National Association of Independent Schools) p. 37; and, *NAIS Statistics* Spring 1988, (Washington, DC: The National Association of Independent Schools) p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> Sara Lawrence Lightfoot. *The Good High School* (New York: Basic Books, 1983) p.225.

<sup>11</sup> This demographic sample was of particular interest to the UJA Federation of New York.

<sup>12</sup> Special emphasis schools, proprietary schools and religiously affiliated schools were omitted from the sample. The schools selected and data presented on the schools are from Porter Sargent, *Handbook of Private Schools* (Boston, MA: Porter Sargent Publishers, Inc., 1997).

<sup>13</sup> Since the focus of this study is Jewish students, only those findings are presented.

<sup>14</sup> "Corps Profile," Teach for America, (New York, 1998.).

<sup>15</sup> Bruce A. Phillips, *Re-examining Intermarriage: Trends, Textures and Strategies: Report of a New Study* (Los Angeles, CA: The Susan and David Wilstein Institute of Jewish Policy Studies and New York, NY: The American Jewish Committee, 1997). pp.72-77.

<sup>16</sup> Estimated family income by graduating students taking the SAT, Student Descriptive Questionnaire 1997, SAT Overview Report for public and independent school students, The College Board, New York, New York.

# "We Cleverly Avoided Talking about God": Personal and Pedagogical Reflections on Academia and Spirituality

### Susan Handelman

This essay examines the relation of academia and spirituality in a postmodern world. The author shares her personal experiences teaching the Bible and literature in a large state university. She examines her own thoughts and feelings, as well as those of her students, as they struggle to figure out how questions of personal religious belief are to be dealt with in the classroom. Reflections on classic Jewish sources in Kabbalah, Chassidut, and Halakah help clarify pedagogical strategy and the teacher/student relationship. The notion of tzimtzum, "Divine Self-Contraction" provides one model. The essay argues that intellectuals and academics need to abandon their old fears of religious expression in the university. It asks them to help guide the spiritual quest of their students and colleagues and not abandon them to the extreme dogmatists eager to exploit their yearnings.

Scanning a recent issue of my college alumnae magazine, the *Smith Alumnae Quarterly*, I was surprised to find an article on "The Soul of America: An Increasingly Fractured Society Sends the Nation on a Quest for Faith." The topic was unusual for this magazine. The article described in depth the intimate spiritual quests of several Smith students and alumnae, including Ruth Simmons, the first African-American President of Smith, who strove to return to the Southern Baptist traditions of her childhood.

I needed a way of understanding how to put my life together and how to heal and how to deal with great and substantial, irrevocable loss. And I needed a way to deal with joy and contentment, because you have to deal with those things as well . . . It really wasn't my Ph.D. in Romance languages that was helping me confront the death of my brother. It wasn't the meaty

### Personal and Pedagogical Reflections

### Courtyard 1999

courses I'd taken all my life; it wasn't the books I'd read. It was something more than that."<sup>1</sup>

The article also cited recent Gallop Poll (1992) statistics: 85% percent of Americans believe in a personal God or higher power, 58% say religion is very important to their lives, 70% claim to be active members of a religious organization, and more than half say they pray every day. Yet, at the end of the article, there was a startling quote by a current Smith religion major:

"I once heard someone say it's harder to come out as a spiritual person than as a lesbian here at Smith... My religion professor always talks about people who find religion or go on religious quests as Other, as if no one in the room has had any of these experiences."<sup>2</sup>

I understand so well that student's dilemma. Despite the great spiritual yearnings of contemporary America society, there is a kind of taboo on open, personal discussion of such things in academia. I began college as a religion major at Smith and finished with a B.A in English. My interests, however, were always interdisciplinary and stemmed from my own spiritual quests. Today I am a professor in an English Department at a large state university. Much of my work and research continues to focus on the relations of literature and religion, especially Jewish thought and contemporary literary theory. Thus, I am somewhat of an anomaly, for much of the discourse of current literary theory revolves around issues of politics and power, and constructions of national and sexual identity. Most of my English department colleagues know that I work on issues of hermeneutics and post-modern thought in relation to Jewish texts. They are warmly supportive; however, they hardly know what I really do. Nor do they show personal concern with religion or spirituality in their scholarship or in their public personas as professors.

The case is different where my students are concerned.

Allow me to relate two stories from a recent seminar I taught to a group of senior English majors on "The Bible as Literature." Generally, the class consists of students of varying religious backgrounds, including several who have never read the Bible at all. The students are always quite wary at the beginning of the semester. They say that they are afraid of becoming mired in polemical religious arguments about "whose religion is true" (this is what they construe to be "discussion of religion"). Moreover, they say they do not feel comfortable discussing religion in their classes. When they express a personal religious point of view, it is commonly met with criticism. I always point out that the goal of the course is to examine the Bible from a "literary" point of view. The aim is not to argue which religion has the right interpretation and, of course, we must respect each other's views. Yet, I have a hidden agenda. I hope that getting them to read the biblical text closely, from a literary point of view, will create a neutral ground that might open a spiritual path for them - "under the table" as it were

I am very aware of the necessary "separation of Church and State" in a secular university, of my contract with the University, and my role as a professor, not rabbi, priest, minister, or therapist. Thus I admit that I am uncomfortable. I have to restrain myself from expressing my own personal beliefs quite often, and sometimes restrain students from expressing theirs. Recently, I was stung by a comment by one very bright student who said, "It was an excellent course, don't get me wrong, but we all cleverly avoided really talking about God. Didn't we?" This comment haunts me. In the end, no matter how interesting "literary analysis" is, I believe that students are desperately trying to figure out who God is, if God is good, and how to cope with the pain and trouble that life has brought their way. (And so, may I add, are the biblical writers, for that matter . . . which is why we read them in the first place).

From experience, I have an intuitive hunch that the proportion of believers among my students is probably about the same as

the Gallop Poll indicates-- 85%. Interestingly, this contrasts sharply with the faculty, most of whom, at least in their public professional personas, are proponents of radical skepticism and who take up the role of "appositional intellectuals." Contemporary academics, especially in literary studies, often describe our pedagogical and intellectual goals in terms of "critique, subversion, interrogation" --or what Lionel Trilling felicitously called "the unmasking principle" that has influenced intellectuals since the French Revolution. Trilling explained that Marx and Freud "taught the intellectual classes that nothing was as it seemed, that the great work of intellect was to strike through the mask."<sup>3</sup> My colleagues' "faith commitments" might be expressed in their classes and writings in terms of feminist politics, or struggles for gay and lesbian rights, or forms of political radicalism.

Many of my undergraduate students are in a different frame of mind. They seem to be undergoing painful existential dilemmas. As example, a very bright pre-medical student, majoring in biology and English, came to my office to discuss her paper topic. She was having trouble choosing a topic for her Honors Thesis. With a half-smile, she admitted that she wanted to write on "The Meaning of Life." Her faculty advisor had discouraged her and asked: "Why does it always have to be about you?" The student admitted, "Maybe there's something wrong with me, but I always want to see how it relates to my life. I was assigned to write a paper for my American Literature class on financial exchanges in *Huckleberry Finn.* I'm really not interested in that."

The *Finn* assignment reflects one of the main trends in current literary theory - the assertion that literary phenomena must be understood through the lens of "cultural materialism". This is a kind of postmodern Marxist perspective. It insists that one may not appeal to any "transcendent" factors or "universal, ahistorical values," but rather to examine literary works as produced by entirely material historical factors, in a network of political and economic exchanges (to use the current lingo).

### Personal and Pedagogical Reflections

Here was another brilliant student, frustrated and yearning and not finding answers to her theological and existential dilemmas in her classes. Toward the end of the semester, I began to have the feeling that I might have been failing these students after all. Had anything happened "under the table"? By looking closely at the Bible's literary structures, teaching modes of formal, critical analysis, and having "cleverly really avoided taking God" had I just left them with more painful questions and perplexities about the Bible and their spiritual lives?

I remember one student's journal entry very vividly:

The Bible should be read as a "piece of literature," they say. In other words, I should distance myself emotionally, and analytically examine the "text," as opposed to reading and experiencing the book. As the class progressed, I tried to read the Bible as literature, but felt disturbed, uneasy, and distant. It was as if I was asked to detach, empty, and ignore myself. I don't know if I can put my emotions on hold and read something so emotionally charged mechanically. However, most of my English professors advise me to do just this. "Don't get too emotionally wrapped up in the text." I don't understand what the threat is. Why not get emotionally involved? Why distance myself and apply intelligent theories if the book is not going to change me? Why am I discouraged [from trying] to experience books? Why do I have to criticize and analyze these texts?" Why is everyone calling books texts? I have been trying to read the Bible critically. It's difficult because its language demands both an intelligent and passionate reading. Isn't reading supposed to change us and the world in some way?

This is how I felt one month into the class . . . [One month later] the class has become a class about reading and rereading. It has expanded and stretched my

104

narrow reading habits. I realize that it takes my emotions, spirit, and intellect to read the Bible. I'm developing a balance. It's not just an emotional or spiritual thing. I come into the class with questions, and I walk out with more questions. Our in-depth reading of certain passages stirs feelings but they also provoke thought.

I, too very painfully feel the gap between intellect and emotions, my professional persona and my personal religious beliefs. I am not there to teach from the perspective of an Orthodox Jew, yet being an Orthodox Jew is so much a part of me. To help bridge this gap, I have shifted the focus of my research from examining classical Jewish texts in terms of issues of abstract hermeneutics and epistemology, to analyzing them as self-consciously constructed teaching texts . . . texts which are fashioned to be taught and to establish a certain *relation between* teacher and student, and student and student (and needless, to say, student and God). Ultimately, what I learn from Jewish tradition is that "texts" are not only, nor primarily "books"-- or "cultural practices" or "discourses" or "ideologies" -- but ultimately "Teachings." That, of course, is the root meaning of "*Torah.*" Or as Franz Rosenzweig put it:

> Literature is written only for the sake of those who are in the process of development and of that in each of us, which is still developing. Hebrew, knowing no word for "reading" that does not mean "learning" as well, has given this, the secret of all literature away. For it is a secret, though a quite open one, to these times of ours--obsessed and suffocated as they are by education --that books exist only to transmit that which has been achieved to those who are still developing.<sup>4</sup>

I am also wondering how some of the more traditional Jewish ideas of teaching and learning might be transferable to the contemporary academy? What is the purpose of all our scholarship and teaching? In what ways is the classroom itself a kind of sacred space? In what ways is the tension

### Personal and Pedagogical Reflections

between withholding and giving itself a spiritual act?<sup>5</sup> In the Jewish mystical tradition, the idea of "self-contraction," of a concealing or withdrawal of the divine light is the essential first step in God's creation of the universe. The *tzimtzum* is the withdrawal of the infinite Divine Light in order to leave an "empty space," a space which can allow for finite beings, who otherwise would be overwhelmed and nullified by the Divine Light. There is a twentieth century *chassidic* text that explains this *kabbalistic* notion of the *tzimtzum*, or Divine Self-contraction in an intriguing way. The analogy is to the teacher/student relation. Here the cosmological becomes pedagogical and the pedagogical cosmological. In his last essay Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak Schneersohn (1880-1950), the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, wrote:

Through the process of *tzimtzum*, the infinite light was concealed, and the first and basic perception became personal identity and independent existence. God's infinite light was not perceived openly. Yet after the *tzimtzum* God is still one with creation, as the verse declares, "I fill the heavens and the earth." Now the *tzimtzum* only applies to us, for in regard to God, the *tzimtzum* does not conceal at all...

An analogy is the act of a teacher communicating a concept to a student. The teacher desires that his "plantings" [i.e., his students] should be like him. He cannot, however, transfer his ideas directly. In order to enable the student to apprehend and absorb the influence of his teacher, the teacher must first entirely remove the light of his own intellect and conceive an intellectual light that is on the receiver's level. He will make, therefore a number of *tzimtzumim* and "concealments" in order for his thoughts to be apprehended by the receiver.

The same principle applies in the spiritual realms: the limiting aspects of the *tzimtzum* only effect ourselves, but in regard to God Himself, the *tzimtzum* 

106

did not conceal at all. Even in relation to ourselves, furthermore, the intent of the initial and all the subsequent ones is for the purpose of revelation. As in the example of the teacher and the student, the main purpose of the *tzimtzum* is to enable the influence to be accepted by the receiver. Thus, from a deeper perspective, the *tzimtzum* does not conceal at all.<sup>6</sup>

This model serves my act of "withholding" as a teacher in a state university. It could also be transformed into the spiritual empowering of my students. The gap can be made productive. In the *kabalistic* scheme, a trace of the Divine Light remains in the void created by the *tzimtzum*. Then a ray of Divine Light illuminates into it to allow for the creation of finite independent beings. I can use this model to instruct me in my teaching: I can conceive of my role less as expansive self-expression of my religious position, but as leaving a "trace" (*reshimu*) of them in the space I create for my students. A trace that hints, points, invites, but does not compel. My students should also have the freedom to withhold their personal beliefs. Yet the larger life of these texts should somehow be felt at the edges, indicated, traced. The class should sense the *tzimtzum*, the fuller divine life beyond.<sup>7</sup>

The secularization of the university has created its own kind of empty space. To the anti-clerical Enlightenment heritage of the modern university has been added the more recent orientation toward specialized professional and technical education. The current popularity of a materialist worldview has led to the further banishment of religion or a simplistic and ignorant identification of religion with extreme right wing fanaticism and conservative politics. The absence of "spiritual values and discourse," in turn, has led to the current widespread discontent with contemporary education. On the other hand, a space has also been cleared for the pursuit of truth and for a reexamination of religion and spiritual issues without constraint, dogma, or prejudice. In this "postmodern" era, when the foundations of Enlightenment reasoning are being philosophically questioned, we have a special opportunity

### Personal and Pedagogical Reflections

to reintegrate the spiritual and academic on a different level.

The contemporary Quaker educational theorist Parker Palmer has written movingly about the spiritual void in the American University and has made eloquent pleas for such reintegration. His is not a voice in the wilderness. In the last few years, several books have appeared in the United States dealing with this issue. Among them are George Marsden's The Outrageous Idea of a Christian Scholarship and The Soul of the American University, Mark Schwehn's Exiles from Eden: Religion and the Academic Vocation in America and Jane Thompkins' A Life in School: What the Teacher Learned. What most intrigues me about Jane Thompkins is that she too is a Professor of English, like me, who until recently taught at Duke University, one the most avant-garde English Departments in America. She is one of the earliest feminist theorists, and has worked in the areas of semiotics, readerresponse criticism, and canon revision -- the whole range of poststructuralist theorizing. In the last several years, she has come to feel constrained by all that abstract theoretical language, and has become very involved in experimental pedagogy. She is one of the founders the school of "personal criticism." In an autobiographical mode, calling for a renewal of spirituality in education, she writes:

> People often assume that attention to the emotional lives of students, to their spiritual yearnings and their imaginative energies, will somehow inhibit the intellect's free play, drown it in a wash of sentiment, or deflect it into the realms of fantasy and escape, that the critical and analytical faculties will be muffled, reined in, or blunted as a result. I believe the reverse is true. The initiative, creativity, energy, and dedication that are released when students know they can express themselves freely shows, by contrast, how accustomed they are to holding back, playing it safe, avoiding real engagement, or just going through the motions. Besides, it's not a question of repressing or cutting back on intellectual inquiry in school, but rather of

acknowledging or cultivating wholeness. As Maria Montessori wrote in *The Absorbent Neither Mind*, education is not just "of the mind," nor should it be thought of as "the mere transmission of knowledge ... For what is the use of transmitting knowledge if the individual's total development lags behind?"

The real objection to this more holistic approach to education lies in a fear of emotion, of the imagination, of dreams and intuitions and spiritual experience that funds commonly received conceptions of reality in this culture. And no wonder, for it is school, in part, that controls reality's shape. The fear of these faculties, at base a fear of chaos and loss of control, is abetted by ignorance. How can we be on friendly terms with those parts of ourselves to which we have never received a formal introduction, and for which we have no maps or guides? The strength of the taboo can be gauged by the academician's inevitable recourse to name-calling when emotion, spirituality, and imagination are brought into the curricular conversation: 'touchy-feely," "soft," "not rigorous," "mystical," "therapeutic," and "Mickey Mouse" are the all-time favorites, with "psychobabble" and "bull" not far behind. The implication is always that something mindless, dirty, and infantile is being recommended, which in a certain sense is true, since the faculties in question have not been allowed to mature and remain in an unregulated state. The concern that things will fall apart and no one will learn anything if these unruly elements are allowed into the picture stems precisely from their historic exclusion from our system of education. The less we know about the unpredictable domains, the less we want to know.8

Jane Thompkins makes an eloquent case. She underlines my own teaching experiences. Yet I am disturbed that she primarily associates "spirituality" with "emotions, dreams,

### Personal and Pedagogical Reflections

intuitions, imagination." Much depends, of course, on how we define spirituality, which can mean self-discipline and intellectually rigorous search (and of course tzimtzum) as well as emotional outpouring. My students are all too eager to react emotionally to the biblical text and its characters without performing their own tzimtzum, learning to let the text speak on its own terms, learning its language, its nuances, its way of conveying its messages so subtly. Jewish tradition, of course, views the rigorous study of the Torah as one of the holiest acts, but that too can become a danger when the emotional component is lost. I again go back to a Chassidic source, to the writings of the extraordinary Rebbe and brilliant pedagogue of the Warsaw ghetto, R. Kalman Klonymous Shapira (1889-1943). He warned of the dangers of a religious life where there is no proper balance of the intellectual and emotional faculties:

> The soul of a person loves to feel. It yearns not only for feelings of happiness but even for melancholy and tearful feelings. A person will listen to horror stories and watch violent horrifying scenes which actually bring him to tears, just so he will be able to feel. Emotion is the food of the soul; it is as much of a need of the soul as food is to the body. A person who fulfills this need with emotional prayer and study is nourishing the soul correctly. Prayer and study without emotion will leave a vacuum that will force the soul to search for emotion anywhere, even in sinful behavior.<sup>9</sup>

One need only examine the weekend pastimes of so many of our students to verify the truth of this statement. A student who attended one of the most selective and prestigious Ivy League universities wrote me about the difficulties of her freshman year. She had been so eager and excited to go, but found herself very unhappy:

> I was really lonely. [X] is a strange place. Students there often seem to look upon their fellow students as

### Personal and Pedagogical Reflections

### Courtyard 1999

competitors. They are very close-mouthed about their ideas, and definitely put schoolwork before anything social. On the weekends, people get drunk. They're so stressed out from the intensity of their "work week" that they use alcohol in an escapist way ... And because I wanted to feel in place, I started becoming as rigid as my classmates did. It was more out of necessity than anything else was. It's hard to be extremely vivacious when everyone else is stone-faced.

That cruel competition is part of what Parker Palmer calls the "hidden curriculum" of the University. It is one way "the whole culture of the academic community with its systems of rewards and punishments work to shape our views of self and world." Students absorb that "hidden curriculum" as much as, if not more than, the actual "content" of the material. "To teach," Palmer continues, "is to create a space in which the community of truth is practiced." Our models of epistemology - of what knowledge is and what is the relation of knower to known is - contain implicit pedagogies that either undermine community or foster it.

> It is no accident that communal images of pedagogy are being recovered even as communal images of epistemology are being reclaimed. The way we teach depends on the way we think people know; we cannot amend our pedagogy until our epistemology is transformed. If teaching is transformed in our time, it will not be the result of snappier teaching techniques. It will happen because we are in the midst of a far-reaching intellectual and spiritual revisioning of reality and how we get to know it. In truthful knowing we neither infuse the world with our subjectivity (as premodern knowing did) nor hold it at arm's length, manipulating it to suit our needs (as is the modern style) . . . In truthful knowing, the knower becomes co-participant in a community of faithful relationships with other persons and creatures and things, with whatever our knowledge makes known. We find

truth by pledging our troth, and knowing becomes a reunion of separated beings whose primary bond is not of logic but of love.<sup>10</sup>

In Jewish tradition, both teacher and student are indeed those who "pledge troth," who represent and continue through their teaching and learning the divine "troth," the Covenant between God and Israel. The teacher is not the impersonal transmitter of an impersonal knowledge but the very personal embodiment of the Torah. Thus, even more, as the great medieval Jewish philosopher and Talmudist Maimonides (1135-1204) wrote in his compendium of Jewish law:

> Just as a person is commanded to honor and revere his father, so he is under an obligation to honor and revere his teacher, even to a greater extent than his father; for his father gave him life in this world, while his teacher who instructs him in wisdom, secures for him life in the world to come. If he sees an article that his father had lost and another article that his teacher had lost, the teacher's property should be recovered first, and then the father's. If his father and his teacher are loaded with burdens, he should first relieve his teacher and then his father. If his father and teacher are in captivity, he should ransom his teacher first. However, if his father is a scholar, though not of the same rank as his teacher, he should first recover his father's lost property and then his teacher's. As students are bound to honor their teacher, a teacher ought to show courtesy and friendliness to his students. The sages said, "Let the honor of your disciples be as dear to you as your own" (Pirke Avot 4:12). A person should take an interest in his pupils and love them, for they are his spiritual children who will bring him happiness in this world and in the world hereafter.<sup>11</sup>

As I read this I am taken back. The responsibility and the intensity of this kind of teacher/student relation are almost

overwhelming. Is any of this applicable to academics? Perhaps I could answer yes by returning to the idea of the *tzimtzum*. As an academic, my teaching of "divine wisdom" might be found only in hints, in indirections. If, however, I leave a trace of my apprehension of the divine, a whole world can be built from that trace. In other words, the contractions of my academic mode would ultimately be for the purpose of a revelation.

Like Parker Palmer, I try very hard to create "community" in my classroom. Having students write collectively published letters to each other rather than solitary journals, is one of the techniques that I use.<sup>12</sup> After the semester, the pre-med student who had wanted to write on "The Meaning of Life" wrote me about our class. She wanted to respond to something I said on the last day of the semester: I had expressed my feelings of discontent with the way we had indeed really "avoided talking about God," my responsibility for that, and my unease at leaving them with theological perplexities rather than comfort. In the message, she said:

It's not so much the theological manner in which I've gained comfort, but far more important to my present being, I've found psychological comfort and intellectual comfort . . . I've never really known any of the other students in my classes or had the opportunity to befriend them . . . Yet in this instance, I feel that we all had an opportunity to get to know each other without being overwhelmed by competition or insecurity.

Perhaps that is one of the ways in which I left a "trace" in the contracted space of my classroom and in which it could become a sacred space. We need to remember, too, that spirituality is found as much in trying to make the mundane (including the university classroom) holy in small, ordinary steps as well as trying to exceed ourselves in moments of transcendence. The great climactic scene at Sinai, filled with thunder, lightning, and the Voice from heaven, is followed in the biblical narrative by a seeming let down: the minutiae of laws regarding goring oxen, Hebrew bondmen, and so forth.

### Personal and Pedagogical Reflections

Then come the long seemingly tedious narratives of the building of the *mishkan*, the Tabernacle, descriptions of its boards and nails, the dress of the high priests. Then we proceed into the book of Leviticus and its elaborate descriptions of the sacrificial system. These are the parts I usually skip when I teach "The Bible as Literature" to undergraduates. Perhaps this is a mistake. For these are also the parts that are so distinctive of Jewish spirituality, of the ways in which the elevated abstractions are brought into the concrete world.

This image of the Tabernacle allows me to conclude by way of another modern Chassidic commentary. In the Tabernacle in the desert, and later in the most holy precincts of the Temple in Jerusalem, were found the images of the two kruvim (a term often poorly translated as "cherubs"). These were not the chubby angels of Baroque paintings, but sphinxlike winged figures with human faces. The Talmud relates that at times of Divine favor, when the Jews were performing the Divine will, the faces of the kruvim were positioned toward each other, and they were locked in an embrace. When the Jews did not act according to the Divine will, it was a time of Divine disfavor, and the positioning of the kruvim was the opposite. When the Temple was destroyed and the alien conquerors came into the Temple, they saw the kruvim positioned face to face and dragged them into the street to mock and desecrate this strange "idol" of the Jews.<sup>13</sup>

R. Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, the late *Lubavitcher Rebbe*, once asked: How could it be that at a time of greatest Divine disfavor, the destruction of the Temple, the beginning of the exile, the faces of the *kruvim* could be looking *toward* each other?<sup>14</sup> He answered with the example of the teacher/student relation: when a teacher is transmitting knowledge to the student, the teacher's attention is fully engaged with the student. If, however, in the middle of this process, the insight of a new idea suddenly comes to the mind of the teacher, the teacher must stop suddenly, withdraw from the student, and turn her or his attention to the task of grasping and developing this new insight - or else it will disappear and

be irretrievably lost. Because of the teacher's deep inner love for the student, his or her intention is, in withdrawing and attempting to comprehend this new idea, to later be able to give it over to the student. The deeper and more precious the new idea, the more the teacher has to withdraw her or his attention from the student. The student, however, feels the disconnection and loss of the teacher as a kind of "exile" and "destruction." That, however, is only on the "external" level. On the inner level, disconnection and withdrawal is intended to bring about the highest revelation. R. Schneersohn explained that externally, there was indeed a terrible destruction of the Temple and exile of the Jews. Yet, the "inner" meaning is the highest revelation, specifically the revelation of the future redemption, a revelation of a new light so great that it temporarily requires a time of darkness and disconnection. R. Schneersohn explained that this is why the gentile conquerors, when they came into the Holy of Holies, saw the faces of the kruvim positioned toward each other. This indicates a time of Divine favor for the Jews. The entire purpose and inner meaning of the exile is to bring about the highest revelation. The Holy of Holies is the place that expressed the deepest, innermost aspect of the spiritual. This was precisely a time of Divine favor. The Jews, just like the "student" in the parable, must therefore remember and know that the concealment and removal of the teacher is only the "external" level. At the deeper inner level, however, the highest revelation is being found. They need to continue their strong connection to and yearning for the teacher amidst the darkness.

While this, of course, is a light we still await, we each have a part in creating through own struggles to maintain our own light in the darkness. What do we make of the spiritual darkness we find in academia these days, of our own withdrawals and contractions and concealments? My plea here has been to fashion from those very gaps and darkness a deeper light. Indeed, the sparks of redemption are already there. I detect them even among my seemingly relentlessly secular skeptical colleagues. I see it in the well-known creative writing professor who confides to me that she often is tempted

### Personal and Pedagogical Reflections

to give it all up and become a Reikki healer. She has been studying and practicing this ancient oriental method of healing which involves placing one's hands on the patient's body to channel energy flows. It is there in my office-mate who has been battling colon cancer for many years. His spiritual life intensifies as he struggles for his life. He tells me of "moments of grace" that have come to him during his hospital stays. Another example is the colleague who suddenly confides that her fundamentalist, evangelical Christian family virtually disinherited her when she divorced her husband and went to live with another woman. She explains what it means to "stand before the throne of God." Finally, there is the older faculty member who converts to Catholicism. I realize we are all like Marranos in a way, "practicing our faith in secret," hiding our religious identities from our colleagues and students.

As the article in my alumnae magazine testified, there is tremendous hunger in America today for "spirituality" ... a disillusionment with institutional religion and desire for a direct access to a personal God in one's daily life, and a shared life in community with fellow spiritual travelers. This is not only an academic dilemma. A day hardly goes by when I don't encounter this phenomenon in the man or woman on the street - the deliveryman, the secretary, the stock boy, and the desk clerk. Indeed it is time for intellectuals and academics to abandon their old fears of religion and of "coming out" of their secret hiding places as persons of faith. If we academics do not help lead and guide this spiritual quest, we abandon it to the many false prophets, hateful fanatics, and cynical manipulators who so eagerly desire to fill that space. Our students indeed are "our children" to whom we give life, and who in turn give us life. Or as the Talmud puts it in Sanhedrin 99h :

> Reish Lakish said, "Whoever teaches his fellow's son Torah is reckoned by the verse as if he created him, as is written '...and the souls they created in Charan' "[Gen 12:5]. Rabbi Eliezer said: "[He is reckoned by

### Personal and Pedagogical Reflections

the verse] as if he created words of Torah, as is written, "...and observe the words of this covenant and practice/do [משירום] them"" [ Deut. 29:8]. Rava said: "[He is reckoned by the verse] as if he created himself. Do not read the aforementioned verse 'them' [Dut sther 'yourselves."" [Dut sthem].

Susan Handelman is Professor of English, Department of English and Jewish Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park. She is the author of The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory; Fragments of Redemption: Jewish Thought and Literary Theory in Scholem, Benjamin, and Levinas. She has received several awards for outstanding teaching.

This essay was inspired by a workshop given in 1997 with Marc Bregman of Hebrew Union College at Machon Schechter, the Seminary for Judaic Studies in Jerusalem. I dedicate this paper to the memory of Ze'ev Falk. I also thank the Jerusalem Fellows program of the Center for Advanced Professional Educators in Jerusalem, where I was a Fellow from 1997-1999, for the time and support needed to write this essay.

#### **NOTES**

<sup>1</sup> Karin Fischer, "The Soul of American: an Increasingly Fractured Society Sends the Nation on a Quest for Faith," *Smith Alumnae Quarterly*, Spring, 1997, p.10.

<sup>2</sup> Fischer, Soul of America, p.12.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Morris Dickstein "A Man Nobody Knew." New York Times Book Review. Sept. 20, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Franz Rosenzweig, *On Jewish Learning*, 1995, ed. Nahum Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1965), p. 216.

<sup>4</sup> For my further reflections on these matters, both theoretical and practical, see my essays, "The Torah of Criticism and the Criticism of Torah: Recuperating the Pedagogical Moment," *Journal of Religion*, 74:3 (1994): 356-371 and reprinted in *Interpreting Judaism in a Postmodern Age*, ed. Steven Kepnes (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1996) 221-242; "Find (ing) Yourself a Teacher': Opening the Discussion on Pedagogy at the Association for Jewish Studies Conference," *Association for Jewish Studies Newsletter*, Spring, 1995 (45):8-9; "*Emunah*' The Craft of Faith," *Crosscurrents: Religion and Intellectual Life* 42:3 (1992): 293-313, to be reprinted in *The Academy and the Possibility of Belief*, ed. M. L. Buley-Meissner (New York: Hampton Press, 1999); "Crossing the Void: A Postmodern Jewish Theology" in *Creating the Jewish Future*, eds. Michael Brown and Bernard Lightman (Walnut Creek, Ca.: AltaMira Press, 1998): 45-59.

<sup>6</sup> R. Yosef Yitzchak Schnersohn, *Sefer Ha-Ma'amorim: Bati* L'Gani. 1950. 3rd.ed. Vol 1. (Brooklyn: Kehot Pub. Society) 1993, ch.15. Translation mine.

<sup>7</sup> I thank R. Tzvi Blanchard of CLAL, of the Center for Leadership and Learning in New York for helping me formulate this idea.

<sup>8</sup> Jane Thompkins, *A Life in School: What the Teacher Learned* (Boston-Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1996), pp.213-214.

<sup>9</sup> R. Kalman Klonymous Shapiro. *Tzav V'Ziruz* () ch 9.

<sup>10</sup> Parker Palmer, To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey. 1983. (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993), 19, xvii, 8-9.

<sup>11</sup> Maimonides. *Mishnah Torah*. "Laws of Torah Study." 5:1, 5:12.

<sup>12</sup> I describe this technique at length with samples of students' letters and my own in my essay "Dear Class," in *Essays on Quality Learning: Teachers' Reflections On Classroom Practice*, eds. Steven Selden and James Greenberg, (College Park, MD: University of Maryland, Center for Teaching Excellence): 17-31.

<sup>13</sup> "Rabbi Katina said: when Israel would come on Pilgrimage, they [the Temple Functionaries] would unveil the curtain [in the Temple] and show the Israelite Pilgrims the *kruvim* embracing one another. And they would say to them: 'Look! God's love for you is like the love of man and woman'"... " Reish Lakish said: When the gentiles entered the Temple they saw the *kruvim* embracing one another. They took them out to the market place and proclaimed: 'These Israelites, whose blessing is a blessing and whose curse is a curse that they should be occupying themselves with such matters!'" Then they cast them down [destroyed the *kruvim*], as it is said, "all that honored her, cast her down, for they have seen her nakedness" (Lamentations 1:8) (*Bavli, Yoma* 54a-b).

<sup>14</sup> Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, *Likkutei Sichot*, Vol II, "Parashat D'varim," (Brooklyn: Kehot Publication Society, 1975) pp. 359-363. The following paragraph is my translation, summary, and paraphrase of this discussion.

## Emotions In Jewish Education

## Larry Scheindlin

r he role of emotions in initiating children into Jewish spiritual life in the context of a rigorous, content-rich Judaica curriculum should go deeper than motivational issues or the development of values. This paper argues for viewing the emotions as active, potentially rational forces in general, and, religious education in particular. By seeking out the more basic emotions underlying our complex spiritual concepts, and by finding materials that enable students to explore those emotions, it is possible to introduce children to the inner life. In such a progression of emotional concepts lie educational tools for preparing children for spiritual experience that is also cognitively rich. The pedagogical task that emerges from this discussion is: to seek out the emotional antecedents of the complex emotions inherent in the experiences in which those antecedent emotions can be explored along with cognitive content. As a practical example. a lesson-sequence for teaching the concept of reliability and the prayer hamaariv aravim is given at length.

121

Jewish life prizes the intellect, yet it is rooted in spiritual experience that derives equally from the emotions. Developing in children an appreciation for the inner life is therefore a necessary step toward initiating them into Jewish spiritual life. To help a child develop a life of emotional awareness is not to denigrate the intellect. It is, rather, to recognize the interweaving of intellect and passion in profound religious experience. A life of emotional awareness requires that one have a feeling for the nuanced differences between emotions, and for the ways in which emotions and intellectual insights can support or contradict each other.

This enterprise of developing spiritual sensitivity entails something different from, but by no means contradictory to,