

Yirat Shamayim
The Awe, Reverence,
and Fear of God

EDITED BY
Marc D. Stern

Robert S. Hirt, Series Editor

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THE ORTHODOX FORUM

The Orthodox Forum, initially convened by Dr. Norman Lamm, Chancellor of Yeshiva University, meets each year to consider major issues of concern to the Jewish community. Forum participants from throughout the world, including academicians in both Jewish and secular fields, rabbis, rashei yeshivah, Jewish educators, and Jewish communal professionals, gather in conference as a think tank to discuss and critique each other's original papers, examining different aspects of a central theme. The purpose of the Forum is to create and disseminate a new and vibrant Torah literature addressing the critical issues facing Jewry today.

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Fear of God: The Beginning of Wisdom and the End of *Tanakh* Study

Mosheh Lichtenstein

יראת ד' ראשית דעת² – 'ראשית חכמה יראת ד'¹

A

A few years ago, a friend of ours was in *miluim* (reserve duty in the IDF) in early December. We invited his wife and children to eat with us on Shabbos morning, which was *parshat Vayishlach*. During the meal, the mother requested that I discuss the *parsha* with her girls, since her husband usually did so. I obviously obliged and began telling the story of the meeting between Yaakov and Esav in a manner that seemed to me most appropriate for a second grader. As I was reaching the climax and began to dramatically recount the story of Esav breaking his teeth as he attempted to sink them into

Yaakov's neck, I noticed the look of shock on the mother's face. Upon inquiring whether I had committed any grave error, I received the following reply: "Anachnu," she sternly told me, "lomdim peshuto shel mikra!" (We learn the simple meaning of the text!)

The story of the broken teeth is, of course, a famous midrash that features prominently in *Chazal's* interpretation of this episode. Coupled with the opposing opinion recorded alongside it that Esav kissed Yakov wholeheartedly, it is also an important debate regarding the ambivalent relationship underlying the meeting of the two brothers. As the issue at hand is *Tanakh* and *yirat shamayim* and not *pshat* vs. *drash* (the literal meaning vs. homeletics), let us set aside the (narrow-minded) assumption that such a midrash does not contribute to our understanding of the *pshat* and the interpersonal dynamics at work in this charged narrative and dwell upon the implications of the story from the *yirat shamayim* perspective.

Broadly speaking, Rashi's interpretation of the *Chumash*, with its integration of much *Aggadic* material, is much more colorful than the commentaries of Ramban, Ibn Ezra and others who focused upon the plain meaning of the text. Teeth fall out, lions take swipes at a *tzaddik* who doesn't deliver their food on time, princesses' arms are extended into the middle of the river, dreams are swapped by cellmates, giants survive the deluge by wrapping themselves around the ark and many other vivid details are integrated by Rashi into his commentary. Conversely, it is also true that Ramban offers a more sophisticated and nuanced reading of the human relationships under consideration that contrasts sharply with Rashi's schematic and two dimensional approach. To put it differently, Ramban's protagonists are much more "round" and dynamic as opposed to those of Rashi who are considerably more "flat" and fixed in their characters.

What, then, should we teach our children – Rashi or Ramban? Needless to say, any answer to the question of Rashi vs. Ramban must take into account various considerations, exegetical, didactic, philosophical and others as to their relative merit as commentaries that are not of our concern in this paper. However, it seems to me that there is a very basic truth in our preference for Rashi in the early grades, even if one accepts the premise that Ramban's commentary

has a depth and richness that are unique to it, since it is Rashi who captivates and appeals to a child's imagination. Ramban may be sophisticated, but Rashi is vivid.

The rationale behind the choice of the more colorful commentary is that our aim in teaching *Chumash* is first and foremost the achievement of a religious goal. Not a biographical analysis of its protagonists, but the fostering of a sense of identification with those whom we see as our forefathers is our primary concern. It is a living dynamic that we are seeking, in which the *Avot* and *Imahot* – not the Patriarchs and Matriarchs³ – are part of our family tradition, and the establishment of a collective family memory is an integral part of our goals in relating their stories to our children. Needless to say, there is much that we should learn from the episodes themselves; they enlighten our lives, enrich our experiences, and provide perspectives on life and our relationship to God, but these are not our only goals. Love of the text and childhood excitement in regard to the story are crucial to our endeavor.

The enlightening role of literature as representing and enhancing human experience, along with the transmission of ideas and values to the reader, is indeed a major goal of *Tanakh*; nevertheless, we do not read *Tanakh* as great literature *per se*, but as a text with which we are emotionally engaged. In other words, there is a basic contrast between our approach to *Tanakh* and to literature that goes beyond the disparity of authorship and sanctity. Whereas great literature exists solely for its aesthetic and moral purposes, *Tanakh* expects us to identify with its protagonists and their experiences as relating to us existentially.

Thus, although there is much to be learned from *King Lear* or *Hamlet* as works of art, we do not attempt to identify with the personæ of Lear or Hamlet as people with whom we have established relationships. They are fully realized characters on stage but abstract figures in our lives. The same holds true of people whose existence is rooted in a firm historical setting that is not part of our heritage. In *Tanakh*, though, we do care about the people as people since their biographies are our history. To put it differently, *Tanakh* is not only literature but also history – not knowledge and analysis

of the past for the sake of the historical record but rather a family history of our own.⁴

Judged from this perspective of identification, there is much to recommend the world of the Midrash – on its own or as filtered through Rashi – as the entry point of a child into the world of the *Chumash*. The sense of wonder and excitement that it elicits serves the purpose of identifying with *Tanakh* better than other approaches. *Pshuto shel mikra*, despite its importance, may have to wait for a later stage of intellectual development.

Thus, purpose dictates choice of method in regard to *Tanakh* study. Needless to say, this is predicated upon the premise of *Ailu Va'ailu* that grants legitimacy to a variety of methods and recognizes them as expressing a possible and plausible reading of the text. There is an inner logic to the Midrash's reading of the text that we accept as imaginatively expressing a valid interpretation, without which we would not teach it to our children. Our preference, though, for this method and mode of expression is our understanding that the primary need of the child is an interpretation suited to his imaginative needs. The rationale for this is not only didactic but is also rooted in the priority of the religious need that the young soul connect with the world of *Tanakh*.

The price for such a strategy is that first perceptions (*girsā dey-ankuta*) are often very difficult to modify. When the child develops and is capable of appreciating other approaches,⁵ much work will be required to expose him receptively to differing interpretations. Indeed, there are many who remain throughout life with their first reading of *Tanakh* as their primary (or only) knowledge of it. The major impact of the kindergarten teacher's exposition of the *Chumash* on our perceptions of its narrative, even in adulthood, is legendary. Nevertheless, I would suggest that the benefits outweigh the disadvantages, since the goal of identifying with *Tanakh* is paramount.⁶

B

The mitzvah of talmud Torah mandates a dual obligation – intellectual and experiential. The former is rooted in the imperative of

veshinnantam levaneichah which emphasizes the element of knowledge (*veshinnantam*), while the latter is derived from *velimadetem otam et bneichem* which is a more general directive to learn that lacks the focus upon the intellectual achievement. This idea, which is the basic concept that informs most of the details of *hilkhot talmud torah*, was established by Ba'al HaTanya in his *hilkhot talmud Torah*⁷ and elaborated upon by Rabbi S.Y. Zevin in a wonderful essay on the topic. Both prove conclusively that there is an obligation to learn Torah, even when such study does not contribute to knowledge and that such an act qualifies as *talmud torah* (e.g., repetition of the same text daily, learning without any comprehension, studying a familiar text), but that there is also an imperative to increase Torah knowledge that requires the attainment of broader and deeper Torah knowledge.⁸

Thus, our remarks are predicated upon the experiential goal of establishing *ahavat torah* (love of Torah) and *yirat shamayim* through the medium of *talmud Torah* and do not relate to the pursuit of knowledge that is also included in the *mitzvah*. Clearly, this too is a component of the *mitzvah* that any worthy educational program will seek to realize but the issue at hand is prioritization. Which of these two elements is the primary value that must be granted precedence and that all other considerations must be subordinated to its needs? It is in this regard that we claim preference for the existential goal of the learner's relationships and identity over the attainment of knowledge. Simply put, *Ahavat Torah* is indeed religiously more important than Torah knowledge, and, therefore, its needs must be taken into account as a major factor in choice of curriculum.

C

Having utilized the example of childhood *Tanakh* study, let us now address the broader issue of *Tanakh* and *yirat shamayim* in contemporary society. It, too, must be viewed from a similar perspective. Essentially, the relationship of *Tanakh* and modernity confronts us in a dual manner. The first is our ability to relate to *Tanakh* as a relevant text that we can enter into an existential dialogue with, while the second is the intellectual threat posed by the findings of Biblical

Criticism and/or archæology to our conception of *Tanakh*, and their challenge to the unity and divine origin of the biblical narrative.⁹

As stated above, our relationship to the entire Torah, and not only its narrative portions, should be predicated upon the premise that existential involvement with *Tanakh* as a living text, and not knowledge of *Tanakh* for its own sake, is our crucial concern. *Ahavat Torah ve Yirat Shamayim* is the bedrock upon which interpretations, exegetical approaches and commentaries are to be founded and their implications for these concepts must be constantly evaluated.

Therefore, for example, a literary approach to *Tanakh* is a valid and fruitful method of interpretation, predicated on the assumption that *Tanakh* is a work of art from the stylistic perspective. However, any consideration of a literary analysis must always keep in mind that the detachment and lack of existential involvement with the protagonists as living figures that characterizes the study of literature is foreign to *Tanakh*; therefore, it can serve as a valuable interpretive tool that allows us to fathom the meaning of the text and to understand the methods and techniques that are employed to convey these ideas. However, this cannot and should not transform our approach to the text as a living text that engages us as the record of our legacy and is thereby unlike a literary work of art that deals with the fortunes of real or fictitious characters whose actual – and not literary – fate is of no concern to us.

The claim that *Tanakh* should be a text that we enter into a relationship and dialogue with rather than analyze for the sake of intellectual knowledge need not imply that we approach it with a simplistic and naïve perspective. On the contrary, after early childhood, a sophisticated approach that will bring about a deeper and more meaningful understanding will provide a much better basis for integrating the *Tanakh* into our existential world. This, in turn, will contribute to an enhanced *yirat shamayim*.

The outline of my topic that was distributed to members of the forum questions this premise. After stating that “some of the modern approaches to the study of *Tanakh*... seem to have the potential to undermine *yirat shamayim*,” it attributes this to a “sophistication that can distance us from a kind of *emunah peshutah* and continuity of in-

terpretive tradition that was traditionally a basis for *yirat shamayim*.” Therefore, we must address the subject in greater detail.

To a large degree, the issue is analogous to the more general question of whether naïve innocent faith is preferable to a philosophically oriented belief or not. The best way to illustrate this dilemma is by means of a metaphorical question: which father-son relationship is better – that of the four-year-old who can unhesitatingly approach the father, fall upon his lap, hug and kiss him without any qualms or that of a thirty-four year old son who cannot do any of the above, but, unlike the toddler, is fully aware of his father’s inner life? The adult relates to his parents’ spiritual goals and personal aspirations, identifies with the family system of values, understands their economic situation and its impact upon them, and is aware of the pressures at work as well as the sense of achievement and frustration that accompanies his parents’ life. In a word, the child has the ability to express himself naturally and unreservedly, effortlessly pouring forth his love while the adult must overcome deeply rooted inhibitions to do so, yet on the other hand, the adult has the advantage of perceiving the inner being of the parent to which the child is oblivious.

Obviously, the desirable solution would be to have the best of both worlds by trying to retain the spontaneity of the youngster and coupling it with the comprehension of the grown-up. Unfortunately, this is possible only to a degree. The dialectical tension that exists between the two attitudes is such that each compromises the other, so that a true harmony is unrealizable. Therefore, like it or not, we must strike a personal balance between the conflicting needs that the relationship requires.

Moreover, it is not really a matter of choice, since there is an age-appropriate response that dictates the proper course of action. A mature adult cannot remain with a child’s emotions nor can the child act like a grown up. Just like there is something very wrong with a four-year-old behaving like a thirty-four-year-old, so, too, it is equally incongruous for a thirty-four-year-old to express himself like a four-year-old. Thus, although we hopefully retain the ability as adults to express ourselves spontaneously and without

emotional inhibitions when necessary, we nevertheless are subject to the reservations and sophistication that are a direct result of the self-awareness and differentiation that accompanies adulthood.

The same dilemma that the child-parent metaphor illustrated presents itself in regard to our relationship with God, our Father in Heaven, and the preferred mode of man's contact with the Almighty. However, it is important to note that the theoretical preference of naïve vs. sophisticated faith that is rooted in philosophic debate regarding basic issues of man's spirituality, his place in the world and the role of intellect and emotion in his being, is not the only determining factor. As the Kuzari long ago pointed out,¹⁰ there is an additional element which must be taken into account. This is not the desirability of innocent faith, but the possibility of it. Thus, even though R. Yehuda Halevi strongly advocates innocent faith as the preferred alternative, he clearly recognizes that those who have been exposed to philosophical or critical thought have long ago lost their innocence and must, therefore, establish a spirituality that is rooted in rational thought and convictions. This is not necessarily the better option – it is simply the only one.

Let us now return to *Tanakh* and utilize these metaphors and analogies as a guide to assist us in determining our approach to *Tanakh*. The first conclusion to be drawn is that there must be age differentiation. The child should receive a version of the Torah that appeals to his imagination and understanding, even at the expense of depth and sophistication; it will, therefore, be a more vivid and less introspective approach that may often be two dimensional and schematic with the emphasis upon action rather than reflection. In addition, it will prefer amplification over ambiguity and literal comprehension over textual analysis. Thus, Rashi who is a quintessential “amplifier” will consistently portray the “heroes” in a more positive light than the *psukim* (verses) themselves, thereby making the good guys better, while the villains are usually cast in a more negative light that will always make the bad guys seem worse. It is a didactic world of black and white that does its best to eliminate gray from its universe and, therefore, most appropriate for the child's needs.¹¹

At a later stage, though – both in the context of schools, Ye-

shivot and Midrashot, as well as adult education – skilled textual analysis and/or nuanced psychological treatment will reveal subtle tensions and ambivalences that will enhance rather than detract from our *yirat shamayim*. The deeper we delve into Torah, the better we understand it and the issues that it is presenting to us. The more we understand it, the more it will engage us; the more it engages us, the more we will learn it; the more we learn, the more we identify with it. In short, as Rambam put it (Hilchot Teshuva, chapter 10), על פי הדעה, תהיה האהבה. (The love will be in proportion to the knowledge.)

In-depth analysis will provide us with an appreciation for many of the issues that lie beneath the surface of the narrative which, deep down, are the real issues that motivate the text and determine its message. The very act of analysis creates a bond to the text and the world of *Tanakh*. Thus, it is not only better intellectual understanding and the fulfillment of the knowledge component of the mitzvah that is achieved by in-depth analysis, but also a deeper emotional attachment will be established by dealing with the issues that *Tanakh* is concerned with. Although not without the danger of developing a critical faculty that fosters a posture of intellectual detachment, the benefits outweigh the pitfalls, and, therefore, the preferred course of action to achieve the goal of connecting to the *Tanakh* and enhancing our relationship with God should be sophisticated analysis.

A final point is worth noting in this context. The upshot of advocating an innocent and naïve approach to *Tanakh* as spiritually preferable for all would be that many great commentaries would never (or should never) have been written, unless deemed necessary for apologetic purposes. Can we really imagine a Yiddishkeit that would have willingly forfeited works that have illuminated *Tanakh* for the past hundreds of years?

The case for knowledge and analysis as the most desirable approach is true, regardless of the cultural context. However, it is undoubtedly the only avenue open to Modern Orthodox society that has integrated a modern sensibility into its worldview and experiences. The attempt to turn the clock back and return to a pre-modern outlook is like trying to recapture a lost innocence – appealing but impossible. As the Kuzari noted, once the exposure to rationalistic

and critical thought has occurred, the remedy is to harness the forces of reason and utilize them for an analysis that will foster and enhance *yirat shamayim* rather than bemoan the inability to experience a simpler and more direct approach.

Both sophistication and naiveté have their respective advantages and disadvantages. Modern Orthodox society has opted for the advantages of analytical knowledge in all other spheres of activity – it must, therefore remain faithful to its basic approach to life and cannot adopt an opposite approach in its religious mindset. Doing otherwise would produce the worst of both worlds, as all the advantages of knowledge and understanding would be forfeited without receiving any of the benefits of innocence. Having tasted the fruits of modernity and chosen sophistication and analysis as the proper approach to the world, it cannot belittle the religious sphere by depriving it of these achievements; to do so would be to short-change our religious awareness by providing it with lesser and more superficial tools than we grant other areas of knowledge. Medieval Spanish Jewry recognized the need for a society exposed to general culture to produce sophisticated commentaries – we would be well advised to follow in their footsteps.

D

In this regard, I would like to emphasize that the goal of identifying with *Tanakh* as a component of *yirat shamayim* and a major goal in our quest for *yirat shamayim* doesn't only mean that one should have respectful feelings towards the biblical text and assume that it is an important and holy book; rather, it is being engaged by the Torah and its words as a meaningful message that confronts a person existentially. This means that (1) it should be part of our lives and (2) that we involve ourselves in its life, i.e., the lives of its protagonists. Thus, the ethos of the *neviim* (prophets) should challenge us to live according to their charge, and we should turn to them in times of tragedy and triumph as a source of inspiration and direction.

For instance, the chapter in *Yirmiyahu* that serves as the Haftora of the second day of Rosh Hashanah, whose opening statement relates to עַם שְׂרִידֵי חֶרֶב הַלּוֹךְ לְהַרְגִיעַ יִשְׂרָאֵל (a nation of survivors that

escaped the sword, is being calmed down) and describes the people's return to Zion in terms of בכי יבואו ובתחנונים אויבילם (they will come with tears, and with prayers I will transport them) should be part of any response regarding the religious value of the state of Israel after the Holocaust, while *Kohelet* should be taken into account as part of our perspective on life just as one should constantly ask himself whether he has lived up to *Yeshayahu's* demands of social justice and so on and so forth. To put it simply, we should dialogue with *Tanakh* in the sense that one dialogues with great literature and relies upon it for guidance and spiritual sustenance. In essence, this is what the Torah itself instructs us when it defines its role for future generations: ועתה כתבו לכם את השירה הזאת ולמדה את בני ישראל שימה בפיהם למען תהיה לי השירה הזאת לעד בבני ישראל. (And now write for yourselves this song and teach it to the children of Israel, place it in their mouths so that this song will be a testimony to the children of Israel.) The text is designated as the spiritual framework of reference for the predicaments that shall befall us throughout history and we are instructed to refer to it for such purposes. The flip side of this is that we should involve ourselves in the *Tanakh's* narratives and view them as relevant to us. Thus, problematic episodes should disturb us, arouse our interest and cause intense debate at the family Shabbat table, the study group and the public sphere. The inner life of its characters as they cope with their crises should concern us as the life of those who are close to us, and not only as instructive material.

I have focused upon the human element in *Tanakh*, since it is the most significant aspect that should concern us, both regarding life and *Tanakh*, but the underlying concept relates to the historical and geographical elements as well. The "Tanakh in hand" tiyulim (walking tours) that are popular in Israel are an excellent example of relating to *Tanakh* as a contiguous historical reality that connects us with the past. The sense of walking down the same paths that Eliyahu and Elisha used or retracing the steps of David Hamelech on location is exhilarating. If driving down the Yerushaliyim–Tel Aviv highway, one realizes that he is in Emek Ayalon where the moon stood for Yehoshua and ponders that fact rather than the onrushing traffic or Israeli cabdrivers, then he is able to leave behind him the mundane

existence of his locale as he transcends the present and is transported to the realm of Jewish historical destiny. All these experiences inject the *Tanakh* and its vision of Jewish destiny into our daily lives, as they juxtapose our past and present and weave them together into a live and dynamic presence within our current existence. Such an attachment to the text as the living record of Jewish existence is a direct contribution to *yirat shamayim* since we exist throughout history as people and it is through the medium of history that the relationship is enacted and realized.

II

Two controversies that revolved around the relationship between *Tanakh* and *yirat shamayim* engulfed the Religious Zionist–Modern Orthodox world in *Eretz Yisroel* in recent years and exposed basic disagreements upon fundamental issues. Although the two debates were lumped together by most participants and treated as one issue of contention, they are two distinct arguments that must be treated as such and not be intertwined into a single debate. The first, the code named *Tanakh begovah ha' eynayim* was the question of evaluating biblical figures through the prism of our experience and the willingness to criticize various actions that they performed. The second, a debate addressed the legitimacy of utilizing the findings of Biblical Criticism within an Orthodox framework. In both cases, it was alleged that a lack of *yirat shamayim* is at the root of both approaches and that the use of these methods has the potential to diminish *yirat shamayim* in the students that are exposed to it.

Actually, there are two separate threats that exist to *yirat shamayim* in both of these cases. The first, and obvious, factor is the substance of the critiques that are considered by opponents of these approaches to undermine *yirat shamayim*, due to content that in their opinion belittles holy figures or rejects basic tenets of Judaism regarding the text of the Torah. However, a second, and no less important problem is not the content but the posture of the critic. Criticism, by its very definition, implies a perspective that sets the critic above and outside the matter under scrutiny. The relationship assumes impartiality and judgment and precludes empathy and

identification. A good deal of the animosity that exists between the subject of a review and its writer, be it in art, literature or sports, is rooted in the Olympian aloofness that the critic adopts as his posture. He is not a participant seeking to better understand or a sympathizer trying to help, but a judge who assumes superiority. Were he to express feelings of a common endeavor and phrase his remarks as a friend's constructive criticism, or in another words, if the relationship was perceived as an I-thou relationship, the angry and insulted responses of those being criticized would be substantially different.

The same holds true regarding *Tanakh*. It makes all the difference in the world from the perspective of *yirat shamayim* if we approach the stories of Mosheh Rabeinu and David Hamelech with the sense of empathy that we exhibit towards immediate family and with the feelings that close disciples feel to their masters, or if we judge the relevant episodes from the objective viewpoint of the unengaged critic. In the former case, the student views them as figures with whom he can identify and admire; the narrative and analysis serve to reveal the inner workings of great souls whose challenges and struggles we are interested in experiencing. We are not engaged in a critique of the event but in reliving it. In the latter event, the supremacy of the critic – inherent by the very nature of the critical act – detaches him from any emotional attachment to the text and transforms him from a participant into an observer and from a sympathizer into an authority.

Thus, although the two issues are unrelated from the substantive point of view, there exists a common denominator of perspective that is no less crucial than the actual content in terms of respect and *yirat shamayim*. Let us now turn to the issues themselves. The debate regarding the legitimacy of criticizing towering biblical figures revolves around two poles. The first is whether their actions and motives can be judged through insights based upon our knowledge of human nature or do we view their stature as so unique and exalted that we cannot begin to approximate their level of existence? The second dilemma is the justification of criticizing the actions of the great figures of *Tanakh* as being wrong or sinful. Is it reasonable that they

too may have erred and sinned, or must we axiomatically assume that their righteousness is such that the offenses of mere mortals are not committed by them, and therefore that their transgressions must be understood in an entirely different light than persons more familiar to us? The common denominator of both issues is whether we view them as essentially human or as grand heroic figures who tower above us. Since the topic of this paper is *yirat shamayim* and not the study of *Tanakh* per se, the question that we must address is not the issue itself but the possibility of harmonizing *yirat shamayim* with the humanizing tendency of interpretation. Thus, it is one thing to suppose that an attempt to make Avraham Avinu more human and similar to us is misguided – it is something totally different to claim that this reflects a flawed *yirat shamayim* or that it will diminish *yirat shamayim*.

The claim that *yirat shamayim* dictates a superhuman perception of biblical protagonists is totally unwarranted, as long as we maintain proper respect for their achievements and personalities. The recognition of humanity in great figures does not necessarily result in a flippant and irreverent reading of *Tanakh* or need it detract from our appreciation of their greatness. Thus, a reading of *Sefer Breishit* that views the lives of the *Avot* through the prism of our human experience need not belittle their accomplishments or their *yirat shamayim*; on the contrary, it emphasizes their achievements. If Avraham Avinu was able to reach the spiritual peaks that he scaled from a starting point of plain humanity similar to that of common man and if his relationship with God was realized as a person who interacts with others in the same manner as we do, faces our dilemmas and is prone to the frailty of human judgment, it only makes him greater and his achievement more impressive. Even if they exhibit weakness or err, the problems and failures of the *Avot* serve to highlight the human condition and the complexity of life rather than cause us to deny their greatness.

To take another example, David Hamelech's greatness is not lessened but heightened by the fact he had strong desires and that he was able to overcome his failures. The perek in *Tehillim* (51) that

details his state of mind after the sin is a shining example of *yirat shamayim* that is so powerful because of its recognition of the human element involved. The statement that he was conceived in sin – הן – בעוון חוללתי ובהטא יהמתני אמי (lo, in sin I was conceived, and with transgression did my mother incubate me) – explicitly defines his state of existence as human and exposed to desire and impulse. The clash between ingrained human frailty and the obligations thrust upon a human being because of his fear of God, the tension between the inner humiliation of failure, and the justification of sin as a human characteristic directly address the basic issues of *yirat shamayim* that concern us all. Lest we think that the above claim was only uttered from the depths of despair after the sin but does not represent a more basic truth, David himself returned to the same theme on another occasion (103:14) and reiterated the very same sentiment as a general comment on the state of man: כי הוא ידע יצרנו זכור כי עפר אנהנו (For He knows our desires, remembers that we are dust).

In essence, the argument regarding the human element is a question of defining spiritual achievement. If we are to consider spiritual greatness from the perspective of absolute accomplishment, there is a case to be made that the greater and more removed from normal existence biblical figures are and the less their lives resemble those of mere mortals, the grander their achievement is, regardless of circumstance. However, if we focus upon subjective personal growth and commitment to God, the greatness of the *Avot* and others is precisely in their rising above the limitations of normal human beings to devote their lives to God. In the context of the topic of *yirat shamayim* and *Tanakh*, the religious commitment, not the metaphysical resolution, is what concerns us. Thus, paradoxically, if we view the personal element as paramount, the human perspective applied to biblical heroes serves to enhance their spiritual stature and to emphasize their *yirat shamayim* as the hallmark of their greatness. Suffice to mention the *Akeidah* in this context to illustrate that the more human we consider the relationships and emotions involved, the more impressive is the religious commitment. Moreover, to the extent that we view Avraham as a role model and a beacon to follow

in his footsteps, the more his struggles resemble our dilemmas, the easier it is to identify with his achievements and to utilize them for our spiritual advancement.¹²

Furthermore, even if one were to deny the validity of such an interpretation *qua* biblical interpretation from an intellectual and religious perspective, it is undeniable that Gedolei Yisroel have adopted such positions. A prominent example is the Ramban, who both applied contemporary experience to interpret the psychology of the *Avot* and also famously criticized various actions of theirs,¹³ but he is far from being unique. Therefore, any claim that such an approach reveals a lack of *yirat shamayim* or diminishes the student's *yirat shamayim* is disparaging not only of contemporary Modern Orthodoxy but also of luminaries such as the Ramban and other Gedolei Yisroel.¹⁴

The third issue in the debate over current modes of *Tanakh* study is the utilization of Biblical Criticism and the inroads that it has made into our community. It is self-evident that a system of thought that challenges the most basic and fundamental principle of *Tanakh* as *dvar HaShem* is incompatible with our beliefs and a direct threat to our religious identity. Thus, the academic study of *Tanakh* as practiced in Bible departments throughout the country is not a threat to *yirat shamayim* – it is anathema to it. The only statement that one can make about this is *shomer nafsho yirchak mehem* (one who guards his soul will keep himself apart from them) or in a stronger vein, it is certainly appropriate to apply to it the dictum of the Gemara in *Avodah Zarah* (17a) regarding heresy: הרחק מעליה: זו מינות – דרךך – (Stay away from its path – this is heresy). Simply put, the Gemara advocates disengagement from an intellectual setting that threatens a person's *yirat shamayim*.

If we accept the above claim that Biblical Criticism and *yirat shamayim* are totally incompatible, a choice must be made between an affirmation of religious commitment and rejection of the academic findings or acceptance of the critical approach to *Tanakh* at the expense of *yirat shamayim*. This leaves a modern Jew who is both God-fearing and trusting in the achievements of the human intellect

in a bind, since he must choose between two conflicting sources of values and knowledge that are both recognized by him as valid.

At its root, the issue is not unique to Biblical Criticism; rather, it is part of the broader subject of faith and science that has engaged religious philosophy over the past millennium, since the essence of the issue pits the analytical findings of the human intellect against the plain meaning of the Scriptural text. This leaves us with three options: (1) accepting the findings of science and rejecting the plain meaning of the revealed text, either by denial of the text's authority or by reinterpretation of its meaning, (2) holding on to the literal meaning of the text and rejecting scientific knowledge as the product of fallible human reason, or (3) attempting to find middle ground, in which part of the scientific finding is recognized and integrated into the textual meaning while other portions are denied.

In theory, *yirat shamayim* can accommodate all three of these alternatives, although the first only by a radical redefining of many basic tenets and texts. Therefore, the traditional approach has been to choose the second or third options in varying degrees. Thus, even though the classic sources relate mainly to natural science and not to Biblical Criticism, which is a more recent phenomenon, the basic methodology is applicable in the case of Biblical Criticism and biblical archaeology as well. However, since Biblical Criticism is not a natural science, the prevailing tendency has certainly been the third approach that declines any acceptance of critical theories.

A radical break with this tradition was initiated by R. Mordechai Breuer who established a method of interpretation that is based upon adoption of the first alternative regarding Biblical Criticism. The method is predicated upon the assumption that the textual conclusions of Biblical Criticism are accurate and their findings indisputable, so that intellectual honesty requires us to validate them. The religious challenge, therefore, is not to deny the textual claims but to provide them with a metaphysical framework that is compatible with an Orthodox viewpoint. R. Breuer's approach figured prominently in a previous Orthodox Forum, whose papers have subsequently been published,¹⁵ there is not much point, therefore,

in entering into a lengthy discussion of it here, despite its relevance for our topic.¹⁶ However, the discussions of that forum focused upon the theological implications of the method and did not relate to the educational aspects of it. These, though, are a crucial element for any evaluation of his *Shitat Habechinot* and its relationship to *yirat shamayim*.

The inherent dangers of contact with Biblical Criticism and the attempt to integrate it into an Orthodox framework from an experiential point of view are of a dual nature. The first is a function of its content. Aside from the dilemma of adopting (or adapting) interpretations that were arrived at by a method whose implicit metaphysical axioms are foreign to any God-fearing outlook and the concern that these principles may unknowingly be the motivating force that underlies the suggested interpretation – which was the subject of the previous forum – there is the additional problem of the slippery slope. Exposure to a body of work that is academically impressive but whose theological premises are in contradiction to *yirat shamayim* may cause a student to go beyond R. Breuer's policy of accepting the details and rejecting the framework and induce him to accept the metaphysical structure as well. Essentially, such a person accepts the premise of R. Breuer's critics that the interpretations and metaphysics are inseparable, only like R. Breuer and unlike his critics, he is so convinced of the interpretations that he does not have the option of rejecting them. Therefore, he has no choice but to redefine his beliefs. Even if this is sincerely done out of deep religious motivation, the result will be a system of belief totally incompatible with traditional Orthodoxy. R. Breuer himself brought attention to this phenomenon in a very poignant piece that he wrote in *Megadim* a few years ago.¹⁷

The additional risk of this method is the emotional aspect. The constant contact with texts and/or people that treat *Tanakh* as an ancient piquant text lacking divine authority can have a corrosive influence. If the intellectual framework of reference is an academic milieu that treats Torah as fodder for deconstruction, then there is an existential price that is often exacted. The sense of awe, dignity, and reverence that we feel towards Torah as d'var HaShem is readily

compromised in the soul if critical concepts become routine and cease to jar the ears. References to “the Biblical narrator” or other similar phrases¹⁸ that convey a detached academic aloofness and the loss of intimacy and *varmkeit* that must accompany the study of *Tanakh* are not worth any intellectual gains that may have been gotten by exposure to such materials. To employ a metaphor, if a person has to choose between knowing more about his father or mother, but at the price that the additional understanding will come at the expense of the warmth and intimacy, isn't it self evident that it's better to know less and feel more rather than vice versa?

This brings us to the heart of the issue of *Tanakh* and *yirat shamayim*. To paraphrase John Henry Newman's remark about God and Nature, *we do not believe in God because of the Tanakh, rather we accept the Tanakh because of our belief in Him*. If medieval commentators saw *Tanakh* as a means of arriving at *yirat shamayim*, our perspective is the opposite – *Tanakh* is an expression of the relationship between Am Yisroel and God. Therefore, the entire approach to *Tanakh* must be transformed. If *Tanakh* is meant to persuade us to accept God and His Commandments, the focus must be its ability to fulfill an authenticating role. Thus, both the Rambam and the Ramban emphasized *Maamad Har Sinai* as proof of *Tanakh's* divine origin and veracity. The medievals insisted upon Mosheh Rabeinu's prophetic stature and integrity, since these elements are crucial to the burden of proof to which *Tanakh* must adhere. The advantage of such an approach is obvious, since it is able to supply an autonomous basis for our belief in *Tanakh*. The result, though, is that there is a strong emphasis in their writings upon the rational criteria in our evaluation of *Tanakh* at the expense of the emotional elements. Moreover, the medieval emphasis upon the mode of transmission of *Tanakh* as providing proof of its veracity assumes that the Torah can be submitted to a test of verifiability that will satisfy standards erected by human reason and dictated by the logic of the mind, and that its success in this test will support its message of faith and belief. The acceptance of such a standard was a policy that they willingly adopted, since they had no doubt in the outcome.

To us, though, such a premise is disastrous. If we were to

approach *Tanakh* critically from an a priori perspective that is not predicated upon our set of beliefs in God and without our accompanying tradition, we would be swept away by critical doubts and a historical skepticism that would cause us to view the biblical text as non-convincing. Therefore, *Tanakh* for us is not a catalyst for belief, but an expression of a relationship with Him whom we believe and trust, regardless of an objective critical evaluation of the textual evidence. Lest I be misunderstood, let me emphatically emphasize that this is not to claim that belief need not be based upon firm grounds of conviction, rational or otherwise; it is simply to state that the grounds for our belief are rooted in other spheres of life and are not a function of the contact with *Tanakh* per se.

Thus, the experiential rather than the intellectual element must be paramount in *Tanakh*, since the significance of *Tanakh* for us is rooted in its being d'var HaShem and not in its proving Him. Needless to say, understanding the statements of the most dear, beloved and respected Entity that exists is important as an expression of awe and love as well as for the content of divine wisdom. As the Rambam (Teshuva 10:6) long ago stated: על פי הדעה תהיה האהבה. Indeed, there is no doubt that in practice, the lion's share of time devoted to *Tanakh* study will focus upon analysis and comprehension. The root cause, however, is the recognition of *Tanakh* as God's message and from it are derived the applications that were discussed above. Be it the preference of Rashi's imaginative interpretations for children, the need for an engaged involvement or the challenge of biblical criticism, all of these issues revolve around the establishment of the priority of *Emunah* and *yirat shamayim* to *Tanakh*, and the transformation of the relationship between *Tanakh* and *yirat shamayim* in the modern era. זיל גמור, ואידך, – the rest is all study!

APPENDIX

The assigned topic of this paper, which was presented at a conference of the Orthodox forum held in 2006, was *Tanakh* and *yirat shamayim*. The utilization of the Midrash and its mode of instruction to young children was intended simply as a case study to illustrate the basic and broader point of the interrelationship between these

two factors and was not meant as a detailed treatment of the subject of teaching Midrash to youngsters. Nevertheless, a good deal of the discussion at the Forum and of the subsequent comments that I received have focused on the details of the particular example that seemed to have touched a chord (or a nerve) and, therefore, a few words of elaboration upon this topic may not be out of place.

First, a word or two about the contemporary cultural background is necessary. The thesis outlined in the paper is rooted in human nature and the innate differences between the imaginative world of the child as opposed to that of the adult, and is, therefore, independent of any particular cultural context. Nevertheless, the art of education is to a large degree a system of checks and balances. Unless one believes in an extreme monochromatic view of the world in which there are no competing and conflicting elements that must be balanced but simply correct and incorrect approaches, there will always be a creative but disturbing dialectic between various values and goals that we aspire to realize, yet are at odds with each other and therefore engender in our souls a real tension between these different elements. This results in a spiritual and educational balancing act in which the differing states must be given their due, since each contains positive elements that we seek, yet without being tempered by opposing elements will be extremely one-sided and unfaithful to our needs. If not a golden mean that can create the proper balance, then at the very least, a constant shift from one value to the other. Thus, if one value is very prominent in a particular individual or society, there is a need to counter-balance it by emphasizing the opposite idea, while in a different setting, an opposite course of action will be preferable, despite the fact that in both cases we are attempting to achieve the same educational result.

Therefore, there may indeed be a significant difference regarding the advocacy of Midrash in the contemporary setting that is a function of an Israeli or American vantage point. As mentioned above, the basic message is valid in any context but in terms of educational practice – or in the Aristotelian metaphor that the Rambam adopted of bending the stave – there is a difference in perspective between the two continents.

The concerns raised by Orthodox Forum participants that the imaginative childhood narrative will remain the only version implanted in the learner's mind, leaving him or her with a simplistic and superficial picture of the biblical narrative, reflect a situation in which the naive viewpoint appropriate for childhood is never outgrown because there is no serious attempt to teach *Chumash* differently at a later age. My impression is that very few North American Yeshiva high schools teach *Tanakh* in the manner that is common here in Israel and so, therefore, there is no competing vision that is presented at a later age to supplement and/or supplant the younger version. I do believe that there is a slow but steady shift that is happening in American Modern Orthodoxy in this regard, that the *Tanakh* trade winds are blowing westward from Eretz Hakodesh to Medinat Hayam and that the *Tanakh* curriculum will evolve accordingly,¹⁹ so that the message of this paper will become more relevant in the United States, but at the moment there is a cultural gap between the two countries.

Religious Zionism, as well as classic secular Zionism, has a strong ideological interest in the literal meaning of *Tanakh*, since this serves as a model and a proof of the viability of Jewish life in the Land of Israel and a living connection to the past. While this is undoubtedly a priority, the price of such an approach is to emphasize the historical at the expense of the literary element. Midrash, which is the prime example of a literary and non-historical reading of *Tanakh*, therefore, suffers from a certain amount of neglect. My argument is not intended to belittle the importance of a literal reading of *Tanakh* but to point attention to the value of the imaginative elements and their contribution to *yirat shamayim*.

Moreover, not only is the Israeli Religious Zionist ethos more engaged by the *Tanakh* than the corresponding Modern Orthodox culture, but there is also much more contact and cultural osmosis between Modern Orthodox and Haredi society in the United States than in Israel. This is a situation that has many advantages, but like most such phenomenon, it also has its drawbacks.

One of these relates to *Tanakh* study. Iconoclasts excluded, human nature finds it uncomfortable to articulate opinions that the

speaker may believe in sincerely but which will shock the surroundings and therefore tends to tone down, modify and/or qualify statements that are out of sync with the rest of the community that we belong to and with whom we pray. In other words, the boundaries of the consensus do impact upon formulation and articulation of opinions. The moment certain positions are regarded by the majority as self-evident, the contours of the debate are influenced and positions undergo self-censoring. The result of this in contemporary American Modern Orthodoxy is that certain excesses of Haredi interpretation impact upon Modern Orthodox schools and shuls, so that any attempt to encourage Midrash at the expense of *pshat* is viewed as adding fuel to the fire.

In Eretz Hakodesh, which is the vantage point from which this paper was written, the situation is reversed; *pshuto shel mikra* rules the roost and has so taken over the field that no real attempt is made to teach Midrash or parshanut seriously in the school system. The Barkai system that teaches *Chumash* out of *Tanakh* in the early grades without Rashi or anything else is quite popular and used by many schools in the Religious Zionist system. There are many advantages to their hammering in the text at a young age, but it creates a warped system in the other direction. Thus, the current head of the religious high school *Tanakh* studies in the Ministry of Education, a very serious talmid chacham who believes in old-fashioned parshanut and assigns Ramban on the Bagrut exams, is universally villainized by *Tanakh* teachers and high school principals for teaching *Tanakh* in a wrongheaded manner and is considered totally out of touch with the contemporary *Tanakh zeitgeist*.

Thus, there is no comparable Religious Zionist text to the Little Midrash Says; the only text similar to it is *Koh Asu Chachmeinu* which tells over the stories of Chazal, but not *Tanakh*, and is indeed very effective in accomplishing the goal of familiarity and identity that was addressed in the paper. An article in *Tradition*²⁰ very perceptively noted how Mosad Harav Kook's *Torat Chaim* edition of the *Chumash*, which has effectively replaced the traditional Mikraot Gedolot in Religious Zionist circles, took out all the commentaries that were more midrashic and homiletical (in particular, the Kli

Yakar and Or Ha'chaim) and replaced them with a smorgasbord of medieval Spanish *pshuto shel mikra* oriented commentaries. Therefore, this paper is not swimming upstream against a simplifying Haredi current, but against an opposite Religious Zionist literal tendency and the advocacy of Midrash at a young age is partially meant as a counterbalance to the prevailing literal approach that is so dominant in contemporary Israeli Religious Zionist culture.

It is indeed true that in societies in which the reverse is true and the child's *Tanakh* curriculum is dominated by a steady diet of Midrash, sound educational policy would dictate issuing a call for more *pshuto shel mikra*. As stated above, education is to a large degree an attempt to create (or restore) an equilibrium between contrasting perspectives and, therefore, differs from society to society.

A second point that was raised by some of the participants regarding the use of Midrash was that it is perceived as a simplistic and fantastic text that will only invite ridicule and, therefore, the needs of the modern learner are better served by shelving these Midrashic passages as embarrassing secrets that do not warrant display. Indeed, the danger of too literal a reading of the Midrash exists and it is undeniable that many sincere learners in the past and present treat the Midrashic texts in too literal a manner that results in a simplistic text that belittles Chazal. Nevertheless, we must still utilize the Midrashim and not throw out the baby with the bath water.

The world of the Midrash is extremely rich and evocative, if explored in depth and not taken in the narrow literal sense. No less a figure than the Rambam devoted considerable energy to refuting the literal approach to Midrash and its consequences; however, he did not simply disqualify Midrash but rather insisted that it should be understood figuratively. Therefore, he often utilized Midrashin prominently in the *Guide*, a classic philosophical text that was addressed to a sophisticated audience. Ramban, an additional towering medieval authority whose philosophical world view was far removed from the Rambam's, makes the same point. In his perush on *parshat Chayei Sarah*,²¹ he quotes the Gemarah in Bava Bathra 16b that Avraham Avinu had a daughter named "*bakol*," points out that it is ridiculous to understand this claim literally, explains that the

“daughter” is the attribute of *midat hayesod* and that the Midrash is simply expressing a very basic idea in figurative language.

Thus, for example, the Midrash that Noah was assaulted by a lion whose food was late is a very colorful story but also contains more basic truths. Aside from illustrating the inherent cruelty of the natural world and man’s inability to replace God as a provider of the world’s needs, it is also staking a position regarding Noah. According to this Midrash, Noah was not rescued from the deluge because of his personal righteousness, but rather there was a need to rescue someone, anybody, so that the human race would continue and creation would not lose its meaning. Noah happened to be the best of a bad lot, but not much more. Therefore, the bare minimum – “*ach Noach*” – needed for survival of the human race was saved, viz. a wounded Noah who could hand the torch over to the next generation (which is the reason that he has no positive role in the post-deluvian world), but the price of the generation’s wickedness was exacted from him as well. This is an idea which is supported by other Midrashim relating to Noah and opposed by others. Support from the text can be summoned for both as well, so that the colorful Midrash taught to the child need not embarrass the adult, since it expresses a profound truth, if figuratively read by a serious adult.

Countless additional Midrashim could be summoned to illustrate this point (e.g., Yitzchak’s blindness as a result of the Akeidah is a similar idea to Noah and the lion), but we shall limit ourselves to the above example which was chosen since it was quoted in the opening sentences of this paper. Midrashim do not need to be undone or neglected at a later stage – they have to be reinterpreted and recast as adult texts that should be treated figuratively. This is admittedly difficult and requires providing teachers with the requisite pedagogic tools, but we certainly need not be embarrassed that they are mocked by those who lack the insight and sensitivity to understand an imaginative text. *L’havdil*, if Tennyson utilized Greek mythology, does that mean that he simplistically believed a primitive text or that he was able to imaginatively transcend the literal meaning and create a rich world of symbol and metaphor? So, too, the Midrashic form of expression is the literary vehicle that our sages chose as an

exegetical tool that can relate both to children and adults, addressing the needs of each at their respective levels.

NOTES

1. Tehillim 111:10.
2. Mishlei 1:7.
3. This claim is not due to an aversion to the English language but is meant to emphasize the familiarity and warmth that are associated with *Av*/Father and *Em*/Mother but are lacking from Patriarch and Matriarch, whose Latin etymology and archaic connotations transform it for the contemporary user into a word denoting a dignified but distant persona, which is the exact opposite of the nearness and intimacy that we seek with the *Avot* as our fathers and mothers.
4. The prohibition to teach Torah to non-Jews is derived by the Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 59a) from the word *Morasha*. One opinion derives it from the literal meaning of the word (legacy) while the other transforms it into *Me'urasah* (betrothed). If we accept the first suggestion, this ban may be a halakhic expression of the principle that our study of Torah is not only for the sake of knowledge but is an act of participating in a family legacy that is not intended for others. Unlike the latter *drasha* that focuses upon the act of learning and the relationship that it creates between man and God, the utilization of the text's plain meaning that Torah is our legacy precludes those who do not belong to the family narrative and whose learning of Torah must be for the content alone.

[All of this is valid assuming that the *issur* includes Torah *shebekhtav* and not only Torah *shebaal peh* and that the guiding principle is the legacy or non-legacy element rather than a commitment vs. non-commitment division. For a brief survey of sources and references, see *Margalit Hayam*, ad loc.]

5. The primary purpose of this paper is the relationship between *Tanakh* study and *yirat shamayim* and not the teaching of Torah to children. Therefore, I have not attempted to chart a detailed course of *Tanakh* study for various stages of childhood and have limited myself to a schematic presentation.

I would also readily agree to the claim that exposing a youngster to a sophisticated interpretation will bring about a greater appreciation, and therefore also greater identification, but the age factor here is crucial. There is an age where the path to the heart and mind is through the Midrashic imagination and not in-depth analysis, and my remarks relate to this stage of development.

6. R. Samson Raphael Hirsch expressed a similar position regarding the analogous issue of anthropomorphism in *Tanakh*:

Regarding...anthropomorphic expressions of God, we would like to make a general remark. For so long people have philosophied all round these expressions to remove the danger of the slightest thought of any materiality or corporality of God that at the end one runs very nearly into the danger of losing all idea of the personality of God. Had that been the purpose of the Torah,

those kind of expressions could easily have been avoided. But this last danger is greater than the first... This was also the opinion of Ravad, the quintessential Jewish thinker, that awareness of the personality of God is of much greater importance than philosophical speculation about these matters.

(Commentary on Breishit 6:6)

7. Shulkhan Arukh HaRav, *hilkhot talmud Torah*, ch. 2, 12–13, ch. 3, 1–4, esp. *kuntres achron s.v. vehinei, vehashta*. Rav S.Y. Zevin “Talmud Torah Veediatah” in *Leor HaHalakhah* (Tel Aviv, 1957) pp. 204–13.
8. Cf. *Menachot* 99b, *Nedarim* 8a, Ran ad loc, s.v. *Ha, Kiddushin* 30a. Interestingly, the Rambam positioned *hilkhot Talmud Torah* in *Sefer Madah* and not in *Sefer Ahavah*.
9. In theory, the two are unrelated. A person can be unperturbed by scholarly claims regarding *Tanakh* and yet feel unengaged by its message, while others may accept critical theories relating to Torah but view it as the formative text of Jewish historical destiny and, therefore, of deep relevance to their lives. The latter, of course, was the attitude of classical Zionism to the *Tanakh* while the former is familiar to us as the routine of numerous individuals who live a frum lifestyle, but are distant from the world of *Tanakh*. Such a mindset is not necessarily a function of a modern sensibility; many factors may contribute to it, but, undoubtedly, the modern outlook can certainly create an experiential distance from *Tanakh* that is difficult to bridge.
10. 2:26; 5:1–2.
11. An enlightening example from *Tanakh* itself is the interplay between *Mishlei* and *Iyov*. Both address the issue of divine justice, but in markedly different perspectives. *Mishlei* presents a conventional, almost facile, morality that portrays a world in which the righteous are always rewarded and the wicked never prosper. The outlook of the companions that *sefer Iyov* so unflinchingly attacks is the very world that *Mishlei* champions. The juxtaposition of the two is almost an act of self-reflection on the part of *Tanakh*, with *Iyov* serving to call into question the conclusions of its companion *sefer*. One of the more plausible suggestions to explain the discrepancy is that *Mishlei* is addressed to the young child while *Iyov* reflects the world of the adult. The voice of the narrator in *Mishlei* is the didactic parental voice while *Iyov* presents the raging debate of the embittered adult conversing with his peers. Each message is age-appropriate for the needs of its participants.
12. It must also be emphasized that even if such a position is incorrect and the objective spiritual apex is a more important criteria than the subjective personal development, the vantage point of the *yirat shamayim* perspective cannot be utilized to deny the “human” reading of *Tanakh* as legitimate. Since it is an intellectually and religiously viable option that does not diminish the religious stature of the biblical heroes, it cannot be repudiated on the basis of disrespect or lack of *yirat shamayim*. As long as it is not adopted out of disdain to the *Avot* and *Imahot*, but is a sincere attempt to interpret *Tanakh*, *yirat shamayim* is wholly accepting of such an approach.

13. See Breishit 46:29, 12:10 and 16:6.
14. I am well aware of the claim that what is allowed to Ramban is off limits to us because of Ramban's greater stature. The essential point of the debate, though, revolves around the basic legitimacy of such an approach and is a theological issue that cannot be influenced by the greatness of the commentator or his personal piety. If it is a theological error to ascribe common human characteristics to biblical figures, the inescapable conclusion must be that Ramban gravely erred, so that it can unequivocally be stated that Ramban (and others) have legitimized the basic stance. Needless to say, it is undeniable that such an approach must be done with a deep and sincere respect vis-à-vis the biblical figures, but one need not be Ramban in order to sincerely trust to their greatness or to evaluate their actions responsibly and respectfully.
15. *Modern Scholarship in the Study of Torah*, ed. S. Carmy (New York, 1996). An additional collection of essays specifically devoted to R. Breuer's method has also appeared in Hebrew, *Shitat Habechinot shel Harav Mordechai Breuer*, ed. Y. Ofer (Alon Shvut, 2005)
16. Rav Breuer's paper was titled, "The Study of the Bible and the Primacy of the Fear of Heaven: Compatibility or Contradiction."
17. M. Breuer, "Al Bikoret Hamikra," *Megadim*, 30 (1999) pp. 97–107.
18. An excellent example that can be illustrated in the Israeli scene is the use of many observant intellectuals of the word **הַיְיָ**, pronounced as it is written, of course, rather than the Holy One, Blessed Is He, or Ribbono shel Olam to describe God. The difference in terms of cold distance as opposed to a warm relationship is light years.
19. The recently introduced summer *yemi iyun* in *Tanakh* is a good example of this phenomenon. The concept, which originated in Israel, both reflects and creates a renewed interest in serious *Tanakh* study that will eventually have a trickle-down effect to the high school level.
20. B. Barry Levy, "Mikraot Gedolot and Other Great Books," *Tradition*, 25,4 (1991), pp. 65, 75.
21. Breishit 24:1.