
Article

A Talmud Page as a Metaphor of a Scientific Text
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Abstract

The authors' aim in this article is to deal with a new option of writing a hermeneutical text by using the metaphor of a Talmud page. They present this through the multiplicity in which three researchers contemplate a single set text. This case concerns the life story of Zoheira, a Bedouin student at a teacher's college. The use of the Talmudic layout as a metaphor of a scientific text presents a preference of a polyphony of voices, rather than one voice, when dealing with ambiguous texts. It also changes the places of both the reader and the researcher.

Keywords: life story, narrative analysis, hermeneutics, Talmud, metaphors

Our aim in this article is to deal with a new option in writing a hermeneutical text by using the metaphor of a Talmud page. This will be presented through the multiplicity and dynamics of the ways in which three researchers think about and contemplate a single set text. The case in question concerns the transcription of a life story related by Zoheira, a Bedouin student who is studying at a teacher's college.

Modern hermeneutics:

In his survey of the developments that led to the new stream of deconstruction in the second half of the 20th century, Levy (1987) wrote that representatives of contemporary philosophical hermeneutics, such as Husserl (1999), Ricœur (1974), and Gadamer (2000), have acknowledged the fact that no interpretation can reveal the one and only true meaning of a text. Meaning is composed of all the possible and potential

interpretations, and although every interpretation reveals new horizons and can contribute to a suitable understanding of the text, it will never reach the ultimate meaning.

The assumption that it is impossible to reach a consensus with regard to the original meaning of a text, let alone rule on its final meaning, led several philosophers to a further hypothesis that searching for meaning is futile and that it is preferable to focus on “significance” (Gadamer, 2000). The difference between the meaning and the significance of a text has implications with regard to the central position of the individual reader in the process of interpretation. When we assume that a text has a fixed meaning, we also assume that the interpretation is either correct or incorrect, regardless of the reader. However, if the text has multiple meanings, the reader is the one who ascribes a meaning to it at that particular time and in that particular place. Thus, different readers interpret the text differently.

Gadamer (2000) claimed that people read texts from the standpoint of a certain set of values that are unique to their self-understanding. He stressed the influence of a collective reading tradition in which readers express their manner of reading and his individual understanding of the text. Something that catches the eye of a particular reader in a period with a particular reading tradition does not catch the eye of a reader in another period. The meaning of the text is not contained within, waiting to be revealed, from the outset; rather, it is created in the encounter between the text and the reader, who is both an individual and a person of time and place.

The passage to the hermeneutic paradigm also changes the position of the researcher. During the course of the history of scientific research, from the end of the 19th century and up to the 21st, researchers were granted various options to express their views. It is possible to speak about a transition from the “absent” researcher—one who is not present directly in the text and who speaks in the name of objectivity and “scientific truth,” via the interpreting and organizing researcher—to the participating researcher. For instance, the works of Lieblich—Kibbutz Makom (1984), Gilgulo shel Makom (2000), or Seder Nashim (2003)—demonstrate this difference. In the first book, the researcher is an absent and distant figure whose name appears on the cover. In the other two books, however, she is a thinking, feeling, objecting, agreeing woman—she is a part of the description and has her own voice. In the first book, the researcher is an anonymous figure who presents evidence and draws conclusions, whereas in the other two; she is a part of the situation, a participant in the conversation, and a part of the negotiation. Her opinions and feelings, as well as her personal experience and bits of her life story, are a part of the story.

With regard to each of the researchers’ voices, it is possible to ask to what extent it is heard, in what form, and whether it is an objective or a subjective voice. These questions come to the fore mainly when conducting research on life stories. The story is perceived as possessing a type of knowledge that displays the wealth and nuances of human events in a unique fashion and affords a special understanding of the human phenomenon (see, for example, Carter & Doyle, 1995a, 1995b, 2003; Kainan, 2002). A life story is a multilayered, complex text that needs more than one view to be understood. It needs the presentation of different voices of interpretation.

The research of life stories also deals with the stories of teachers and teacher educators. Carter (1993) stressed the importance of narrative in educational research. Carter (1995) claimed that teachers should avail themselves of stories so that they can understand their work, and Connelly and Clandinin (1990) discussed the fact that stories about teachers’ experiences enable them to reflect on the event, understand what happened, and improve teaching. Other studies relate to the effect of personal history on the teachers’ viewpoint, on the decisions to choose the teaching profession, and on the way in which new teachers think about working in teaching (Kagan, 1992; Knowles & Holt Reynolds, 1994; Kelchtermans, 1993; Schmit & Knowles, 1995).

The extensive use of life stories has shifted the questions concerning the place and voice of the researcher to center stage, but an in-depth investigation of these questions also necessitates a change in the structure of the writing. The accepted way of writing in research today stems from a perception that does not reflect this change, as only one objective voice is given. Our article is an attempt to take a study of a life story and to demonstrate how the researchers can be presented through the metaphor of Talmudic page.

What is a "Talmud page"?

The Talmud, which was written after the Bible, is one of the fundamental books of Judaism. It contains the discussions of the Sages that took place in the academies of Babylon and the Land of Israel between the third and the seventh centuries CE. The Talmud contains two main types of content that merge into each other during the oral discussions. The first content type deals with legal matters and is called halacha, (Jewish law), whereas the second content type is literary and includes didactic stories and legends about ethics, society, religion, and so on, and is called agada (legend). We chose the Talmud page as a writing model, because the structure of the page and its division into different text-types is the fundamental message of its method. Every Talmudic discussion opens with a quote from the Mishna, which is the sacred text of the ancient law, whose formulation does not alter with different times and places, people, and ideas. The Talmudic sages, the Amoriam, quote an excerpt from the Mishna, discuss it, ask questions about it, draw comparisons, present traditions of various schools of study, air differences of opinion, present contradictions, tell stories that are both relevant and irrelevant, and express opinions. The discussion exposes the properties of the speakers on different levels: styles of expression and thinking, personality structures, affiliation with schools of thought, worldviews, social status, and anything that is connected to these things. There is no dichotomy between the statement that is uttered and the person who utters it, and everything occurs within a living and changing situation.

The "Talmud page" is the ancient Jewish model of interpretation that postulates that the meanings of a sacred text are infinite and resound with polyphony of people's voices at different times and in different places. Talmudic literature, which serves as a model for the discussion below, is an interpretive literature for a text of the Mishna.

The Sages' discussion does not only focus on halachic (or law) matters, but it moves on, via comparisons, illustrations, associations, and digressions, to various topics ranging from ethics to metaphysics. In this way, the text contains many layers of meaning that seem to be far removed from its content and immediate meaning. Alongside this openness, the Talmud sages employ several set interpretive tools that were constructed and accepted in their culture. These tools were called midot (analytical tools). By means of these tools, the sages compare texts, determine the types of relations between them, and draw conclusions from this comparison. For instance: If a certain prohibition or permission applies to a minor case, they conclude that it applies to a serious case as well, even if this is not



stated explicitly. In other words, within the open discussion, there are some texts with an “objective” status, as they are examined and ruled on by means of the *midot*.

From the 16th century onward, the Talmud page was printed in the following manner: In the center of the page, there is a column containing two text-types: a quotation of an excerpt from the Mishna and a discussion of it by the Talmudic Sages, and around it appear commentaries from later generations (Handelman, 1982).

How the interpretive model, a Talmud page, is applied

We consider the Talmud page to be a metaphor and a model of the interpretive perception that can be an alternative to some of the accepted perceptions of the text in life story research. This layout allows a presentation of multiple meaning as promoted in postmodern generations. In the Talmud page, the interpretive discussion was arranged as an open dialogue involving many participants from various generations and places, and it was possible to keep it going ad infinitum. We have accepted Gadamer's (2000) perception, which recognizes the fact that texts are read in a culture-dependent manner and from the standpoint of a collective tradition by means of which the individual reader interprets the text.

The text we have chosen to interpret consists of parts of the life story of Zoheira, a pseudonym for a Bedouin student at the Kaye College of Education in Beersheba. Her background is presented below. Her story, which was recorded in her own voice and transcribed, is located in the Center. Alongside it appear its various interpretations, as suggested by three researchers: Anat, Miri, and Michal.

Zoheira's voice, in conjunction with the unique manner in which she relates and explains her life, resonates with the interpretive voices of her story. In a conscious and integrated manner, the voices demonstrate the use of two principles that constitute the essence of the fundamentals of interpretation presented above:

“The organizing voice” is a traditional analysis of the text. In our case, this is done using Levi Strauss's (1963) structuralism theory. Levi Strauss's method is based on finding binary oppositions that are embedded in the text and thereafter classifying them into fields according to their content. This analysis was conducted by all team members.

All of the findings that were drawn by means of this tool throughout the discussion were written down under the heading, “The organizing voice,” without any mention of the speaker's name, and it is a collective interpretation that organizes the text according to one structural principle. This tool resembles the sages' use of *midot*, mentioned above.

Along side the organizing voice, the voices of the three researchers, participating in the study, are heard. Each of the voices derives a different meaning from the story and places the contrasts that erupt in it in a different interpretive context. The whole act of interpreting occurs within the dialogue and with reference to it, and it gradually develops.

The personal background of Zoheira, who relates her life story

Zoheira is one of five Bedouin students who agreed to share their life stories with us and came to the interview. An interview is an unequal situation from the outset, and in every interview there is the problem of power relations (Seidman, 1991). In our case, one has to take into consideration even more complicated power relations between the interviewer who is a Jewish woman belonging to the ruling group in Israel and a teacher in the College, and the interviewees who is a member of a minority group in Israel and student at the College. Also hovering is the war situation in the Middle East, which we were

trying to disregard as much as we could. Nevertheless, there is no direct connection between the Bedouin student and us, as she studies in a different section of the College. In addition, this college is known for its warm and friendly relations between teachers and students. It is, however, impossible to assess just how far this complex situation influences the student's input. Nonetheless, the interview system does allow the interviewee to choose what she wants to present as the story of her life. It can be assumed that what she chooses to tell us is essentially true, even though it is not the whole story. The interview was conducted in Hebrew, which is not her mother tongue but is the language in which she studies at the college, and she speaks it fluently.¹ From our experience, many interviewees find it sometime even easier talking to an interviewer who has no connection to their social and cultural group.

During the interview, the research topic was first explained, and only after the position was made clear and the student's agreement obtained did the researcher proceed to the next stage. In addition, because of cultural differences between the researchers and the student, we consulted experts in Bedouin society regarding topics raised and expressions not fully understood. In addition, the findings and conclusions were presented to the Bedouin teachers of the college, who are experts on the Bedouin students and know this population well. The teachers agreed with the portrayed picture and with its analysis.

Zoheira belongs to a group of 110,000 Bedouins who live in Israel's southern region (the Negev). The Bedouins in the Middle East in general, and in Israel in particular, underwent an enforced process of settlement (Dinero, 1997). This process engendered a transition from a nomadic way of life to an urban society. This transition is characterized by an ideological change from tribalism to individualism, a process common to changing societies (Meir, 1997). Individuals in society gradually detach themselves from the ties that obliged them to the tribe and are motivated by a more personal set of values. Some of the values are transferred via the schools. Consequently, outstanding young women acquire professions such as teaching or secretarial work that enable them to work (Abu Rabia, 2000).

The text we are about to read is an accurate transcription of two excerpts from the student Zoheira's life story. Zoheira is her parents' eldest daughter, and this fact is a source of pride for her, in the same way as she is proud of the fact that both her father and her grandfather are eldest sons and occupy a place of honor in the family. The central figure in Zoheira's story is her father, and she repeatedly talks about the close relationship between them, which, according to her, deviates from the norm in Bedouin society.

In certain areas, her father acts like a "Western man." Because of this, she has to prove that she is a respectable girl by behaving and dressing according to the norms in Bedouin society. A central concept in her life is that of honor. She emphasizes the great honor she is accorded by everyone everywhere—in the town, among relatives, and at school—and it seems that in this way she defends her father's honor as well.

The two excerpts presented here relate to one event: Zoheira's betrothal. We have entitled the first excerpt "My father" and the second "The story of the betrothal." In the life story, the two excerpts have no bearing on each other. The first appears at the beginning of the story and the second toward the end. As researchers, we identified a contrast between these two excerpts, and we opted for the analytical method of Levi Strauss (1963) as a suitable manner of analyzing the text.

In addition to this analytical method, each researcher related to the text in her own way, and the discussion was open and took off in different directions. It also featured clear contrasts that arose as a central characteristic of the text. Alongside them, the researchers identified various layers of the text, particularly different possible interpretations of it. Thus, it turns out that the interpretation is a product of the encounter between the words in the text and the cultural background, and the researchers' conglomeration of knowledge and personal life experience.

The text we are about to read is not a transcript of the discussion that actually took place, as it was held over a length of time, with repetitions, pauses, and the body language that accompanied the spoken language. We tried to represent what was said rather than reproduce it, thereby expressing each researcher's personality, ways of thinking, and worldview. The difference between these aspects led each researcher to channels of interpretation that differed from those of her colleagues. The article is constructed in such a way that the analyzed text is displayed at the center of the page, and it is an accurate transcription of the narrator's words. The organizing voice is displayed at the top left of the page. Its main function is to demonstrate the contrasts that occur throughout the text. Leading on from it at the top right of the page is the personal voice, in which the researchers' interpretations are quoted. Each voice is printed in a distinctive font. The Talmud page is not read in a linear fashion. The reader can choose to read every voice separately to hear one particular voice only, keep track of it, and distinguish the characteristic lines for understanding the character and her life according to the reader's personality and unique perception of the world and of people. Alternatively, it is possible to listen and react to the discourse that takes place among the researchers regarding every line of the narrating student's voice, as well as to the resulting interaction dictating the tone and course of the discussion.

The analysis itself does not reach a concluding generalization. The aim of the article is to present a way of writing that permits the reader to catch a glimpse of the three researchers' ways of thinking and outlooks, as well as the dynamics that exist among them. The discussion at the end of the study also attempts to show how each interpretation arises from the unique integration between the text and its particular interpreter, and also how this interpretation, in spite of the unique nature of each researcher, has no absolute validity. This is because it is dependent on the attitude toward all of the other voices that are heard in that team at the same time and in the same place.

The format of a Talmud page we chose enables us to demonstrate both the special place of the researcher and the vitality and dynamism of the interpretation, which leads to a complex and non-finite comprehension of a person's life story.

An explanation of the Talmud page format

The Talmud page format provides a glimpse behind the scenes of the final paper before it assumes its final and consistent form. This glimpse contains not only an exposure of the analytical process, but also a change in the relations between researcher and subject, among different researchers, and between writer and reader. We perceive the Talmud page as a metaphor for a scientific text which objective is to express the interpretive approaches in qualitative research.

The Talmud page: Its format and what it permits

A Talmud page is characterized by its layout. In the center lies the original text, containing the things the interviewee said in her own words. Each line of text is numbered. Around it is the interpretation. The numbering of the lines enables us to create a link between the text and the interpretation, to show what the interviewee said, and how the researcher comprehended it. Moreover, the nature of the page permits us to display a different interpretation of the text right next to it.

The reading of the Talmud page is not linear. The readers can choose to read each voice separately to hear it only and follow it. Alternatively, they can listen to the dialogue that is conducted among the researchers with regard to every line. In a text of this type, various aspects of the text are revealed to the reader: the original text, each voice separately, the interaction between the voices and the possibility for the reader to add his own interpretation to what is written.

The usefulness of this exposure lies in the fact that it arouses the consciousness to the relativity of each of the interpretive possibilities displayed to the reader. In addition, it illuminates the complexity of the person under investigation and the multiplicity of viewpoints from which he is observed—the viewpoints being as numerous as the number of researchers. Therefore, even though the organizing voice sought to reach the baseline of the text, that is, the mythical structure of the life story, the interpretation, which is the base of this format, produced various possibilities of understanding without attempting to unite them.

Standing before the multiplicity of truths and their legitimate coexistence, as led us to a new awareness of the words of our sages: “These and those are the absolute truth.” The Talmud page format is a structure that is a message, because it permits these multiple voices to be sounded next to one another in such a way that even an opinion that is rejected by the person or the public exists and exerts an influence by the very fact of its presence.

The different voices as “different significances”: The organizing voice

The organizing voice revolves around the contrasts in the relationship between the daughter and her father. The first excerpt in its entirety speaks about “my father,” a special father who, in addition to relating to her like a concerned father, is also like a friend or a brother to whom she can confide her problems, and who also confides his problems to her. As a father, he wants her to have a good life; he spoils her and gives her whatever she wants. As a friend, “he knows everything about my life, I’m attached to him, so he always gives me whatever I want, shares things with me, speaks to me.”

In the second excerpt, which speaks about the betrothal and the wedding, the daughter is on her own. A year and a half after the betrothal, she finds herself alone, saying, “I’m betrothed,” “I became betrothed,” “I didn’t intend to . . . but . . . it happened.” The contrast that occurs in this excerpt is a contrast between betrothal and tests. The feeling is one of either/or—either one becomes betrothed or one studies. The tension surrounding the betrothal affected her, and it was not a good feeling.

In the third excerpt, resignation sets in. Here, the contrast is between her and her intended husband. His conduct does not please her. She does not know him, and what she knows she does not like. She is angry. The father that appears in this excerpt is a different father. He is the one who is deciding on a husband for her. However, she reached a decision: “I became convinced that he is a good person. I’ve begun to understand the contents of things. Let’s hope that we’ll live a good life.” She concludes the excerpt with the sentence, “My father asked me before, ‘If you want’ and ‘If you don’t want, then you don’t have to.’ And that’s it, and I made that decision.”

Zoheira speaks about a relationship between a father and a daughter who reached the point of conflict and confrontation at the time of the betrothal. From the whole interview, we know that these relationships exist in a society that is undergoing processes of change.

In the last excerpt, the father and the daughter are on the same side once more, facing the extended family. The father sums up: “No one will decide about my life except her and me. Because of my role, I will direct her. You, don’t you interfere in my life.”

The behavior of the father at the time of the betrothal serves as a litmus test for the relationship between him and his daughter. Are their relations those of father and daughter, or also of friendship and closeness? The story is built as a trilogy, with the opening excerpt presenting the father and the daughter and the relations between them, which the daughter depicts as a situation in which the father will make her wishes come true. At the time of the betrothal, it transpires that her wishes differ from those of her father. She does not want to become betrothed at this time, nor does she want the husband that has been offered to her. The solution is a renewed understanding of the state of affairs: The father wants what is best for her,

he wants a good life for her, but there are things she has to understand. She believes that if she had said “No,” her father would not have forced his will on her. However, she chose to acquiesce in her father’s decision, as she understood that her conduct carried a lot of weight with regard to her father’s ability to oppose tradition and innovate. She chose to rely on the correctness of her father’s choice for her. The interesting thing about this trilogical structure is the fact that the trilogy is displayed as a process of development in time. However, when she describes her ideal relations with her father in the first excerpt, she already knows the end of the story. This fact notwithstanding, she preserves the story as it is: an ideal situation that exists perhaps in “the dream” of a young girl who is going through the process of growing up. She understands that even her father has his limitations, and builds a new ideal relationship that permits her to go on feeling as if she and her father are on the same side. Mature now, she understands that she has a role to play in preserving this relationship. Despite the pain, she prefers to see a rift not in the relationship between her and her father but, rather, a compromise.

The structure of the story, as it emerges from our “organizing voice,” attests to the structure of a myth. There is an ideal reality, a rift occurs, and finally resignation is achieved.

The organizing voice builds the analytical backbone. The researchers all deal with the contrasts that occur in the text, and their meanings. Whereas the organizing voice asks what the existing contrasts are, the researchers ask what type of contrast it is, what its character is, and from what mental and culture dimensions it is built.

The three voices of interpretation

Michal: “I am betrothed to my blood relative.”

Michal contemplates the contrast between regular relations and relations that are perceived as irregular. The irregularity lies in the one-sided commitment of the father to his children and to his daughter in particular. A more daring irregularity is expressed in relations of the other kind—those between a male friend and a female friend or between a brother and a sister. Those relations include intimacy and reciprocity, which remove the hierarchical barriers that exist between a father and a daughter and between a mature man and a girl. These two types of relations are irregular vis-à-vis what is acceptable in other families in that society. The last type, the intimate and reciprocal relationship, is unique to her and her father: It does not include all of her brothers and sisters.

When Zoheira speaks about the betrothal at a relatively late stage of the interview, a hidden difficulty can be detected in her words. The confidence she displayed in the fact that she has a father who consults with her and is like a friend seems to be undermined. Perhaps the separation from her father and from her relationship with him is difficult. Perhaps she feels disappointed that he is handing her over to someone else. There might also be romantic dreams here.

The step taken by the father—pushing her to marry the man he has chosen for her—upsets the reciprocal balance between them, and Zoheira, as a counter reaction of sorts, fails at her studies. This is how she equalizes the balance of power between them.

In the meeting with her intended husband, he remains silent. In spite of this, he ignites a great deal of anger in her. She suspects some kind of “different nature” that will come to light in him and seems to be directing emotions at him that she actually feels toward her father. She had built up an image of a father who breaks down all the barriers, but the betrothal episode revealed “a different father” to her. To her astonishment, she realized that when it came down to “the things that matter,” the father exercised his authority over her in the traditional way, and here she is on her own, separate from her fiancé and from her father, and keeping her thoughts to herself. She defines herself as “the girl” whose sensitivity and

feelings are different from those of a man, a girl that every “little thing” can “affect . . . from the psychological point of view.”

At the end of the story cycle, Zoheira returns to the image of her father she created for herself at the beginning of the interview: someone who helps in decision making, advises, and convinces. It seems as if she is the one who has made the decision to become betrothed to the “person.”

From Michal’s point of view as a researcher, she considers Zoheira’s perception to be erroneous. In her opinion, the father is taking advantage of his daughter’s love for him to dominate her and make her want the same thing he wants. In reality, Zoheira cannot oppose him, despite the fact that even in her thoughts, she is not prepared to admit it. It seems that Zoheira is telling herself her life story over again in a way that she can live with it. In Michal’s view, the story is an illusion, and Zoheira is paying a heavy price by attempting to preserve her father’s love at any cost.

Anat—Maturation: A romantic and realistic view of “the good life”

According to Anat, the story is one of maturation. Zoheira is a young girl who is compelled to be a woman before she is ready for it. The betrothal, the meeting with her intended husband, and the impending marriage are the processes that will transform her from daddy’s little girl into a grown woman, the wife of another man. Zoheira has to embark on the growing-up processes that society demand of her, and it is very difficult. The father is the one who is trying to help her get through these processes. There is no contrast between her father’s love and the betrothal. In her cultural world, fathers are responsible for their daughters’ betrothal, and for her, it is a natural step. The emphasis is on the transition from childhood to maturity. Both in her behavior and in her mind, Zoheira attempts to adapt to the reality that is imposed on her. She says that “[she has] begun to understand the contents of things.” This refers to the meaning of the term, “the good life.” At the beginning of the story, the good life was meant to be the consequence of her studies: “[My father] . . . likes me to study, wants me to be something in my life,” and she saw “the good life” as contingent on the continuation of her childhood under her father’s protection. Suddenly, she is required to see the good life as contingent on a suitable marriage, and this is a process that she finds difficult to go through. The father is the one who looks beyond the romantic aspect and examines what will enable her to have a good life as a grown-up woman.

In Bedouin society, the father decides for the daughter without consulting her. In Western society, the daughter decides. Zoheira lives in Bedouin society but studies in Western society. Thus, there is an additional option according to which the father makes a suggestion; there is a consultation, but the daughter is not obliged to consent.

It could be said that from a sociological point of view, what we see here is a process of change in the traditional norms of Bedouin society. The change occurs in a slow and controlled manner, but it nevertheless exists and takes place.

Miri: The pact between father and daughter

Zoheira is the eldest daughter of the eldest son of the head of the tribe. As in many stories, her destiny is unusual. She won the knight on the white horse who is not her husband but her father. He makes her every wish come true, as if with a magic wand. Her wishes are his wishes, and vice versa. There is a great closeness between them. She knows what he is thinking, what his dreams are, and he also knows everything about her.

The father is an educated man who sees that the future necessitates effecting a change in the relations within the family, in keeping with the Western tradition of greater freedom as well as increased closeness

and intimacy among the family members. Perhaps he is also aspiring to terminate the dependence of the nuclear family on the extended family without jeopardizing his honor and his position in society.

The daughter cooperates willingly and behaves like a perfect Bedouin daughter of whom everyone can be proud. Zoheira's cooperation is put to a very difficult test. During the exam period, just as she is seeking to fulfill her desire for a different kind of future, her father expects her to become betrothed.

At that very moment, Zoheira's father stands up to his own father and demands the exclusive right to choose the husband he wants for his daughter. The special relationship between Zoheira and her "irregular" father prevents her from opposing him and rejecting the bridegroom she has been offered. She ostensibly "becomes convinced" and, by so doing, behaves like a traditional daughter. Her father can prove that the fact that he has suggested someone else for his daughter rather than the cousin—the expected match, according to the Bedouin custom—poses no danger to society.

The language Zoheira employs attests to what is happening in her heart. The words she chooses to use lead us to discover the conflict that is raging inside her: the principal contrast between "my father" and all the other fathers in her society. Her words talk about friendship and closeness among siblings that is reminiscent of comrades-at-arms.

On this backdrop, Zoheira has a hard time understanding what is happening in the betrothal. In her language, betrothal does not have a name, just the pronoun "it": "it happened ... it was very difficult ... it affected," as if it is something to hide, something to be ashamed of.

The betrothal places her in a position of conflicting expectations. As a Bedouin daughter, she has to direct her full attention to the betrothal. As a pupil, she has to be calm and expend all her time and energy on her studies during the period of the matriculation exams. She wants to study and get high grades. It seemed to her that that was what her father wanted, too. That was in the past, however. In the present, her father's wish is for her to become betrothed. In spite of all this, Zoheira does not complain about her father—perhaps because she understands "the contents of things." She understands that the betrothal is the test that takes place in front of everybody. This is where her father's "irregularity" will be put to the test. Does it result in "promiscuity" on his daughter's part, in his honor's being tarnished, or is that not the case? The daughter understands that everything depends on how she behaves, and she accepts—"becomes convinced"—that her father is thinking of a good life for her to the extent that this is possible in the complex reality.

In Miri's opinion, the relationship between the father and the daughter molds the daughter. Zoheira is an independent girl, an eldest daughter who bears the family honor on her shoulders, understands what she is doing, and is prepared to fulfill this role.

In this article, we have presented three researchers and three points of view that do not oppose one another but, rather, present the complexity of the relationship between a father and a daughter in a society that is undergoing processes of change. In this case, the organizing voice and the personal voices describe the same character, and there is still room for the reader to add his or her point of view.

Characterization of the researchers

A retrospective perusal of the discussion of Zoheira's life story permits us to distinguish the differences among the researchers, at least according to three criteria:

The focus of the interest that the researcher displays in the life story

Michal is chiefly interested in the psychological structure of the players and in the unconscious and hidden motives that govern their behavior. For instance, she interprets the fact that the subject of the betrothal crops up at a late stage in the story as a repression of the critical event that was liable to change the picture of Zoheira's world.

Miri tends to examine the verbal and stylistic aspects of the text, showing how the repetitions, contrasts, images, and so on construct and expose the hidden meaning of the words. For instance, she examines the meaning of the term "good life" in different contexts, the discrepancy between "what I want," which appears in the ideal description at the beginning, and "what I would have wanted," which appears in the context of the betrothal.

Anat explains the situations, deeds, and reactions of the characters on the background of the Bedouin society in which they live. She frequently points out—and in different contexts—the influence of the conventions, customs, and accepted relations in the tribe and in the family of the individual person. The fine balance between preservation and change in Bedouin society is what causes the father to make decisions that accept the conventions on the one hand and flout them on the other.

Ways of analyzing and thinking

Anat tries to synthesize the details into single unit and look for a principle that links them. She devises a conceptual formula for parts of the story that are ostensibly far away from one another from the point of view of topic and places them in it.

Michal sees the reflection of the entire personality of the character within one excerpt of the story, and she tries to apply her perception of the character in one excerpt to the other parts of the story. For instance, she sees Zoheira's entire relationship with her father, even prior to the betrothal, as based on an unreal image that Zoheira attempts to protect.

Miri links groups of details in the story together, and in each group she discovers a different outstanding aspect. Thus, she sees the character from multiple points of view, which she allows to exist side by side. Since the link is frequently linguistic and contextual, she uncovers what is contained in it rather than in another link. Therefore, she deals with the character's psychological state, the social aspect, and the intrafamilial relations without uniting the three aspects.

Worldview

Michal tends to see the dark side of the characters and their lives. She is inclined to ascribe a life of oedipal illusion to Zoheira—and motives of total control even by means of love—to her father.

Anat and Miri see things in a more optimist way that offers possibilities for healing the crisis. They accept Zoheira's description of the positive relations in her family more credible to a far greater extent than Michal does. They also perceive the father's motivation as essentially positive and as stemming from his love for his daughter within the limitations of the framework of life in which he lives and with which he has to contend.

Discussion

Starting at the second half of the 20th century, we can trace some of the ideas of the Talmud in the perceptions of modern researchers and even more in postmodern researchers. The first group is the group

of American education researchers that led the qualitative revolution. Among other things, they asked about the researchers and their place at the research.

Eisner (1979), in his well-known work *The Educational Imagination*, presented the concept of connoisseurship. Connoisseurs are experts with a vast personal experience, professional knowledge, and taste, and they use all these and more in their work as art critiques. Eisner suggested using this metaphor for research in education. Accordingly, we can see that researchers, with their personality, perceptions, and knowledge, are the main research tool. The sages of the Talmud are also presented because of their knowledge and experience. They are not objective anonymous figures; they are alive, whole human beings.

Lightfoot (1984) forwarded this idea even further. In her book *The Good High School*, two researchers, or connoisseurs, studied the same school, each writing his or her own school portrait. Consequently, two different descriptions of the phenomenon emerged. Lightfoot presented both portraits together and let the readers devise their own image of the school. In the work of Lightfoot, we can trace one of the basic idea in the Talmud. An outstanding characteristic of a Talmudic page is that it does not contain a legal decision. The Talmud presents different interpretations from different generations side by side and leaves the readers to select the interpretation that appeals to them.

In this article, we connected the Talmudic ideas with those of our time. First, we used our worldview, personal experience, and professional knowledge, and stressed the process rather than the product. Second, we gave an example of three researchers interpreting the same text.

Still, the main question is What are the advantages of such a text. To answer this question, we have to turn to another scientific revolution, this time in Europe, especially in France. Here we can talk about the “revolution of the text.” Derrida (1971) claimed that every thing is text and continued by saying that everything that happens is nothing but text. Husserl (1999), Ricœur (1974), and Gadamer (2000) stressed the idea that no interpretation can reveal the one and true meaning of the text. Others, like Hirsch (1967) and Iser (1976), changed our ideas of text understanding by emphasizing the relations between the text and the reader. Barthes (1977) argued for what he termed a writerly as apposed to a readerly approach to the texts. The writerly text differs from the readerly text, in that it is seen as a work in progress, whereas the readerly text is considered a static product. According to Barthes, a complicated text demands that readers create their own story while reading it. Thus, the readers become creator of a text through choice and interaction between the different subtexts.

The method of using the Talmud text as a metaphor of a scientific text creates similar relations between the reader and the text. Here, the readers have to be active, devising their own interpretation based on their choice of a specific writer and/or on their integration of the different views offered. There are different voices in the text, and the readers listen to all of them, choose among them, and create their own text. Instead of the common system of a scientific text, which allows the readers either to agree or disagree, here they have to choose from a complicated system of interpretations and to “write” their own text.

Ricœur (1970, 1981) distinguished between two forms of hermeneutics: a hermeneutics of faith, which aims to restore meaning to a text, and a hermeneutics of suspicion, which attempts to decode meanings that are hidden. Josselson (2004) applied this distinction to narrative research but used the terms hermeneutics of restoration and hermeneutics of demystification instead. Hermeneutics of restoration is based on faith. The researchers believe what the narrator is telling them. The researchers’ aim is to represent the subjective world of the narrator and the historical and social world they feel themselves to be living in. The researcher tries to stay as close as possible to the story the narrator tells and to decode the meaning with as little distortion as possible.

The hermeneutics of demystification is based on Ricœur's (1970) idea that there is another meaning hidden behind the meaning of the story. The researcher's job is to discover this hidden meaning and reveal the underlying truth behind the story.

Instead of faith, the attitude there is skepticism toward the narrator and the narrative. There are some ways of decoding that enable the researcher to arrive to the hidden meaning, and attention is directed to omissions, inconsistencies, and contradictions in the story. The effort is one of discovering some durable truth. Here, the aim is not to represent the narrator but to offer a different reading, so the researcher is often concealed behind its interpretation.

We can understand the difference between the voices presented here according to these terms. The organizing voice and the voice of Michal are what Josselson (2004) defined as working according to the hermeneutics of demystification. They are striving to find the hidden meaning of the text through different systems. On the other hand, the voices of Anat and Miri are more according to the hermeneutics of restoration. Both are presented side by side by using the Talmud as a metaphor of a scientific text. We prefer the polyphony of voices, rather than one voice when dealing with ambiguous texts. Use of this method also changes the places of both the reader and the researcher simultaneously.

Notes

1. Translation note: As the interview was transcribed literally, it contains many inconsistencies of language, hesitations, partial sentences, and so on. We have tried to retain this oral style in translation, except where the result would be incomprehensible, in which case some minimum editing has been employed.

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