

June 26, 2008

For: Biblical Anthropology-Passover

In Exodus, the Bible (in the original JPS translation) Exodus 12:6-8, says, “.

6. Seven days thou shalt eat unleavened bread, and in the seventh day shall be a feast to the LORD. 7 Unleavened bread shall be eaten throughout the seven days; and there shall no leavened bread be seen with thee, neither shall there be leaven seen with thee, in all thy borders. 8 And thou shalt tell thy son in that day, saying: *It is because of that--* “*ba'avur zeh*”-- *which the LORD did for me when I came forth out of Egypt*

“Because of that which the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt.” What is the antecedent of the word “that?” The verse lacks clarity and is therefore open to various interpretations. In the 1985 JPS translation of Tanakh, the ambiguity is resolved: “And you shall explain to your son on that day, ‘It is because of what the Lord did for me when I went free from Egypt.’” Hence, clearly, the Passover ritual is occasioned by the need to acknowledge and praise the Lord for liberating us from the shackles of Egypt. That is, indeed, the common understanding of this key sentence.

Rashbam, and apparently Onkelos, agree with this reading of our text, as do Ramban and others. However, Rashi and more explicitly Ibn Ezra and implied in the Targum Jonathan, reverse the cause and effect: It is in order that I perform these rituals that the Lord took us out of Egypt. Ramban, as I mentioned, is critical of this translation, one which is adopted as well (without mentioning the above authorities) by a famous contemporary scholar, R. Yitzchak Zev Halevi Soloveitchik.

At first, this seems to be an outrageous halakho-centric exegesis: it is not the divine gift of freedom that is celebrated at the Passover Seder. Rather, He blessed us with freedom so that we might perform the mitzvot of Passover: the matzah, the bitter herbs, the Haggadah narrative.

However, upon further reflection, what they are saying is that, in general, the Torah is not here to teach us history unrelated to practical righteous conduct. Therefore, when the Torah says “because of that” are we to observe the laws of Pesach, it means to inform us that the purpose of relating the history is in order to partake of the obligatory practical, empirical deeds, in this case, the offering of the Paschal lamb. Halakhic performance is the cause, the ultimate; freedom is the effect, propaedeutic. Or better, freedom is the handmaiden of Halakha.

Read that large, and it tells us that the Torah does not intend to reveal to us the nature of God or the grand highways and byways of history, but to teach us to sanctify our lives by the performance of the commandments.

There has been much discussion recently as to the relevance of Academic Bible to the Yeshiva and Orthodox community. Some of this has been the result of current events – the publication of a book by an observant (I would call this Orthoprax) Jewish prominent Biblical scholar articulating his belief that the Documentary Hypothesis is correct but attempting to reconcile this with traditional Jewish belief that the Torah is divine has brought the issue recently to a boil. But even without that there have been voices from the traditional world weighing in on the issues. In Yeshiva, in particular, there has often been heard in the last few years an increase of grumbling about the fact that most of the Bible taught in YU is of an “academic” nature – this in spite of the fact that many of the students who grumble (and what percentage they are I don’t know – one or two people can make a lot of noise on the one hand, or there just may be a significant number of people who grumble quietly who agree with them) know not what “academic” Bible means (nor perhaps do they appreciate what a University is or is supposed to be). At the same time, those who would take the approach of the professor mentioned above are not people who have spent much time within the *arba kotei habeit Midrash* (and in the rare cases that they have, they seem to have abandoned or forgotten that world). I wish to address this topic as someone who spends most of his time within the *arba kotei habeit Midrash*, but who has ventured out of those walls in the past into the world of academic study, and who continues to spend time in a unique academic setting, or perhaps I should term in quasi-academic setting – the Bible department of Yeshiva College.

I) What is “academic” Bible?

- 1) “Irrelevant”
- 2) Takes place in the “Academy”
- 3) Set of methodologies used in the “academy” although perhaps not unique, and even more significantly, not original to the academy
- 4) Set of attitudes commonly found in the “Academy” – skeptical, nihilistic, seeking to destroy what is there
- 5) Careful and rigorous approach to a particular subject – (in our case grammar, careful reading of texts, attention paid to language)

II) Where does the new פשט school fit in here

- 1) The new פשט school sees itself as a natural continuation of the work of the Northern French School which included Rashi, Rashbam, R. Yosef Kara, R. Yosef Bekhor Shor; and the Spanish school of Ibn Ezra and the like
- 2) The interest here is in understanding Tanakh as it would have been understood by its original audience – in the case of Torah, the דור הדבר; in the case of other books, their original audiences
- 3) The location is not necessarily the academy – in the case of Yeshiva College it is, in the case of Mekhon Herzog it is not
- 4) The attitudes found in the academy have no place here
 - a. The working assumption is a kind of יראת שמים relating to the text (this could theoretically be the case even for someone who were not a complete מאמין)
 - b. The עיקרי האמונה – however exactly one defines them – are sacrosanct; and for the purposes of definition here, Hazal were clear on the broad contours of תורה מן השמים
 - c. One of the עיקרי האמונה here requires note – but not the one that you might think –
 - i. Prophecy

- ii. Past prophecy is what one must term a non-rational belief, not an irrational belief
 - 1. Non-rational means that it is not subject to proof (in this case, both its existence and that the prophets of Scripture were actually prophets)
 - 2. Irrational means that it conflicts with demonstrable (or seemingly demonstrable) facts
- iii. The documentary hypothesis – which in its very essence conflicts with the eighth *iqqar, torah min hashamayim*, is theoretically subject to rational proof or disproof – the proof in one direction or another does not actually exist, but in theory it could; a copy of the Torah from the 12th century BCE would put it to rest; and in contrast, חס וחלילה, a discovery of a copy of the supposed “P” from the 8th or the 6th century BCE would constitute strong evidence, even though not incontrovertible, for the basic outlines of the Documentary hypothesis. And aside from this, the discussion of the issues can take place in the rational realm – what are actually contradictions and what do contradictions actually indicate.
- iv. But prophecy, or its lack thereof, is one of the non-rational *a priori*s of the Academy – the Wellhausens of the world began their analysis with an unstated assumption – prophecy does not exist (or at least the Bible is not divinely revealed/inspired) and thus, for example, a prophecy claiming to predict the future in Scripture must have been written *ex eventu* –
 - v. For example in interpreting the passage of ואלה המלכים – the “Academic” begins with the *a priori* that these kings, if they reigned in a post Mosaic period, would constitute evidence of post-Mosaic authorship. The מאמין on the other hand may choose to believe (as do Ibn Ezra and Ramban) that the Torah simply does not record historical narrative before it happens; but it is not that God could not have revealed the future events to a prophet and one does not assume that prophecy predicting the future accurately cannot be given in advance.
 - vi. There is absolutely no rational proof whatsoever for the “Academic’s” assumption of the non-existence of prophecy; nor is there any for the מאמין’s belief a-in prophecy and b-in the prophecy of a specific prophet or book; but the Academy starts with an assumption that is totally incompatible with our worldview
- d. There are other attitudes prevalent in the Academy which are wholly or at least partially incompatible with the reverence of a מאמין – one of which would be an attitude towards Biblical figures
 - i. I don’t wish to rehash the entire issue now –
 - ii. There is certainly a range of opinions in Hazal
 - iii. Everybody seems to know R. Shm. B. Nahmani aRYonatan saying כל האומר דוד חטא אינו אלא טועה, although far fewer seem to know the gemara on the next *amud* where Rav observes that Rabbi interpreted David in a favorable light because of his ancestry
 - iv. And certainly this battle continues to be waged up until this day – Rishonim sometimes write uncomplimentarily of behavior of even revered Biblical characters, but on the whole – even when the text allows some the license to view the story as being critical of the Biblical character, nonetheless, there is a kind of respect that we accord the Avot and other like Biblical characters (even

for those who are willing to acknowledge flaws in them); and this is simply incompatible with the attitude of many in the Academy who simply do not possess reverence for these characters (even if they admit that they existed)

- 5) What the new פשט school does share with the Academy are some of its methodologies
- The use of language – the medievals had Arabic and Aramaic (as well as Hazal using non-Semitic languages)
 - The use of history know from other sources – the Assyrian annals are invaluable in this regard
 - The use of archeology – with all the caution due a discipline which is part science part art
 - Cultural knowledge of the ANE and the pagan beliefs prevalent in that period
 - Literary techniques and methodologies – most of a modern vintage, but certainly anticipated in some of its aspects by Midrash
 - Of course there are times that the methodologies may create conflict, but in their own right they are fundamentally mostly theologically neutral

III) Why is it that people object to it?

A) Methodologies are supposedly foreign to Torah

- Dunash vs. Menahem
- The methodologies are not foreign to Hazal – or Rishonim who are our commentators (Rashi, Ibn Ezra – maybe Ramban)

B) Undermines Yir'at Shamayim and Reverence for Scripture

- Regarding the first – there can be real concern, but in most cases it depends on the person going in – מי שיראתו קודמת להחמרתו does not usually have a problem
- Story of Elisha ben Avuya

הגיגה טו:

אשכחיה שמואל לרב יהודה דתלי בעיברא דדשא וקא בכי. אמר ליה: שיננא, מאי קא בכית? - אמר ליה: מי זוטרא מאי דכתיב בהו ברבנן (ישעיהו ל"ג) איה ספר איה שקל איה ספר את המגדלים. איה סופר - שהיו סופרים כל אותיות שבתורה, איה שוקל - שהיו שוקלים קלין וחמורין שבתורה. איה סופר את המגדלים - שהיו שוננין שלש מאות הלכות במגדל הפורה באויר. ואמר רבי אמי: תלת מאה בעיי בעו דואג ואחיתופל במגדל הפורה באויר. ותנן: שלשה מלכים וארבעה הדיוטות אין להם חלק לעולם הבא, אגן מה תהוי עלן?

אמר ליה: שיננא, טינא היתה בלבם. אחר מאי - זמר יווני לא פסק מפומיה. אמרו עליו על אחר, בשעה שהיה עומד מבית המדרש הרבה ספרי מינין נושרין מחיקו.

C) Reverence for Scripture – the text

- Comments a & b certainly apply here
- Sometimes, part of the reverence isn't supported by facts
 - Famous response of the Rashba
 - R. Akiva Eiger wasn't afraid to have what might be the longest Gilyon HaShas on this topic
- Often the name of R. Hayyim Heller is invoked here as if no other great Talmidei Hakhamim ever commented on the topic – but aside from the Gedolim (starting backwards with Sridei Eish), the existence of textual variants is so explicit in Hazal that what can one say? ג' ספרי תורה נמצאו בעזרה
- People who live in a printed age can live with delusions of perfectly fixed texts – but anyone who has spent real time with manuscripts – including those of Tanakh – is forced to confront a very different reality (when everyone screams to correct the ba'al kriyah in Noah when he reads ויהי – does one stop to consider what a *safeq* in girsa is [or for that matter the problematic zekher/zeikher and repetitions in the megillah which

are erroneous *sefekot* – the readings are clear]; or does one who reads the Rambam's comments in Sefer Torah 8:4 about the confusion over parasha breaks

5. Halakhic הכרעה determines proper practice – not history
6. One's theology has to fit the facts – the first facts are what Hazal tell us as qabbalah – but when they don't, the remaining facts have to be taken into account – and one does not modify the facts to suit one's own theology

D) Reverence for scripture as an enterprise

1. Here the concern may even be greater
 - i. There are three attitudes toward scripture
 - ii. a- It is just another piece of ANE literature – it fits its context and is fundamentally no different from the literature of Ugarit or Mesopotamia or Egypt
 - iii. b- It bears no relationship to ANE literature – it is sui generis, not contextually connected to what was around it
 - iv. The first of these two is obviously unpalatable for a מאמין
 - v. The second, while theologically and emotionally appealing, has to contend with a set of facts, some of which are virtually incontrovertible unless one chooses to adopt a post modern, nihilistic approach which denies the knowability of anything, and since we have a tradition, no amount of facts can have an effect on that
 - vi. But there are facts
 1. Science on age of the universe
 2. Archeology – not a hard science, but for certain matters presents real data –
 - a. Age of first human fossils
 - b. Absence of flood evidence
 - c. Language Inscriptions of non-Hebraic languages predating traditional chronology of Palagah
 - d. Striking literary parallels to scripture which predate the traditional dating of scripture
2. At the same time, one has to consider what the alternatives are even if modern Biblical scholarship the Academy did not exist:
 - i. In teaching students, one asks them to imagine what language and style a divine, non-contextually rooted – call it a Platonically idealized - text would look like – and the answer is that such a text would not have any meaning to human beings
 - ii. The closest thing that we might have to this would be Torah she-Ba'al Peh before it was written down
 - iii. Why was the Torah not given in Hungarian or Yiddish? Could the Torah have been given in anything other than a language that the Jews spoke at the time of Mattan Torah? How would anybody have understood it (incidentally, in case anyone doubts that the spoke Hebrew, you need merely to look to the story of Ravshaqeh and Hezekiah's men on the walls)
 - iv. If there is poetry in the Tanakh, even if God wrote it literally (although as it turns out, all of the poetry –even in the Torah – is fundamentally human

generated), would he have written poetry that people would have recognized or not?

- v. When one considers the broadly accepted notion of the Rambam that outside of Torah, the language is that of the Prophets themselves even though God communicated with them first – in what language could the prophets have possibly written? What metaphors could they use? What style of poetry could they have authored? What types of realia could they have utilized in their descriptions? Sifrei Nakh, at a minimum, at least in their צורה must be of the ANE
- vi. How does one deal with something like the Code of the Hamurabbi – which predates (according to the traditional accounts) Mattan Torah by a number of centuries in which there is clear literary contact; unless one wants to resort to colossal-joke type theories or make the claim that Hamurabbi studied in the Beit Midrash of Shem ve-Ever
- vii. And I should emphasize that this latter point does not in any way have to undermine the divine nature of the Torah or deny that it is מן השמים – but at the same time, its existence needs to make us consider how exactly God wrote the Torah; the belief in Torah dictated from God to Moshe does not tell us exactly why the Torah was written the way it was, and in shaping our response and approach, consideration of the facts known from outside the tradition – which do not conflict with it – need be considered.
- viii. It seems to me that the inescapable conclusion, one articulated albeit in a more limited context by חז"ל in the expressions דיברה תורה כלשון בני אדם and דיבר הכתוב בבהוה, is that Tanakh is ANE literature, but it is not “just another piece of ANE literature”; the *malbush* is that of ANE literature, the contents divine or divinely inspired. As of result of this, the study of other ANE literature will undoubtedly shed light on פשוטו של מקרא – how various parts of Tanakh may have been understood by their original audience.
- ix. The broader problem raised (as is what is disturbing about the Rambam in the Moreh) is that we are asserting that TSBktav has a historical and cultural context; but as I have suggested already, what is the alternative? How can a document for humans be divorced from a human context? The question of the eternal relevance of the Torah is certainly a critical one, but the answer lies in Torah she-Ba'al Peh. ועוד חזון למועד
- x. To avoid doing so may shield one from dealing with some difficult issues, but it may also result in the falsification of Torah, i.e. a picture of Torah she-bikhtav which does not conform to the truth – to avoid dealing with these issues is a *humra de-ati lidei qula*.

E) Last objection which has been articulated by some – the fact that we could possibly know more than Hazal, and especially for Torah matters

- 1. One must grant that this is not a minor issue
- 2. The reaction recently to the writings of Nosson Slifkin is somewhat telling
- 3. People have now started to deny the validity of texts that have been around for a long time – those relating to the nature of Hazal's science and to the nature and authority of Aggadah

4. Part of the problem is not simply about Hazal – but rather that if one is going to subscribe to or advocate a very expansive view of daas torah, then how can it be that Hazal were “wrong” on anything, even matters such as medicine and science; for if Hazal were wrong on non-Torah matters, how infallible could modern day gedolim be?
5. But this is, some ways, much more controversial – for even if one’s view of the range of authority of gedolei torah is much more circumscribed, as is typically the case in our community, the issues here are about the interpretation of Torah, not merely about חכמת העולם.
6. Of course, one might argue to the contrary – that the interests of the “New School of Peshat” do not speak about halakhah and practical matters generally (the tendency of Rambam in the Moreh for connecting Mitzvot to the historical context of Mattan Torah notwithstanding – and even there it seems to have almost no spillover into the Mishneh Torah) and that most of the concern is over non-halakhic parts of scripture (obviously the overwhelming majority of Scripture), matters in which Hazal had much less to say (at least compared to halakhic matters).
7. This said, there are cases where it is hard to avoid the conclusion that we are privileged to know things that were not known to the Rishonim (and perhaps even Hazal). Take the example of the very enigmatic פתיל of Tamar and Yehudah – over which the Rishonim labor mightily without any very satisfactory resolution (and here the Ramban stands out); is it hard to escape the conclusion that the חותם being spoken about in the story is a cylinder seal, not a signet ring seal of the Mishnaic era and the פתיל is the string which held it and went around the neck as a necklace by means of which to carry the seal!
8. Here, obviously, הוֹטָא is obviously necessary to avoid the terrible הטא of arrogance; we are not superior to our predecessors, but merely the beneficiaries of fortuitous discoveries – none of which redound to our spiritual credit, but many of which may give us insights into Biblical texts which they did not have
9. In some ways one might view this as מקום הניחו לנו מן השמים להתגדר בו

תלמוד בבלי מסכת חולין דף ו עמוד ב

העיד רבי יהושע בן דורו בן חמיו של רבי מאיר לפני רבי על ר"מ שאכל עלה של ירק בבית שאן, והתיר רבי את בית שאן כולה על ידו. חברו עליו אחיו ובית אביו, אמרו לו: מקום שאבותיך ואבות אבותיך נהגו בו איסור, אתה תנהוג בו היתר? דרש להן מקרא זה: (מלכים ב' י"ח) וכתת נחש הנחשת אשר עשה משה כי עד הימים ההמה היו בני ישראל מקטרים לו ויקרא לו נחושתן, אפשר בא אסא ולא ביערו, בא יהושפט ולא ביערו? והלא כל עבודה זרה שבעולם אסא ויהושפט ביערום! אלא מקום הניחו לו אבותיו להתגדר בו, אף אני מקום הניחו לי אבותי להתגדר בו.

10. Ads

- F) There is of course one more objection which will never be articulated but lies at the heart of many who would complain about the new school – the complaints in this case will come from those who have to study it
1. In recent years תלמוד תורה has become what I refer to as a very popular sport – once upon a time, advanced learning (TSBP) was the province of the elite; now everybody styles himself as the next Gadol HaDor
 2. Many of the students simply do not possess the thinking or reading skills that are necessary for proper Tanakh study (or TSBP for that matter) [Yitzzy E. Story]
 3. Academic methods tend to focus at least initially very intensively on text and its basic components – and serious Torah study, in my opinion, including gemara and Rishonim must do so as well, but that is a topic for another time

4. This focus, which undoubtedly is not flashy or sexy or exciting, is an uphill battle even for the serious student
5. Now add in the factor of the student who can not handle it – and “academic” study gets a terrible name
6. Further exacerbating this is that to do this work well, a database of Tanakh is necessary – something which few have, and few are willing to invest the time to acquire that knowledge.
7. At the end of the day, פשט tends not to contain the warm fuzzies of דרוש; the AHA’s of פשט study may warm the cockles of the Litvak’s heart, but usually do little to stimulate the passion of the devoted חסיד; Professor Grossman in his major article on Rashi attributes the decline of פשט study in N. France to a very similar cause.

G) An issue which I glossed over earlier is the nature of the “Hebrew” language

1. In the midrashic conception, Hebrew is the first language and the Torah was written even before the world existed
2. The issue was the source of great controversy amongst the Rishonim; the Rambam did not accept any inherent sanctity in the Hebrew language and was attacked for this
3. Menachem Kellner has observed that even some of the most ardent defenders of the Rambam (Ritva) parted company over this issue
4. Of course one might note that Hazal’s idea that sifrei TNK could be written in any language or at least in Greek, as well as the principle that דברים של קדש are prohibited in a bathroom even in English, but דברים של חול are permitted even in Hebrew, supports his position
5. But that aside, one can easily sidestep the controversy and accept the traditional premise and still be able to use Semitics to explain words in Hebrew, b/c after all, there had to be hundreds or even thousands of words of Hebrew that existed in the Biblical period but whose mazal it was not to appear in Tanakh – and these other languages whose preserved lexicon is much greater may help shed light on
6. Aside from this, clearly the tradition of most mefarshim (Rashi, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra) was to accept the utility of Arabic for the study of Biblical Hebrew and as such Akkadian and Ugaritic should be treated no differently

H) Finally, there is one issue which I think cannot be ignored in this discussion

1. There is a struggle over Torah and what can be accepted
2. There are those who are disturbed by certain things that Hazal or Rishonim said
3. One approach is to strain to reinterpret or try to deny what some said – witness the revision of Ibn Ezra on the last twelve pesuqim or והכנעני אז בארץ
4. The more extreme version of this is to deny the veracity of certain sources – and this seems to be at the heart of the debate between Rav Moshe and Rav Shlomo Zalman (IGM YD 3:114-115; Mishneh Halakhot 12:214) – and here I find myself in sympathy with RSZalman and R. M.H.Klein
5. There are enough instances of comments that Rishonim made that the deny mode doesn’t work – one’s theology has to be broad enough to accommodate opinions of major Rishonim who are part of our mesorah

IV) Why is it compelling

- a) Intellectually - (Truth-compelling) – some of course will say that the truth is only what we know from Hazal, but I would feel compelled to point out that the Rambam and RSG and

many others did not feel that way – rather they assumed that, for the most part, Scripture had to be understood in such a way so that conformed with truth

- b) What follows from the above – is that if it's true then - a proper understanding of דבר ה' – there cannot be such a thing as a humra by avoiding “new interpretations”
- c) A sense of rigor in learning that should be no less than the way subjects are treated by the rest of the world – לא תהא תורה שלנו כשיחה בטילה שלהם – (I believe that this comment may have been made by the Rav with respect to R. Chayim and his approach in TSBP)
- d) But perhaps even more compelling than the above - so much of Tanakh חז"ל had nothing to say on - Yalkut Shimoni on Nakh – where does one turn to analyze and comprehend דבר ה' other than a rigorous reading of texts (one cannot invent good דרוש if does not know how to read a text carefully and deal with language – people fail to understand that so much of מדרש אגדה of Hazal starts with the questions of פשט and moves in a different direction)
- e) In an aside, if someone wishes to study it in the context of a college, it has to be of a certain mold; there is a degree of rigor which is required that דרוש or other styles of מוסר do not fit; a very distinguished Rosh Yeshiva asked me why YC Bible couldn't teach different kinds of courses, for example couldn't we teach a course on משך חכמה – to which I responded that we certainly could, but that studying the Parshanut or the משך חכמה in the academic context would entail an systematic analysis of his methodology and his historical context and so on and so forth – absent such a framework, the course would be worthy for a פרשת השבוע class in the yeshiva, but not for academic credit
- f) Of course, one might say that why do it at all – and the answer in our context is that if the College doesn't do it, it won't happen – Yeshivas as a general rule, for better or worse, do not do TSBKtav – and if the college is going to do it, it has to fit within its framework; some would even question whether or not the Orthodox “academic” Bible should qualify for inclusion in a collegiate framework, but that is something that I think could be defended
- g) One last note in this context – hiding behind parshanut – which is an approach that some wish to take to avoid these issues; but several problems emerge
 - a. You can't avoid dealing with many of the underlying issues, but the parshanim themselves may be deal with some of them
 - b. To understand what the parshanim are doing, you have to appreciate the text itself and the problems raised therein
 - c. Even if you can avoid the first two, the academic approach will end up “desacralizing” a different set of texts – and this is the point I made earlier regarding studying משך חכמה; and I would add that davening up a text like Rashi is being מבזה דבר ה'

V) What are the pre-req's and what are the dangers – in both directions (use story of כי ישרים דרכי ה' story from the gemara)

תלמוד בבלי מסכת בבא בתרא דף פט עמוד ב

ת"ר: אין עושין את המחקק צדו אחד עב וצדו אחד קצר; לא ימחקק בבת אחת, שהמוחקק בבת אחת - רע למוכר ויפה ללוקח, ולא ימחקק מעט מעט, שרע ללוקח ויפה למוכר; על כולן אמר רבן יוחנן בן זכאי: אוי לי אם אומר, אוי לי אם לא אומר, אם אומר - שמא ילמדו הרמאין, ואם לא אומר - שמא יאמרו הרמאין: אין תלמידי חכמים בקיאים במעשה ידינו. איבעיא להו: אמרה או לא אמרה? אמר רב שמואל בר רב יצחק: אמרה, ומהאי קרא אמרה: (הושע י"ד) כי ישרים דרכי ה' וצדיקים ילכו בם ופושעים יכשלו בם.

June 27, 2008

What may be of relevance to my major theme is the question of "multiple truths".

See *Tradition* summer 1991 (Vol.25, Number 4). Pages 21 and 22. The author, Don Seeman, refers to the question of whether there is only one truth or multiple truths -- such as "Halakhic truth," "historical truth," and/or "scientific truth."

He maintains (or perhaps it is I who maintains it...) that the idea of multiple truths can be exploited to avoid confrontation with conflicting sources. Nevertheless, often there is no real way of reconciling them.

Refer to the Midrash on the disagreement in the heavenly realms as to whether man should or should not be created.... At bottom, this would indicate clearly a positive attitude to "multiple truths." Also, as I have read elsewhere, the result of this Midrash is to say that there is a divine truth and there is human truth; the former is absolute and unbending, the latter is in stage of evolution, development, and consequently a recognition of the limits of human understanding.

How do avoid lazy or cozy misuse of the multiple truth concept? Perhaps by trying first to reconcile the various truths.

I have this copy of *Tradition* plus a *Teshuva* from Rabbi Shlomo Fisher which in some ways may touch upon the subject. It is in the folder on my desk at home.

File name: biblical anthropology

June 30, 2008

Suggested additions to my Biblical Anthropology paper:

If my analysis is correct, and the blessing *shelo asani ishah* is not meant to be derogatory, and that indeed there might be a slight tilt in favor of *she 'asani ki' retzono*, especially that the latter includes the former, then we may have before us an answer to a question that a student told me he asked of the Rav but I do not have the answer.

The question was: If a woman hears the blessing *shelo asani ishah*, is she required or may she recite Amen to that blessing? I was not told what the Rav's answer was.