and teaching, where the difficulty inherent in constructivist religious education was mentioned. The findings showing the responsibility the teachers take upon themselves for shaping the children's religious perception clarify this difficulty, raising questions regarding their ability to act in the kindergarten in a constructivist manner. These issues need to be addressed in a separate article.

3.

The third category is made up of gaps between a personal world view and external dictates expressed by the expectations of the religious establishment. This category is expressed in Hanna's words regarding the educational constraint she is acting under, and also hinted at in Shiri's words regarding the "religious perception" she adopts when telling the stories to the children[10].



Due

to constraints of space it is not possible to deal with all three categories,Â thus the article focuses on the first category - the teachers' identity as belonging to the Religious-Zionist movement. The immigration of Sephardic Jews to Israel was mentioned earlier as one of the elements affecting the complexity of the Religious-Zionist movement. Six of the eight participants are of Sephardic origin, representing both the Religious-Zionist movement and the Sephardic community. The following discussion relates to both communities.

The

teachers' affinity to traditional Judaism learned at home characterizes Sephardic religiosity. This affinity can be seen as the main motive for the teachers' efforts "to make the patriarchs look like righteous men". The traditional approach the teachers identify with the homes they grew up in was to present the patriarchs as perfect characters. Horev (2002) describes religious life in traditional Sephardic families as a life of action and experience. Discussion of religious topics in traditional Sephardic homes is not related to in a critical manner. Religious matters have a story-like, sermon-like character, strengthening religion and religiosity (p.10). The participants who were raised in such families return to this approach out of respect and affinity to their families, recreating it as kindergarten teachers.

It

is possible to widen this theory in the following manner: the characters of the patriarchs in Genesis are identified, perhaps subconsciously, with the teachers' fathers. As the teacher eventually perceives these as parental figures, she tries to preserve their honor as a projection of the respect she was brought up to feel.

The

modern, academic approach typical of the teachers' discourse regarding the complex issues present in the Torah, conflicts with their being raised in a family with a traditional Sephardic perception, thus the strong gaps in the teachers' attitudes towards the stories.

Over

the past 30 years the Religious-Zionist sector has been dividing and re-dividing into sub-sectors based on different points of view, internal debates resonating in the media in the form of Rabbis' letters, newspaper articles, etc. The opposing conflicts and perceptions the teachers present regarding these issues reflect the many points of view characterizing Religious-Zionist society. The teachers have probably been influenced by these multiple points of view through lectures and lessons they had heard from the sector Rabbis, reading synagogue pamphlets, and exposure to varied media.

My

claim is that, due to all this, the kindergarten teachers have difficulty expressing a complex religious world in which not all its heroes are perfect, in front of the children. One of the reasons for this difficulty is based on the state-religious educational system the teachers have attended.

At

this point I would like to remark that I believe in young children's ability to perceive complex messages. Especially in a religious context, it is important to exhibitÂ the complexity of the characters in front of the children, and in this way to sow the seeds of critical thinking from early on.

Achituv

Y. (1995, pp.195-197) analyzes three ways of developing religious thinking in state-religious school pupils. The first way is monolithic thinking, creating a division and separation between the holy world and the everyday world, with each world defining "the rules of the game" which suit it. The pupil is supposed to live in both worlds at the same time, and be able to move between them. For example, his/her developed critical sense learned in Civics lessons will never be implemented in the religious world.

The

second way smoothes over the differences between these two worlds, "due either to malice or to ignorance". This strategy claims that all contradictions and differences between the worlds are imaginary, existing only due to the "distortion or vandalism existing in the everyday world".

The

educational way recommended by Achituv as leading towards complex religious thinking is presented by him as the most difficult of the three, but certainly legitimate. According to this way there is a constant dialogue between these two worlds. The critical tools we know in the everyday world are also implemented in the holy world, with great caution, moral integrity and a high level of intellectual fairness. This approach assumes a certain uncertainty even within the holy world, as uncertainty is a basic human situation. This educational strategy adopts a non-dogmatic approach, presenting the different options in the Bible and other religious sources, supporting the development of the pupil's ability to choose among them.

Achituv

feels that the first two ways are more prevalent in the state-religious educational system, and he recommends that the system allow other, less dogmatic, educational approaches to flourish as well.

Thus,

it is possible to see the gaps described in the teachers' behavior as stemming, among other things, from use of the dogmatic thinking modes described by Achituv, which the teachers absorbed in the state-religious educational system, and a lack of real dialogue between the everyday world, represented in this case by modern Western culture, and the holy world.

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Summary

The

present article examines the way in which state-religious kindergarten teachers deal with the complex behavior of the patriarchs and matriarchs in the book of Genesis when telling the Torah stories in the kindergarten. Thus, the article examines the gaps discovered between the teachers' acceptance of the complex way in which the Torah presents its characters and the varied ways in which most of the teachers attempted to hide this complexity when telling the stories in kindergarten.

The article reviews the different reasons the teachers provided for their concealment policy, placing them within interpretive categories relating to the different types of gaps the teachers were dealing with. The article also demonstrates the manner in which the teachers' coping with the different gaps reflects their belonging to the Religious-Zionist movement and the state-religious educational sector. Study of the state-religious kindergarten teachers' coping with the Torah characters' complex behaviors was used to reflect on issues of importance to the entire Religious-Zionist sector.

The confusion, embarrassment and internal contradictions demonstrated by the teachers showed the many points of view and different voices of Religious Zionism. The leaders of this movement, wherever they are placed on the continuum, particularly those dealing with education, ought to consider the implications these multiple points of view have for the young children's attending their educational institutions.

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[1] The term 'ethical identity' is based on the assumption that personal identity definition is mainly expressed in the norms and values according to which one acts, and setting these norms expresses an affinity to the community in which one lives and its underlying culture. For further discussion see Alexander, (2001).

[2] See Ross, 2007. This topic and its reflection in the study needs to be addressed in a separate article.

[3] Nissim (1992, pp.117-124) wrote a book constructed as a guide for state-religious kindergarten teachers, which many teachers use, providing a practical division of the Torah stories into story units according to this approach.

[4] The term 'fusion of horizons' is taken from the work of H.G. Gadamer. He claims that the interpreter cannot identify with the writer's intentions, as he is subject to the circumstances of his historical situation, his biography, and his experiences. The interpreter's presuppositions affect his attitude towards the text, thus allowing him to discover new, original things in the text within the framework of his comprehension, his "horizon". At the same time, through a dynamic, dialectic process, the interpreter's horizon changes and widens while reading the text, thus reading uncovers the combined horizons of the text and the interpreter (Gadamer, 1989). As every interpreter has a different 'horizon', each will find different meanings in the text (Levi, 1986). Gadamer's hermeneutical approach also recognizes the authority of the text and thus the existence of wrong interpretations, but it does not recognize the existence of an objective, unilateral interpretation.

[5] In this observation Liat chose to review with the children a story she had previously told them. This was done, according to her, in order to show me as an observer what the children know of the story. Thus, we need to see the children's words in this observation as reflecting the teacher's words in the previous meeting.

[6] The story of the water coming up towards Rebecca who does not need to bend down is based on the Midrash in Bereshit Raba, ch.60, mark 5. The interpretation of Rebecca's answers to the slave "The first question first and the last question last" is based on Rashi's interpretation to Genesis, 24, 24.

[7] The original appears in Bereshit Raba, verse 63: "Rabbi Pinchas for Rabbi Levi: The fable of a myrtle and a thorn which grew one on top of another. Once they had grown, they gave flowers: one its smell and the other its thorn... thus for 13 years both go to school and come back from school. After 13 years one goes to a place of higher learning and the other to a place of idol worship".



[8] The source of

Amalia's words can be found in the Or Hachaim interpretation regarding Genesis, 27, 6: "As she agreed to the holy spirit which came upon her".

[9] An example of this

perception can be found in the interpretation of The Ha'amek Davar (Hanatziv, Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin) to Genesis, 24, 65, when he describes the communication problems in Rebecca and Isaac's relationship: "And all this was a reason from God, that the blessing reach Jacob that way specifically, as interpreted in his place, and ifÂ Rebecca had been with her husband like Sarah and Rachel and their husbands - it would not have been done that way, and everything is preordained by God, that Rebecca reaches Isaac when she is frightened of him, and everything ended up as He willed it".

[10] One needs to remember

that the teacher is exposed to many external factors affecting her work, sometimes acting as constraints as far as she is concerned. Among these are the supervision of the Ministry of Education, the parents and the community, the community Rabbi, etc.