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A Theoretical Discourse on Educational Motivation

(Address delivered at 20th Annual Pedagogical Conference,
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I. Question of Educational ^{classical} Motivation in Judaism and Jewish literature, is discussed not as a pedagogic problem relating to school children, but as a most serious adult issue. It revolves about the theme of דניאל (T.L.).

II. A. To distinguished assembly such as this, I need not elaborate on the virtue and value of "T.L." or: properly-motivated study of Torah. The whole of the sixth chapter of Abot - which is not really part of the Mishnah of that tractate - is a poetic tribute to "T.L." Other statements abound through our Talmudic, Ethical, and Devotional Literature in praise of T"L.

B. But while I need not elaborate on the significance attached to T"l, it is necessary for me to define the term more carefully; for, first, our authorities are by no means unanimous on the definition, and ~~second~~ the proper definition of T"l is crucial to the theme of this conference: "Beyond The Four Walls." Indeed, the problem of motivation is "beyond" the four walls of either school or home - it is both deep within the innermost recesses of soul and psyche, and it is, as the Talmud says of T"l, (730D) PINK SYN (1132). And not ~~was~~ ^{only} is there no unanimity on the definition of T"l, but this problem was one of the major questions in issue between Hasidim/ and Mitnagdim in the very early days of that historic controversy.

C. Interestingly enough, in trying to classify the various definitions offered in the course of the centuries, we find three categories that fall neatly into Saadia's^a three-fold division of personality - which, indicidentally recur^s in the history of philosophy; thus, the Saadia classification is based on Plato's triadic structure of the soul, although Saadia does not mention him, and ~~why~~^{only} recently Protestant Theologian Paul Tillich makes the same analyses without crediting either Plato or Saadia! These three classes of Saadia are: וְהַיָּדָוּת - the will, reflected in practical living, as in וְהַיָּדָוּת; וְהַיָּדָוּת - the emotions; and וְהַיָּדָוּת - The Intellect. ^{all} the definitions of T"l fit into these categories.

Thus, in effect, exhausting the major aspects of man's personality.

III. The first definition of T"l ^{suggested} ~~proposed~~ by the Tosafists (ד"ר פ"ה) is essentially ^a ~~pragmatic~~: אשר נרמז ... This fits into Saadia's category אגדה פז, and is based on the assumption (as Maimonides puts it in a slightly different context) that אשר נרמז. This pragmatic definition, in which the proper motivation of study is a code of conduct, is found in the medieval פ"ה פ"ה, is affirmed in the פ"ה פ"ה of R. Elijah Vides, disciple of Cordovero, and is pressed, as well, by the פ"ה פ"ה in the פ"ה פ"ה of his פ"ה פ"ה.

IV. The second definition is: devotional. First appearing in Lurianic Kabbalah, and highlighted by the early Hasidic masters, Torah, according to this school, becomes the instrument for the achievement of אגדה. T"l is study motivated by a desire for communion, for a religious experience "אגדה" is broken down to אגדה - "for the sake of G-d," T"l is, thus, not ^a ~~pragmatic~~ as much as it is experiential or devotional, and this falls into Saadia's second category, the אגדה פז - the emotive.

V. The third definition of T"l is אגדה פז - intellectual. This is the theory advanced by R. Hayyim Volezhiner in his אגדה פז. Using as his source a אגדה פז in אגדה פז and considerable supporting evidence, R.H. maintains that the proper motivation is neither ^a ~~pragmatic~~ nor devotional, but cognitive - the desire to know and understand Torah itself. This falls ^s ~~into~~ into Saadia's category of אגדה פז.

VI. We shall, of course, not attempt to decide which of these 3 definitions of T"l - ^a ~~pragmatic~~, devotional, or intellectual - is correct. Will work on assumption that any and all of these 3 are genuinely Jewish motivations. Our problem is that, whether we speak of their application to children or adults in our society, we find that they are all hopelessly irrelevant. Our contemporary American civilization may be strongly ^a ~~pragmatic~~, but its practice is assuredly not that of אגדה פז. Hence we cannot motivate

a person to be יחיד, because otherwise he won't properly be an אדם - the assumption that he wants to behave like a Jew is, unfortunately, not overly compelling. The second, or devotional, is even less^y relevant to our present cultural temper, with its positivistic bias. ניצח is now in vogue only amongst a select group of Jewish existentialists, whatever that means, who speak^e knowingly, esoterically, and neo-Hasidically of Jewish inwardness, ^eleaps, communions and religious experiences - and then repair to the nearest non-Kosher restaurant to satisfy their existential appetites. In our space age, we are more conditioned to reach out, not in. The third, the intellectual element, Torah qua Torah, is also too remote to be seriously pursued as an attainable and realizable educational goal in the intext of our times. We have mentioned the ^apragmatic temper of America. I am frustrated by it when teaching college seniors - I know that you ^aforce it in much younger children. Study for the sake of study is old-fashioned, "square". It doesn't help you get into a good college or graduate school, or land a bigger and better job, and hence it is not at all germane to the gray climate of opinion that dominates even our ^acampuses.

~~Does that mean~~ VII. Does that mean that, from the point of view of the Jewish tradition, there is no choice but to abandon^a the study of Torah, that the situation is desperate, that Talmud Torah must wither and die on the vine we have tried so hard to transplant onto American soul? Is there no way of motivating Jewish learning in America of our day?

The answer is: certainly not. We Jews came from a hardy stock. We have, one way or another, made an impression. If, as is said, Jewish education in U.S.A. is a mile wide and an inch deep, then in a chosen few places, maybe no more than an inch wide, here and there, we have made it a mile deep. Furthermore, even under conditions closer to ideal, TML however you define it, is pretty much unattainable as a first attempt. R.H. ^{says} quite explicitly, הנהגת חינוך יהודי בארצות הברית אינה אפשרית (NH, X:3). Hasidic literature confirms this impracticability - almost impossibility - of aiming too high too soon. Certainly, according to the הנהגת חינוך יהודי בארצות הברית the ^acannot be expected to attain TML by striving for it directly.

VIII. How then are we to attain Torah if the authentic motivation is out of bounds for us both by its very nature and by the facts of our life in our day?

Answer: 2 apparently contradictory passages by Rava. In ש"ס פ"ב, he refers to inconsistency in ^{the} Psalms: בְּכֹחַ הַיָּד הַזֹּאת and בְּכֹחַ הַיָּד הַשְּׂמֹאלית.

Ans: אֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, and re: אֵלֶּיךָ refers to לְפָנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ. However, as Tosafot are quick to point out, in ש"ס פ"ב, ~~we~~ read of אֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ that אֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

[does that sound like the sentiments of a teacher trying unsuccessfully to motivate his pupils to study!] Solution to Tosafot (accepted by all subsequent authorities): 2 classes of SH"L, one legitimate, one illegitimate. Which is which - is a rather complicated problem, depending on which of the 3 definitions of T"L that you accept to begin with.

However, in general, the illegitimate SH"L about which Rava in Tractate Berakhot says אֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, refers to אֵלֶּיךָ - studying in order to "counter" or be contrary to your peers, learning Torah so as to give greater force and authority to your ^{and} importance. This is a subversion of Torah and is never to be counter^afinanced.

The legitimate kind is where the student does not seek to use Torah as a weapon against others, but merely to satisfy his own ego - אֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ and so on. These are lumped together as אֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, ulterior - but harmless - motives.

Now, it is concerning the legitimate SH"L that the Rabbis ~~taught~~ taught that

אֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ... אֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ. R.H. regards this as a fundamental pedagogical principle, and as אֵלֶּיךָ, not merely אֵלֶּיךָ. אֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ etc. means that this is the way you must begin: with SH"L not with T"L! They are, says

R.H., like rungs on a ladder, and unless you've climbed the bottom one you cannot expect to reach the one above it. In a remarkable coincidence, both the Baal Shem and his arch-antagonist, the Vilna Gaon, interpret this passage as advice on the tactics to be used in combatting the Yetzer ha-ra. Satisfy him by pampering your ego -

אֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ - and, when he relaxes his vigilance, you will find yourself properly motivated, learning T"L!

Before proceeding to an outline of how these SH"L are relevant to our concern with motivation, I should like to introduce one more category, hinted at by ה'אמון עין (though not in the main), and casually included by R.H. This is a second category of the legitimate SH"L, preferable to the ה'אמון עין we have mentioned, ^{mediating} ~~indicating~~ as it were between this SH"L of ה'אמון עין, and completely authentic T"L. This is a ~~neutral~~ ^{new} category - learning not for proper selfless motivations, yet also not for selfish reasons, but rather we who studies without any particular motivation - absent-mindedly, אין צורך as ה'אמון עין calls it, out of habit, inclination, and training. Such a person has transcended the egotistical though legitimate motivations of SH"L but has not quite attained T"L, whether, it be pragmatic, devotional, or intellectual.

We thus have, theoretically, four stages of motivations: the illegitimate SH"L; the legitimate but inferior ^{or} SH"L, defined as ה'אמון עין; the superior kind of acceptable SH"L, which we have termed "^{new} ~~neutral~~"; and ~~the~~ true, authentic T"L.

IX. Now to ^{sketch} ~~outline~~ briefly the possibilities inherent in this theoretical structure for application to the problem of educational motivation in our schools.

A. The unacceptable, illegitimate SH"L, studying אין צורך. I should point out that the only excuse for SH"L is that it leaves place for our eventual T"L. If, however, ^{the} ~~the~~ SH"L ~~is~~ ^{is} of such nature that it prevents the subject-matter from ^{ever} ~~inspiring~~ the authentic motivation of T"L - in the words of Rabbis: ה'אמון עין - then such study is destructive, it is ה'אמון עין. One such study is destructive, it is

ה'אמון עין. One who studies in such a manner: ה'אמון עין.

In our own situation, this would mean teaching in such an impersonal, antiseptic manner that we forever ^{ruin} ~~lose~~ any chance for the child to want to study T"L. It means that total ignorance is better for the child than having him subjected to the unconcerned incompetence of a teacher who would emasculate the potential ה'אמון עין of Torah from ever working its benign magic on his words. ה'אמון עין! But I refer not ^{only} ~~why~~ to professional incompetence - I refer also, and even more so, to

C. This category, the ^{new} ~~ventral~~ or twilight zone between the SH"L of תורה and true T"L, sounds rather dull: study by habit or inclination, without any ostensible motivation, good or bad. And yet it offers the most interesting possibilities. Because a ^{new} ~~number~~ of our pupils are sufficiently engaged, both as a ^{result} ~~result~~ of good teaching and by their own ~~different~~ natures, to be placed in this category, and because it is the necessary intermediary step between SH"L and תורה, I propose to discuss it, ^{if but} ~~only~~ briefly.

X. I believe that once we have raised a student beyond the baby-stage of learning, the תורה, we have him in a position where we can begin to introduce him into the antechambers of complete T"L. Whereas the תורה bears no direct ~~relation~~ ^{new} relation to T"L in its various meanings, the ~~ventral~~ category does. It is here that we can begin to anticipate authentic Torah motivation. We can begin to present miniature, primitive models of what we hope will be their ultimate T"L.

In order to do this, let us accept all three definitions -of Tosafot, of the Hasidim, and the Mitnagdim as legitimate, and leave it to the competent teacher to fit the motivation to the individual student, depending on his particular personality, temperament and ^{or} ~~predictions~~. If this is the case, then we must devise ~~3~~ ^{or} 3 modes of motivation which lead to the 3 definitions mentioned. In other words, we must try to formulate three types of transitions from SH"L to תורה which recall or suggest the nature of the תורה to which they are the direct antecedents.

A. The Intellectual. In true T"L, this means תורה. In the form of modified antecedent in the twilight zone of תורה, this would mean evoking in the student a state of suspense, a sense of adventure and excitement. Depending on the age and level of the child, ~~this~~ means progressively moving to intellectually more stimulating material, to תורה, to תורה and תורה. It is fashionable in our days to look down the side of our noses on the classical תורה and dismiss it as mere "pulp". Yet there is nothing quite as thrilling as discovering one, or suggesting a proper resolution. The good teacher, faced with a student possessing intellectual inclinations, must make his

subject problem-centered and allow his pupils to participate in the mental gymnastics leading to solution. This may not be quite ממלא מקום, but it is close enough to be a promising start. Intellectual adventure, a classroom-atmosphere in which the dull and the boring are anathema, is the ~~precursor~~ precursor for T^ML according to R.H.'s definition.

B. The Pragmatic. In true T^ML this means simply משימה. The precursor in the twilight zone would be in an emphasis on those studies leading to a behavior code in areas of immediate interest to the child. This would mean shifting the emphasis to ethics, to הנהגה, and applying the material to the mundane realities of the child's universe. הנהגה applied to concrete situations; הנהגה etc. etc. ~~must~~ must be worked out in the realm of baseball bats, cheating on exams, staying out later than parents allow, and so on - this is indeed משימה, and if we can sufficiently engage the attention of our pupils in this area, we can go on to others as well.

C. The Devotional. The Beshtian concept of true T^ML is: הנהגה, הנהגה. How in the world does ~~we~~ ^{one} proceed to interest children, even those emotionally and idealistically attached to emotional experience, to study on the basis of הנהגה, as Saadia called it?

The problem is not unique for us off the age of artificial satellites, logical positivism, scientific skepticism, comic books and TV distractions. Even in mystically oriented Eastern Europe this kind of T^ML was a tall order.

I would therefore offer a prescription written by that miracle-healer himself: the Besht. He recommends that we make alive not only the argument in a הנהגה - but also the הנהגה! The problem of הנהגה assumes special religious significance when הנהגה are not only anonymous disputants, but - by the grace of a good pedagogue - become for the student flesh and - blood Jews who were הנהגה, divinely inspired teachers, spiritual giants, ^{and with whom he may now establish a personal bond}. We want, in other words, emphasize, above all other things, the element of personality. Making

feel that he is in the presence of some authentically religious personality will inspire פ'נל א'כ'ו', and hence א'פ'ל'א'ן, in him. A charismatic personality can bridge the years and work its alchemy ^{across} in the soul of a child ~~across~~ many centuries.

Incidentally, the Baal Shem reveals one more secret of attaining the kind of inspired religiosity needed to want to study Torah for G-d's sake. How, he as beed, does one rise from א'י'ו'פ' to א'י'פ'ע, from spiritual ~~small~~ ^{small}ness when the soul is constricted and spontaneity choked, to the bigness of inspiration and א'י'פ'ע? His answer - appropriate to an emphasis on personality - is: a sense of humor - א'י'פ'ע א'י'פ'ע! A good teacher who wants to lead his children to the study of Torah as a religious exercise, must have that gentle humor which can engage his students' attentions, attract them by his personality, relax them emotionally, dissolve the harshness of their many psychological involvements and make of them true religious personalities - through ~~the~~ Torah!/
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XI. What I have tried to do, then, is to show, on the basis of Jewish teaching that there are four levels of motivation, from the objectionable all the way ^{up} to the immediately unattainable maximum. Most of us must work at the 2nd lowest level, the SH"L ~~of~~ of א'י'פ'ע, the realm of the artificial, the "gimmick" in various shades of sophistication. The 3rd or twilight level offers us the possibilities of a more direct approach to the true ~~kind~~ kind of א'י'פ'ע which, as we have seen, is variously defined in a ^{pr}agmatic, devotional, and intellectual sense.

With R.H., I would remind you that - as in any psychological problem - there are no ¹ ~~clear-~~ cut, well-defined boundaries separating the various levels of SH"L and T"L. We have, ~~with~~ rather, gradations, emphases, subtle shadings.

R.H.
Both ~~R.H.~~ and the Hasidic teachers agree that we must not seek too much too soon. We ought not expect too much selflessness of motive. It is sufficient if ultimately we attain state of T"L, for then that learning sanctifies all past Torah endeavors; the final T"L justifies all the years of SH"L. Let no man, therefore, depreciate a teacher's

attempt at motivation. Even the "gimmick" - if only it is effective - is invaluable.

XII. It was R.H. who spoke at greatest length about T"L and SH"L. He knew a great deal about it. Not only a אדמו"ר, but a psychologist, and a ped^agogue - he was the ^{founder of the} Yeshiva of Voloshin, his words should carry weight with us. I leave you therefore, with a promise he makes: in the course of any learning, as long as it is not the pernicious אג'פ'ל, whatever the motivation, it is inevitable that sometime, somewhere, the student of Torah should not at least ~~not~~ momentarily rise to the heights of T"L.

XIII. That promise is enough to encourage any teacher to feel that his labor, so difficult often so frustrating, are worthwhile. If somehow, through our efforts, we have contributed to a ^{sublime} moment of T"L in the life of a pupil, ~~through our efforts we have then~~ ~~contributed to our~~ our lives, efforts, initiative and concern have been well spent.

"אז אינא - אדמו"ר". It is the right kind of medicine to give new life to weary souls.