

LEHRHAUS

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Table of Contents

Gidon Rothstein, *What Yitro Can Teach Us About Synagogue*

Leadership ----- 2-11

Sara Wolkenfeld, *Schools Need Leadership, Too: The OU and*

Day School Education ----- 12-20

Tzvi Sinensky, *Lay-Rabbinic Relations: The Present Moment*

and the Path Ahead ----- 21-28

Leah Sarna, *An Alternative History of American Modern*

Orthodoxy ----- 29-32

Shmuel Winiarz, *A Principled Pesak and a Window Into Pesak* ----- 33-41

Dov Lerner, *A Tone Meant* ----- 42-49

Shlomo Zuckier, *Faithful Quotations: Of Saying, Bringing, and*

Citing ----- 50-52

WHAT YITRO CAN TEACH US ABOUT SYNAGOGUE LEADERSHIP

GIDON ROTHSTEIN

Many years ago, I interviewed for a rabbinic job with a committee of eighteen people. When I asked how they chose the committee, I was told that each person came from a different constituency of that synagogue. As I came to know that community better, I realized that their board was not arranged to achieve that same certainty that all the types of members would be represented.

I write here to offer an idea for how synagogues could choose better leaders, both in their qualities of leadership, their being more focused on representing the membership, and their communicating more regularly and effectively with the entire synagogue community.

Part of what leads me to think this is of value is a spate of writing that portrays synagogues as wrestling with how to move forward productively. Edward Shapiro's "Modern Orthodoxy in Crisis" told the story of his local New Jersey synagogue's recent rabbinic search process. Through that lens, he saw the failure to find a rabbi that fit what Modern Orthodoxy had always been as a crisis.

Recent literature addressing synagogue reform suggests he was tapping into a broader phenomenon. Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman's *Rethinking Synagogues* reported the results of his Synagogue 2000 project, an attempt to help synagogues focus their mission better. In 2010, Rabbi Elie Kaunfer argued that congregations with fewer formal institutional and denominational connections served younger constituencies better. Most recently, Rabbi Hayim Herring offered his ideas on congregational structure in *Tomorrow's Synagogue Today*.

One underlying issue all these authors address is that of leadership, lay and professional. Dr. Misha Galperin went further, listing the qualities of good professional and lay leaders.

He and the rest of the authors I have mentioned, however, assume that leaders are either self-identified—those who step forward to offer their services—or cultivated by professional or previous lay leaders. There's much to be said for that, in that it picks out those already committed to the health of the community, willing to extend themselves to help that community grow further and better. But it's only as good as the people thus selected.

I believe a chapter in the Torah offers another way to choose leaders, allowing all of a synagogue's members more of a role in the process, while ensuring that no one person or small group can control the process. In addition, the leadership this

method produces will be more representative of and responsive to the will of the people than currently. This would make it more likely that the synagogue's leaders will address the concerns and goals of the maximum possible percentage of the membership. To see its advantages, let's review some problems in current communal governance.

Representation

Since synagogue leaders advance to their position either by volunteering or being approached by existing leadership, they don't see their role as representing a particular constituency. I don't question their devotion to fulfilling their fiduciary responsibility to the synagogue, but they can easily come to see themselves and their colleagues on the board or executive committee as the arbiters of what counts as "best possible."

If ten percent of a synagogue sits on its board, the other ninety percent have no specific person looking out for their interests. Leaders care about the community as a whole, and take note of issues they hear of, but it's informal at best, and leaves many voices and concerns unheard at worst (with consequences for communal comity and unity).

I don't mean, let me add, that a representative must or should do whatever constituents want. How to best represent others is a complicated question; I only

mean that in the current system, no one sees themselves that way, as representing specific identifiable others.

Communication

The volunteers running a lay-led charitable organization, such as a synagogue, are using their spare time for a multi-faceted endeavor; they don't have the time to deal with every member with a problem, even if those problems are legitimate and well-considered (which they often are not). Periodic newsletters, public meetings, and other ways of informing the public mean that sensitive information can be disseminated only with difficulty, if at all.

I suggest we need a system that gives us leaders chosen based on their qualifications, not just their interest, that makes clear to those leaders that they are representing a specific group of people, as a whole and as individuals, and where the system itself fosters the kind of communication that keeps the membership fully informed.

Yitro planted the seeds of such a system.

Yitro's Judges

He doesn't seem to have intended that. When he urged Moshe to set up judges (Shemot 18), his stated concern was a sustainable system of justice, which would not

overburden Moshe or the people. In doing so, however, I believe he showed us how we could adjust it to address the issues I raised.

One element of his system that stands out is how many layers of judges he envisioned. In society today, judges serve an amorphous group of thousands if not millions of people at a time, to whom they have no personal connection. Yet Yitro thought every 10 people needed a judge. Or, perhaps, every fifty; R. Eliezer Yehudah Waldenberg, the twentieth century halakhic authority better known by the name of his multi-volume set of responsa, *Tzitz Eliezer*, also wrote a remarkable book on how Jewish law could run a modern day nation-state. In *Hilkhot Medinah* (1:9) he suggested that the “officers of ten” referred to in the verse might have been enforcers rather than actual judges.

The value of a closer relationship between judges and judged, of judges’ being part of the community they were overseeing, is not well-recognized in larger-scale democracy (even in a community of 100 families, when leaders are not specifically assigned to a group of constituents, some members will likely feel completely unrepresented).

Community Chosen Leaders

Yitro recommended that Moshe choose, not the people. *Tzitz Eliezer* suggested that that might have been because only Moshe could assess who was qualified to judge

Torah law. Moshe tells us (Devarim 1:13 and 16) that he sought and found judges *yedu'im le-shivteihem*, known to your tribes. He didn't impose strangers, he appointed men with a pre-existing renown in their community.

When we turn from judges to synagogue trustees or directors (and from there to officers), the top-down element becomes less necessary, at least at the early stages. The synagogue leadership would invite members to form groups of ten, and to select one among them to represent them. (There would have to be a mechanism to check that all members had been included in a group, and to find a way for those who had not joined such a group to then do so).

I choose ten because that's the number in the Torah, but also because ten people all know the person they are choosing, are all acquainted with that person's skills, talents, and limitations, and can make the kind of informed decision that is less true when choosing from greater distance (even a hundred people know a chosen representative less well than if ten are choosing).

Depending on the size of the community, that will often produce too many representatives to be workable. In a synagogue of 600 voting adults, it leads to sixty members of the board.

So we do it again. If the sixty trustees or directors form groups of ten, they end up with a working executive committee of six people (who can all be officers, or be the ones to choose the officers).

Alleviating Our Original Concerns

While it ends up looking like any other board, it differs in the following important ways: First, the small groups who choose the board members will know them well, offering the hope they know them well enough to have greater insight into who can handle the job best. Two, in being drafted by others, we might find such positions going to people who would otherwise have avoided the community politics that might have been necessarily previously. The social obligation of responding to friends' calls to service, to my mind, broadens the pool from which leadership will come.

Even so, it might end up with largely the same people; perhaps the kinds of people who currently rise to the top of synagogues are so motivated by the position that they will politick their way into it. The new way of selecting them will still affect their handling of the position, because they will know that they are meant to represent others, not just decide on what they think is best.

While representatives sometimes make decisions for the good of the community in ways the community itself doesn't yet appreciate, these trustees or board members

will know—in a way current lay leaders don't-- that their job is to represent their ten people first, and that their job performance will and should be evaluated by these ten. That immediacy makes it more likely they will in fact represent their people rather than some vague idea of the community's best interests. As a body, then, the board will represent all of the membership in a way that current boards cannot.

Each member of the executive committee will also be accountable to specific trustees, who put them in that spot to act in certain ways, and to whom they will have to answer and explain their decisions.

Finally, communication will flow more freely and personally. Public pronouncements are exactly that, and are therefore limited in what they can and should say. That which can be conveyed in confidence (even if it often gets out anyway) is different than that which can be broadcast generally, but can help assure the community at large that its leadership is aware of and sensitive to their various concerns.

Tweaking the System

I present the idea as theory (as a theory, it is also scalable to larger groups, like Congressional districts or even nations, but that's a different discussion). Putting it into practice would likely reveal where tweaks were needed. We might anticipate,

for example, that some accommodation would be needed to deal with the top contributors to a synagogue. Synagogues expect more of their top donors, such as when *Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayim* 53:23 rules that half of the community's *hazan* salary should be taken from all members equally and half should be raised by assessing people according to income (much like today, where members of a synagogue all pay the same dues, while those with more means are expected to chip in to cover the shortfall between the dues and the budget).

It does not seem unreasonable that those who give more would expect somewhat more of a say. Whether that would mean that half the board would be set aside for top donors, or that those donors would choose one seat on the executive committee would be a matter for each community to decide.

Other such questions likely to arise include term limits, how often representatives should be communicating with constituents, members' rights to recall a representative mid-term, or how to reshape the voting groups of ten when members leave a synagogue.

Those are details. Before they become a concern, we'd have to deal with this in practice, seeing how it affects a community's experience of itself and its leadership, whether it accomplishes what I believe and hope it would.

Some problems call for bold new ideas, and some lead us to realize the idea was there for us to see all this time. I suggest that in terms of constructing our communal leadership, Yitro's insight still rings true, as a way to adapt democracy to the benefit of our synagogue communities.

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SCHOOLS NEED LEADERSHIP, TOO: THE OU AND DAY SCHOOL EDUCATION

SARA WOLKENFELD

The question of who can and cannot be clergy has ramifications beyond the realm of the synagogue. Day school education offers an important lense through which to read the [recent findings](#) of the rabbinic panel, convened by the Orthodox Union, on the halachic permissibility of women clergy. After all, day school education is seen as a core value by many in our community. Read against the backdrop of the OU statement on clergy, it is worth re-examining what transpires in our schools.

The statement opens by celebrating the advances in women's learning. Full disclosure: I am a beneficiary of those advances. I owe so much to the institutions that educated me, to my parents, to the philanthropists who helped endow those institutions, and to the vision and action of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik. He delivered the inaugural Talmud class to women at Stern College in 1977, just a few years before I was born, and I was blessed to attend schools that furnished me with the skills to learn and teach Torah. Though not every educator or educational environment was one that treated me as an equal to my male peers, I had teachers and role models who encouraged me to take an active role in teaching others.

Nonetheless, I was the exception, not the norm. Women did not give *divrei Torah*, *derashot*, or regular shiurim in my shul. In fact, women did not attend most shiurim in my shul. My early memories of shiur attendance are mostly of me, my father (z"l), and the men. I did not have a female Talmud teacher until I was twenty-seven years old, about a year after the first time I heard a woman deliver a drasha in an Orthodox shul.

Imagine that you teach high school biology. For most of the students in the class, you assume that this will be important background knowledge in their lives. A well-educated adult should know some biology; it may not be relevant to his or her career, but it will be important to understand medical decisions, caring for oneself and one's children, etc. However, some students—one or two each year, perhaps—will excel, some may specialize, a handful will become physicians, and some may come back years later with a PhD or a career in the very field that we teach. Ideally, the teacher will have all these outcomes in mind, and will teach all students with an eye towards those possible outcomes. And the same ought to be true for all fields of general studies.

Of course, this was not—and is not—always true. There was a time when a science class would implicitly assume that boys would be the doctors and girls would be the nurses. Even now, research shows that there are sometimes gender differences in terms of the way teachers encourage boys and girls to pursue their interest in

certain subjects. And there continue to be gender differences in the rates at which students enter advanced studies in STEM fields.

What informs us when we teach Torah to our students? Certainly we want it to infuse their lives with Torah principles and values. We also want them to pass it on to their children. But do we place limits on the extent to which we want them to pursue it? Are we teaching boys and girls differently, and if so, are we aware of and transparent about the ramifications of those educational differences? These questions apply not just in terms of curriculum, but also regarding how we teach and speak to our students. Does your school teach Talmud to boys and not to girls?

One implication—and result—being that boys (and men) are expected to have a higher level of literacy than girls. Does your school teach boys to read and interpret texts independently, while girls are “spoon-fed” the material? The implication is that girls will not need these textual skills, and the result is that they will not have them. Does your school ever mention an idea or insight contributed by a woman in the post-Biblical period? If not, girls will intuit that women have no role to play in shaping the dynamics of their religious landscape. Do school leaders show respect for female religious leaders? Witnessing respectful and even deferential treatment of female scholars will help both boys and girls understand that people of both genders can have influential and religiously significant roles in our community. Even years later I cherish the memory of the day when the rabbi who taught our

halakhah shiur at Nishmat told us that Rabbi Yehuda Henkin would be delivering a shiur that evening. “You know who he is, right? He’s married to your Rosh Yeshiva.”

Copious research attests to the fact that even unconscious attitudes towards gender norms can impact how teachers relate to students in the classroom and, in turn, how students relate to the material they learn. The OU’s recent statement ensures that, by and large, the Torah education Modern Orthodox students see on Shabbat will be done by men. And this undoubtedly sends a message: Boys and girls alike perceive that men, and not women, carry authority in the realm of Torah. Men’s ideas have value and their voices are meant to be heard by all, whereas women listen passively and absorb information that comes from men.

Day schools must find ways to encourage girls and women to learn Torah seriously and to share that learning, if we want to take seriously the commitment to “fully utilize” the “talent and commitments” of women. If students see primarily male leadership teaching Torah on Shabbat, then Modern Orthodox educators will have to find ways to counterbalance that picture during the week. Otherwise, our children may very well interpret these asymmetries as signaling that Torah leadership and values are only for men.

The statement tells us "Let us focus our energy and communal creativity on increasing and enhancing the contributions that women make to our shuls and communities, rather than being consumed with limitations." Yes, let us do that. So here are some potential ways to engage in this project; I welcome my colleagues to share their ideas as well.

1. We need to be more self-reflective about our biases, both conscious and unconscious, about the proper role of men and women in the world of Torah and mitzvot. These biases will inform our teaching, whether we intend them to or not, and we need to be sure that our intentions are appropriate to our context and our students. Will our teaching strategies in fact advance the goal of "increasing and enhancing" women's contributions? In our ideal world as educators, who will our students become?
2. If, like me, you are willing to cooperate with the OU's emphasis on expanding the contributions that women can make to a synagogue community, public Torah-related speaking roles must be open to both boys and girls, and to men and women, within the school community. Again, if the children in your school attend an OU shul, you can assume the balance of leadership in their synagogues tilts heavily towards men. It is therefore up to our days schools to identify opportunities to counterbalance what our students experience in our synagogues.

3. The curriculum must be equally rigorous and serious for boys and girls. If the curriculum is different, can you plausibly explain to the students why this is so? If you believe in an ideology of “different but somehow equal,” hiding curricular decisions and their implications from the girls only makes them feel less valued.
4. Girls and women need “educated, knowledgeable, and halakhically committed role models.” Again, this is something we can all agree on. The OU, as a synagogue association, focuses on synagogue roles. But to make good on this objective means finding titles for women that convey their knowledge, erudition, and leadership.
5. There are important roles to be played in schools too. Women can teach all subjects, can serve as inspirational speakers, administrators, leaders of *yemei iyun*, *kumsitzes*, and holiday-related observances. If we want our educational choices to convey the message that the Torah is for everyone, then schools must make an effort to ensure that men and women play the wide range of roles available within the school environment.
6. Language always matters, and actions speak louder than words: I remember sitting in the halls of my Orthodox high school at *mincha* time, while male

teachers swept the area for male students. They had to go to davening; for us it was unofficially optional. The message was clear. As a female high school student once told me: “The boys need to know much more, because they are obligated in so many more *mitzvot*.” I hope we can all agree that “so many more” is an overstatement, especially when you consider those *mitzvot* in which women typically participate (*sukkah*, *shofar*, etc.) even if not technically obligated. If we all believe in embracing the talents of women, to echo a phrase from the OU’s statement, then we need to start by educating them to believe that the world of *mitzvot* encompasses them as much as it does their male peers.

7. And finally, if we are truly to convey that Torah education is the job of both men and women, then we need to put our money where our mouth is. And that means making sure that Jewish institutions embrace pay-equality across the sexes and that current unstated assumptions that men can be paid more than women for the same work be deemed unacceptable.

Several educators have already told me that statements such as these will have no impact on the way they teach. This non-reaction is exactly what I fear. For me, the OU statement was disturbing and alienating, but also catalyzing. Whatever triggered the work of this panel, the larger backdrop is certainly the unprecedented education that my peers and I received. Whatever the next stage looks

like—whether or not there will ultimately be titles and roles that the OU can approve and whether or not the community cares—this stage will certainly be shaped by the education that we provide for boys and girls today. Look what has already come about; with the right educational tools, we can do so much more.

Since the release of the OU statement, there has been a flurry of published reactions online and in the Jewish media (which even succeeded in briefly displacing American politics as the central focus of conversation and debate among Modern Orthodox Jews). Many Modern Orthodox feminists critiqued the statement for categorically condemning female clergy. I also know that many Modern Orthodox traditionalists celebrated the statement for defending our community's traditions from further erosion. Despite their disagreement, both sides expect that this statement will limit or slow change. In contrast, I think the OU statement can be used as a tool to advocate for positive change, particularly in the field of education.

As an educator, I want to encourage our community to highlight and reinforce the statement's unfulfilled and unmet vision of female scholarship and religious leadership. Formal Jewish education occupies a massive space in our community and yet it has been neglected in our community's ongoing debates about female religious leadership. It is time to turn our attention back to our schools and yeshivot where even the OU's position paper calls out for new policies and new priorities.

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LAY-RABBINIC RELATIONS: THE PRESENT MOMENT AND THE PATH AHEAD

TZVI SINENSKY

“I have a confession-brag: I have basically zero interest in reading this OU statement that everyone's talking about.” Thus ran one fairly typical response to the rabbinic panel's recent [position paper](#) on female clergy. Others, instead of ignoring the statement, have lashed out against it.

Whence all the vitriol and eye-rolling amongst a substantial segment of our community? Many have posed questions on the decision's halakhic claims. Some have decried the ad hoc nature of the panel—the seven rabbis are not standing decisors of the OU—which, they claim, proves that the outcome was predetermined. Yet others have taken umbrage to the statement's ambivalence toward *yoatzot halachah*.

But none of these suffices to account for the venomous reception of the statement in many quarters. In truth, it has been obvious for some time that *there has been a breakdown in trust between Centrist Orthodoxy's rabbinic establishment and too many adherents of American Modern Orthodoxy*. Of course, there are many in our ranks who revere such rabbis as mentors and *gedolim*; undeniably, though, there is another substantial group who feel profoundly alienated. This insight, in turn, begs

additional questions: without casting blame on one side or the other, what are the causes of this breakdown, and how can we move forward?

The Current Moment

Many contributing factors have led us to this point. The structure of the American rabbinate, in which a rabbi serves as halakhic authority of the community that writes his paycheck, can engender conflict. The American ethos of autonomy complicates any attempt at establishing positive rabbinic-lay relationships. In recent years, Americans' faith in their political institutions has reached a nadir, further eroding the public's respect for authority. Rabbis who have loudly polemicized against Open Orthodoxy have inadvertently branded themselves and their centrist rabbinic colleagues as reactionaries. The pitched political battles of the past year have left a divided Modern Orthodoxy in their wake, making for a testy readership on any subject. And the parade of headlines announcing rabbinic malfeasance has cast a dark shadow over all rabbinic-lay interactions.

Moreover, the outflanking of the more traditional arm of the Modern Orthodox establishment by their left-leaning colleagues has exacerbated matters. Many community members have been instructed by a new generation of rabbis that *Halakhah* permits far more flexibility than has been traditionally understood. Increasingly, rabbis' objections to halakhic innovations have been understood to be driven by public policy considerations, not strict *Halakhah*. As a result, many have

expressed skepticism as to whether rabbis are being fully forthcoming when they outlaw certain practices. This charge of rabbinic dishonesty, right or wrong, should not be underestimated as a factor that has chipped away at the already-shaky foundations of lay-rabbinic relations.

Proactive and Reactive Religious Leadership

But all this omits what is arguably the greatest contributing factor to the divide. To appreciate this final element, it's worth calling attention to the basic dynamic at play in the OU's request: *the agency solicited a ruling from the rabbinic panel*. The lay organization is pushing forward the community agenda, while the rabbis, despite a valiant attempt to propose a positive path forward, are cast primarily in the role of respondents.

This, I believe, is indicative of the current landscape. While many individual rabbis are rightly beloved by their communities, on the whole, the centrist rabbinic establishment is not perceived as championing a positive community agenda. Granted, ORA is an excellent example of an organization that features a proactive agenda. Moreover, it turns to Rabbi Hershel Schachter as its halakhic decisor and touts Rabbi Mordechai Willig's achievement as author of the Beit Din of America's prenuptial agreement. Still, ORA is a lay organization.

And so institutional rabbinic Orthodoxy has come to be viewed as more interested in drawing red lines than in promoting an affirmative vision of Judaism. Of course, much of this perception is a result of the push from Modern Orthodox liberals, who have left the traditional flank feeling compelled to come to the defense of traditional practice. But whatever the causes, the consequent perception, at least for a substantial segment of our community, remains the same.

The Rabbis and the OU

Against the backdrop of this rocky lay-rabbinic terrain, it was inevitable that many would view the panel's statement with jaundiced eyes. Nevermind that the statement went out of its way to urge a number of proactive steps, or that as part of its research, the rabbis received input from a wide range of pulpit rabbis, educators, *yoatzot halachah*, communal professionals, and lay leaders. Due to the fractured relationship, many community members unfortunately disqualified the rabbis out of the gate.

Wise to the importance of adopting a proactive stance, the OU, in its accompanying remarks and beyond, has looked to position itself as pressing forward with an ambitious community agenda:

On the professional side of the organization, the OU's recruitment, training, mentoring and promotion of talented women within our professional ranks

has been a key organizational priority for the past several years. We have significantly enhanced our maternity/parental leave policy, as well as our part-time and telecommuting work options, to create a more family-friendly work environment. We established the OU Women's Affinity Group as a forum for professional women within our organization, where women can gather on a regular basis for seminars, networking and brainstorming on issues of common concern. We instituted a new compensation system whereby each program position within the OU is assigned a grade and corresponding salary range, thereby ensuring pay equity across the board. And while there remains much work ahead, our management ranks are now beginning to reflect the totality of the talent pool within our community, both male and female...

But there is much more that the OU can—and should—seek to achieve. The OU is, therefore, in the process of forming a new Department of Women's Initiatives. This Department will be led by a senior professional, and will allow us to coordinate all of our programming for women, whether serving our community's schools, shuls or individuals directly. The objective of this initiative is to advance the spiritual, religious and communal engagement of women at all stages of life, in all segments of the Orthodox community, in areas of personal and professional growth, including Torah study and community leadership.

More recently, in a [Jewish Link article](#) aptly (carefully?) entitled “OU Opens its Doors to Women Leaders,” Allen Fagin, the OU’s executive director, emphasized:

I think, in many respects, this statement really changes the dynamics of the conversation with regard to women’s roles in the synagogue structure, by trying to focus not just on the areas where it is halachically impermissible for women to function, but on focusing on the areas where it is perfectly appropriate for women to function... I think it is an innovation of the rabbis and the statement that we are focused as much on ‘the can’ as ‘the cannot.’

This is the right way to go, but there is just one difficulty. Because of past history, and given the nature of the question posed to them, the rabbis’ ruling was widely viewed as reverting to boundary-marking rather than offering a positive vision. At present, it is only the lay organization that can plausibly be seen as claiming the mantle of setting a positive agenda for Modern Orthodoxy.

The Path Forward

Has the lay-rabbinic relationship been damaged beyond repair? While many are pessimistic, I believe there is a path forward.

On the lay side, and from some of the left-leaning religious leadership of our community, we need fewer knee-jerk reactions. I firmly believe that the rabbinic

respondents genuinely sought to present their findings in a balanced, nuanced, transparent, and positive fashion. Individuals are entitled to agree or disagree, but if the community continues to greet good-will statements with derision, we will never be able to move forward.

From the rabbinic side, two steps are in order. First, rabbis ought resist the temptation to focus their energies on declaring individuals and institutions as outside the pale. On the whole, this tactic has backfired. Second, as the RCA has sought to achieve with its recent series of resolutions, including its “[proud platform for the 21st century](#),” it would go a long way for the rabbinic establishment to redouble its efforts to set a positive community agenda and widely publicize those efforts. This will require creative vision and bold action, and I firmly believe it can be done.

Rav Aharon Lichtenstein zt”l concluded his uncharacteristically scathing lecture, “[If There Is No Intelligence, Whence Leadership?](#)” with the following exhortation:

As 'dwellers' of the beit hamidrash, and as people for whom a Godly reality is close to our hearts, with spiritual and Torah-based experiences ingrained in ourselves, we understand well the requirement to make the Torah and Hashem's kingship loved by others. We must begin with the society within which we live—specifically in those sectors that are close to Torah and

mitzvot. Those who involve themselves in Torah study are supposed to demonstrate through their actions and to clarify that its values ... bring love and completion to both the individual and the nation.

Rabbinic leadership, of course, is about so much more than public relations. But for the rabbinate to succeed, earning and maintaining the community's trust is essential. To achieve this, significant effort is required on both sides.

The range of responses to the ruling on female clergy shines a harsh light on the present divisions in our community. Clearly, we have our work cut out for us. But if we can find ways to collaborate in good faith, we may yet pave a healthier and brighter future for American Modern Orthodoxy.

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AN ALTERNATIVE HISTORY OF AMERICAN MODERN ORTHODOXY

LEAH SARNA

Conjure up in your mind a world in which Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik *ztz"l*, founder, philosopher, and halachic mind of Modern Orthodoxy, had been born a woman. Our community would be utterly different. Josefa Beila Soloveitchik would have studied *Tanakh* growing up, but she would not have been tutored in the complex methodologies of Brisk. Her incredible soul and brainpower would have been drawn to philosophical inquiry in the university, and there it would have remained, serving the world of the academy alone—or perhaps just her household. The reins of leadership within American Orthodoxy would have been taken up by others, and America's Jewry would have been impoverished because of it.

Unfortunately, this is not some dystopian novel. This happens in every generation, including our own. Women of brilliance in mind and spirit are born into the Orthodox community, and our community actively deprives itself of their service—not because of their brains or potential, but their gender.

From the youngest ages, women of great potential are disadvantaged in Torah-study opportunities. No co-ed high school or high school for girls offers the same hours of Talmud study as boys are offered at the Marsha Stern Talmudical

Academy (MTA). No seminary in Israel provides the same rigor of Talmud study as men are offered at top Hesder Yeshivot. Stern College does not provide anything comparable to the Talmud study programs expected of men at Yeshiva College. The Graduate Program for Advanced Talmudic Studies (GPATS), Yeshiva University's two-year program for post-college women, requires a fraction of the years and a fraction of the hours of RIETS, the *semikha* program for men. Men, after ordination, have the opportunity to continue their full-time studies, with a generous stipend, in the Yeshiva University Wexner *Kollel Elyon*. Women, after graduation from GPATS, might pursue further study in an array of part-time programs, none of which is selective enough to provide a challenging environment for advanced students. Or, women can pursue a doctorate in Talmud, leaving behind traditional modes of study. (Or, of course, they can study at Yeshivat Maharat, which would not be unprecedented.) Despite all the odds, there are a handful of women in the world who have stuck with it. They are, for the most part, underpaid and underappreciated. In America, these women often find their talents valued more by the non-Orthodox world or even the non-Jewish world, and they direct their energies towards those communities. This is a great loss to our own. But we deserve it, because our community up to this point has actively discouraged those who have attempted to create jobs that give dignity and opportunity to learned women.

The real tragedy are the women, brimming with *Ahavat Hashem* and a love of Torah, who desire a career in *Avodat Hakodesh* but ultimately pursue law, engineering, finance, psychology, or medicine because the Torah world didn't offer them excellence in training or career prospects. They didn't want to have to fight for respect, education, or employment. While other paths rolled out the red carpet, vying to recruit these incredibly talented women, the Torah community said, "you are a woman and not worthy of our investment."

It seems to me that the Orthodox Union's Rabbinic Panel recognizes this tragedy. They [write](#) that "women should most enthusiastically be encouraged to share their knowledge, talents and skills—as well as their passion and devotion- to synagogues, schools and community organizations." And further, "as a community, we need the best and brightest women- and men- to be motivated and well-trained to pursue careers in *avodat hakodesh*, whether in schools, synagogues or *chesed* organizations."

The Talmud and Midrash record a sentiment expressed by Rabbi Elazar Ben Azariyah in response to a grand statement made by his colleague Ben Azzai. Rabbi Elazar Ben Azariyah teaches us: words are pleasant when they come from the mouths of those who act on them. Ben Azzai preaches pleasantly but does not uphold his pleasant words (*Bereishit Rabba* 34, similar to *Yevamot* 63b).

א"ל ר"א בן עזריה נאים דברים היוצאים מפי עושיהן, בן עזאי נאה דורש ולא נאה מקיים.

It is my sincere hope that the Rabbinic Panel of the OU places their full strength and energy into upholding these pleasant words. I hope that this statement heralds a new day, in which the resources of the OU and the Orthodox community are directed towards training, retaining, and employing the best and brightest of the girls and women in our community, just as those resources are poured into our most promising boys and men.

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A PRINCIPLED PESAK AND A WINDOW INTO PESAK

SHMUEL WINIARZ

With the [publication](#) of the Orthodox Union's rabbinic panel's *pesak* and resultant resolution regarding clergy and gender roles, part of the Orthodox community and beyond is again engaged in heated debate. While the *pesak* ably stands on its own, and the distinguished rabbinic leaders who penned the response do not need my approbation, I hope to highlight several heretofore under-discussed points that relate to crucial matters of history, authority, and community.

At its core, Orthodox Judaism places its trust in rabbinic authority. Since the days when the Sanhedrin sat in the *lishkat ha-gazit* (Chamber of Hewn Stone), Jews have sought the guidance and decisions of each generation's rabbinic authorities to understand the *devar Hashem*, the word of God. In this rich historical vein, the OU did not avoid grappling with pertinent issues, but posed the questions to its community's preeminent Rabbis, including those to whom both the OU and many if not most OU pulpit rabbis turn to for halakhic guidance. The OU then undertook to render the guidance into official institutional policy. Irrespective of whether one views the decision as too liberal, too conservative, or something else entirely, the OU demonstrated bona fide leadership by addressing rather than deflecting important issues.¹

¹ The unusual process incorporated numerous consultations and solicited communal input. The panel heard from accomplished men and women from across the Orthodox spectrum, including

History

Some have [accused](#) the OU of being “divisive.” In fact, however, it is precisely the opposite; the OU has long articulated where it stands. The rabbinic recommendation and the subsequent statement are in accord with an earlier stated position of the OU. In the 1970s, in the midst of the Conservative Movement’s debate regarding the ordination of women, the Orthodox Union and the Rabbinical Council of America published an unequivocal statement, asserting women’s ordination was contrary to *Halakhah*.

Soon after his selection to head the Jewish Theological Seminary, the historian Gerson Cohen began grappling with women’s ordination within Conservative Judaism. In 1974 the Rabbinical Assembly’s Committee on Jewish Law and Standards passed a “legitimate minority” opinion stating women could serve as rabbi or cantor. Many Conservative scholars, who similarly viewed women’s ordination as contrary to Jewish law, took umbrage at the resolution, opening a fissure that eventually led, in the 1980s, to the formation of what became the Union for Traditional Judaism. The OU and RCA published an impassioned statement taking

multiple *yoatzot halakhah*, at least one female faculty member of an Open Orthodox institution, and a former Associate Rabbi at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, Open Orthodoxy’s foundational synagogue. While insufficient for those who reject the prominence or role of the members of the rabbinic panel, or their conclusions, the process’s inclusiveness, transparency, and deliberative nature should be universally welcomed. Notably, similar steps were not pursued by those aiming to introduce to the Orthodox community the unprecedented step of ordaining women.

issue with this stark abandonment of halakhic norms, and stated in part:

Halacha is the Jew's means of searching within Torah for guidance to all of life's questions and needs. It gives the Jewish people the opportunity to be creative in seeking solutions and directions within the framework that G-d has set.

In every generation there arose those who were impatient and cut the Gordian knot by approaching the Torah with arrogance saying, "you must give me the answer I desire or I shall deny your relevance." They pronounced the principle that the Torah and hence Halacha must bow to the needs of the moment. They thus deny the divinity of the Torah as a document given by G-d.

Our generation is no different. Those who have risen against Halacha are many. They speak in its name, using its terminology but in truth destroying and emasculating it.

In recent weeks, we have witnessed the Conservative Rabbinates' attempt to establish a new role for women in Jewish religious life. While they have attempted to enwrap it in an halachic framework, this is a falsehood. They have not used the sanctified interpretive approach to Halacha. They have

done violence to the sacred principles by injecting their wishes into Halacha rather than seeking Halacha's answers.

Torah has ordained different and unique roles for men and women. Those who use the terms equality and inequality with regard to the respective roles of men and women in Judaism are either ignorant or have misunderstood the Halachic process. We pray during these Holy Days that the people of Israel will re-affirm their devotion to Torah and Halacha and will not be misled by false prophets.

This history offers insight into the current conversation. It reiterates the position amongst traditional Jews stretching back to Sinai that has precluded women from ordination. This precedent is reflected in the selfsame responses of the OU in 1974 and in 2017, when Conservative Judaism and Open Orthodoxy have respectively crossed that line. The statement also demonstrates what the status quo is, specifically for the OU. Ergo, claims of the OU being divisive, or having the burden of proof to establish its position fall away. The OU is responding to those engineering the divisiveness. As the *pesak* states:

Our group believes that the combination of these two considerations, precedent and halakhic concerns, precludes female clergy. Given the status quo that we feel is meaningful and intentional, the burden of halakhic proof

rests on the side of changing the established practice.

Clearly, it is those who are attempting to introduce women's ordination as an Orthodox practice who have decided that their objectives outweigh the divisiveness they would be triggering. Objectives decided upon without the convening of forums or discussions with a broad spectrum of leading *poskim*, community Rabbis, educators, and lay leaders.

Authority

Beyond the firm historical and halakhic parameters upon which the *pesak* stands, the process concerns other areas, including the methodology and authority of *pesak*.

While Torah study is a central value for every Jew, *pesak*, when determining communal behavior, is the province of an elite cadre of experienced *talmidei hakhamim*. As Yeshiva University's Rabbi J. David Bleich has written:

The ability to formulate definitive *psak* is the product of highly specialized skills. It is in choosing between conflicting precedents and opinions that the consummate expertise of the decisor is apparent. The decisor . . . must carefully weigh not merely on the basis of sheer number but also on the relative stature of the scholars whose opinions are under consideration, and must at the same time assess the complexities and relative importance of any

number of component factors.²

Complex *pesak* is not for the layman, nor is it based on geographic diversity. The more consequential the question, the more qualified and experienced the deciders must be. In every academic discipline, not all opinions are given equal deference and the most consequential questions are posed to the preeminent experts in the field. Would the American Medical Association turn to a first year resident, or a doctor who has rarely practiced, to set profession wide standards? Would a first year associate be asked to pen a legal treatise on, or restatement of, the common law? Moreover, significant accomplishment in community leadership does not by itself earn one the status of a *posek*. There are, no doubt, many extraordinary contributors to the Orthodox community and beyond, whose love for Jews is unbounded. Nevertheless they cannot claim entitlement to leadership in *pesak* on that basis alone. And forum shopping in search of finding a scholar ready to validate a predetermined policy objective through ostensibly halakhic decisions is hardly a valid halakhic process.

Halakhah, in contrast to secular legal systems, is the revelation of the Divine Will. A talmudic *kal va-homer* (a fortiori) can be applied to the process of *halakhic* adjudication, being a meritocracy rather than a democracy. Today, while there is no formalized hierarchy, there is one telling metric of rabbinic stature and skill and,

² J. David Bleich, *Contemporary Halakhic Problems*, vol. I (New York: Ktav, 1977), xvii.

ipso facto, authority. To whom do rabbis, from across the Orthodox spectrum turn to for advice, when they have perplexing questions? What made Rabbi Yitzhak Elchanan Spektor, Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski, and Rabbi Moshe Feinstein zt”l the acknowledged leading *poskim* of their respective times? Their status has been secured by the very fact that most of their prominent and not-as-prominent contemporaries turned to them, when faced with the most vexing questions. In a word, they each served as the rabbi’s rabbi.

Today, there is probably no single posek who towers over the rest. However, there is an acknowledged cadre of eminent *poskim* who field the most intricate halakhic queries from diverse communities and not just their own. Rabbi Dovid Feinstein, Rabbi Dovid Cohen of Flatbush, Rabbi Asher Weiss of Jerusalem, Rabbi Mordechai Willig of Riverdale, Dayan Chanoch Ehrentreu of London and two of the members of the OU’s rabbinic panel, Rabbi Hershel Schachter and Rabbi Gedalia Dov Schwartz, come to mind. The *pesak* requested by the OU thus reflects the clear directive of the most respected authorities of what is termed the Modern Orthodox world.

Community

Many, including myself, fear we are heading towards an irreparable rift. A balkanized socio-religious community will eventually affect acceptance of marriages, divorce, and conversions and real people will be hurt. We need increased

dialogue. Originally, given my orientation towards what is colloquially termed the “yeshiva world,” I was concerned with stating an opinion on an issue for a somewhat different community. Then I realized, if we cannot have inter-communal conversations, the rift will be inevitable.

Some argue the divide is rooted in the reliance on different *poskim* and *elu ve-eluyei elokim hayyim*. Yet the same Orthodoxy that does not countenance a *pesak* from the Conservative's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards does not grant every opinion of every Orthodox rabbi equal validity. What is needed for acceptance of *pesak*, and for the maintenance of communal unity, is for the same basis to be utilized. The Orthodox perspective understands *Halakhah* as legal principles emanating from an independent Godly truth, both for “the yeshiva world” and Modern Orthodoxy.

By contrast, the director of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah's Halakhah program, Rabbi Ysoscher Katz, has [written](#) that “Modern Orthodox halacha” should not be “exclusively Orthodox” but must incorporate a second set of values stemming from “a robust encounter with modernity” where “the books are only the raw materials.” To be sure, Western values and Torah are often incongruent, including notions of autonomy, egalitarianism, and family values. While not to understate the challenges, we can aim to minimize the conflicts and through increased Torah study we can internalize the Torah's values. Yet when the conflict is irreconcilable, we

choose the Torah values and proudly so. This is what unites all of Orthodoxy, from Beverly Hills to Bnei Brak, from Flatbush to Fairlawn. If the underlying framework for *pesak* will be the attempted fusing of two separate value systems, even when in tension, eerily reminiscent of Conservative Judaism's decades-old mantra of "Tradition and Change," then the schism will sadly be unavoidable.

We believe in the rightness of our *mesorah* and in our rabbinic luminaries serving as the torch-bearers of the *Torah Ha-kedoshah* we all cherish. In these trying times, may the OU rabbinical panel's *pesak*, following in the footsteps of its position from 1974 stating the well-established Orthodox perspective, and the discussions that have flowed from them, aid us in understanding and following God's intent for his people.

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A TONE MEANT

DOV LERNER

Earlier this year a critique was levelled against an effort to forge a more inclusive orthodoxy. It argued that the effects of the enterprise were cosmetic and superficial; all tone, no substance. Amassing a catalogue of ostensibly prejudiced ritual traditions, it surmises derisively, “[Maybe a nicer tone is all you need to make those practices meaningful and pleasant.](#)” Perhaps tone is not all you need, but a pleasant tone truly meant deserves far more than scorn. Our sages knew this, and their interpretive torsion of God’s first public words prove its power.

Biblical readers are familiar, from first light, with the voice of God, but not until the twentieth chapter of Exodus—over 2,500 years into Biblically conceived world history—does God verbally address a crowd. From floods to frogs He has exhibited displeasure through supernatural interventions, and communicated His intention through human messengers, but it is at Sinai, before a nation of slaves still aching from the pain of labor, that he first speaks publicly.

“I am the Lord your God” (Exodus 20:2). Plainly read, these words in their context should perturb us. The Israelites, at this stage, ate celestial bread, they walked by the light of angel-fire and inhabited an ethereal mist. They have, as a nation, felt God’s unmistakable mark, perhaps never more than when pacing through parted waters.

The time for introductions had passed. When Sinai then thunders and their souls jointly shudder there could be no doubt as to whose words assaulted their senses. Why open the revelation of heavenly ethics with a farcically obvious remark? Why make Heaven's first public impression one of naïve detachment?

Thus becomes an ordinary accumulation of letters—*"I am the Lord your God," "Anokhi HaShem Elokekha"*—a hotbed of exegetical activity.

So coerced to feel that this formulation says more than it seems, a number of commentaries apply a cipher. Rabbeinu Bachya splits the first word into alphabetic, arithmetic, and phonetic fragments that in turn disclose a code for theistic totality. The Ba'al Ha-turim applies a comparative calculus to transform the apparent excess into another unspoken creed. And the rabbis of old resolve our concern by presuming the semantic density of a veiled abbreviation:

R. Yochanan himself said, *"Anokhi"* is an acronym: "I myself have written the script." The rabbis said: "Pleasant speech, a writing, a gift." Some have said to read *"Anokhi"* in reverse: "Scripture was given, faithful are its words" (*Shabbat* 105a).

Without examining each of these expansions, it is clear that so incongruous are the first words of revelation that they incite an array of esoteric interpretations. But

while these meanings can be submerged for attentive readers to disinter, not one of these renderings can be the meaning gleaned by our ancestors aurally stunned that morning at Sinai.

If one accepts the principle of Biblical brevity, as many commentaries do, and seeks to preserve the integrity of the scene's presumptive reality, how can we account for God's first communal words?

We now turn to tone.

The unpunctuated Biblical text tends, at first, toward monotony. This is what triggered our initial confusion. Our verse is most naturally read as a flat introduction: "I am the Lord your God." But, employing comparative semantics, the Malbim on our verse alters the tone:

There is a distinction between 'Ani' (I) and 'Anokhi' (I). 'Ani' emphasizes the predicate, and 'Anokhi' emphasizes the subject. For instance, "Ani (I) am standing" stresses that I am *standing* rather than *sitting*; but "Anokhi (I) am standing" stresses that it is *I* who is standing rather than *someone else*.

The Malbim identifies in the Hebrew language a pronominal choice with vast implications. God's selection in this verse then demonstrates precisely that he is *not*

introducing Himself. With these words He instead offers an enunciated instantiation of power. God knows that Israel know who He is; He is not speaking to a question of identity, but one of authority. A truer translation might read: “I, *and only I*, am the Lord your God.” Israel’s first verbal contact with Divinity is a sober one. Like the legendary suspension of a mountain over Israel’s heads, God introduces the Decalogue with a crushing utterance that looms like an ultimatum. As a first impression, God is severe, stern, and domineering.

Hermeneutically speaking, the Malbim ratchets the tone to defend the text. An unnamed sage of the rabbinic period takes another path:

God appeared to them at the sea as a warrior at war, and appeared to them at Sinai like a scribe teaching a lesson, and appeared to them in Daniel’s day as an elder teaching Torah; He appeared to them in the age of Solomon as a youth. God thus said to them, “Do not be concerned that you see me in multiple forms, I am He that was at the sea, I am He that is at Sinai.”—“*I am the Lord your God.*”

In this ancient homiletic compendium—assumed by scholars to have been compiled around the fifth century CE—an anonymous voice implicitly recognizes our preliminary bewilderment. But this sage does not ratchet the tone, he softens it.

Apparently the time for introductions had *not* passed. When Sinai was struck, the identity of the responsible being was anything but self-evident. The experience at the mountain bore no resemblance to the previous seven weeks of wandering, and indicated no continuity with the events of the exodus. The notion that Israel would recognize every supernatural force as, by definition, deriving from the same divinity, is, for our sage, simply naïve.

Escorted to freedom by the hand of a martial mastermind and liberated by the repeated thrashing of an awesome power, Israel is stunned by Sinai's cerebral culture. The Heaven conceived by fleeing slaves is administered by a soldierly authority—so to intuit the presence of a gentle teacher more than muddled their imaginations. As shoulder marks fade into elbow patches the people wonder how on Earth Heaven changed?

Our sage here suggests that these words—*"I am the Lord your God"*—respond to Israel, in the midst of confusion, on the brink of theological surrender, and offer an indispensable consolation. For him a truer translation would run: *"It is still I, the Lord your God."* Anything but crushing, God's first public words concede to a human need and seek to steady a deep anxiety. The world will change; your lives will change; your faith will change; and your hearts will change; but I will be your anchor. The words convey: a caring stillness whispers at the heart of a cool and fluid history.

All our commentaries share a creed, a common belief in a single Being that governs existence. But tone, and tone alone, alters revelation. Jean Paul-Sartre cites a contemporary as saying that words are “loaded pistols” and notes that when we speak, we fire. Our sages suggest that the affinity between words—*devarim*, and bees—*devorim*, goes beyond the phonetic. It is a mistake of enormous proportions to imagine that tone is nothing but ornamental; it is not just the words that we say that mean.

Another first impression:

Rabbi Joshua the Priest the son of Nehemiah said, “At the moment when God revealed Himself to Moses, Moses was a novice at prophecy. God said to Himself, ‘If I reveal myself to him with a great voice I will terrify him, but to use a muted voice is offensive to prophecy.’ What did He do? He revealed Himself in the voice of his father” (*Shemot Rabbah* 3:1).

Beyond what this midrash reveals of this sage’s perspective on Moses’ paternal influence—or the relationship between sons and fathers writ large—accent, tone, tenor, timbre, and inflection are of the essence. While Heaven’s projected deliberation may appear as a mere reflection on strategy, that itself is not a cosmetic concern. This is not a question of ornamental aesthetics but a deep concern for

another's welfare as it competes with a spiritual value. It is not just the words that we say that mean.

Will a compassionate tone assuage all the questions of prejudice that press against orthodoxy—both its practitioners and its traditions? Probably not. Should we then be indifferent to our speech? Never. This would not be the first time in our history that traditional convictions seem to stand in the face of progress, and if all we can summon in the face of this tension is bluster we do a disservice to our future and our past.

I will not speak to whether I personally believe that ritual policies should be changed or whether allegorical interventions should be made, but only that wherever one stands on this spectrum of responses the tone directed to those asking the questions matters.

Our tone should voice sympathy and empathy and love, like a parent, even if we champion convictions that we hold to be sacred. Any repudiation of broad changes should not be rooted in present authority but precisely the lack of it—it should be rooted in the humility of those bearing the weight of something far greater than us; something that requires our interpretive nurturing and resists easy revisions.

If we are to inspire confidence and fidelity in an age of reigning liberty, we must attend to that whispering stillness at the heart of fluid history; we must exude the allegiance and compassion of a faith that recognizes and responds to shifting anxieties. It is not just the words that we say that mean. Beyond philosophical and theological inflections, vocalized tenor carries its own semantics—it can be worth a thousand words and is *not* cosmetic but constituent of what it means to be conscientious.

As we ask those to the right not to mistake compassion for fragility, we also ask that flippant disinterest not meet a tone truly meant.

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FAITHFUL QUOTATIONS: OF SAYING, BRINGING, AND CITING

SHLOMO ZUCKIER

I was reading a fascinating language [column](#) on the history of the most famous insult in 2017 (advisory warning: crude language), and the article inspired me to write this short language study. In the wonderful (if off-color) article, [Aviya Kushner](#) cites the following "Jewish principle":

המביא דבר בשם אומרו מביא גאולה לעולם.

One who **brings** a matter in the name of the one who said it

[originally] brings redemption to the world.

She invokes the importance of citing one's sources in context of noting which [state senator](#) had hurled the simian fecal insult under discussion.

However, if one faithfully checks the sources of this citation ([Avot 6:6](#) and [parallels](#)), the phrase, throughout all traditional Jewish texts, consistently appears as follows:

האומר דבר בשם אומרו מביא גאולה לעולם.

One who **says** a matter in the name of the one who said it [originally]

brings redemption to the world.

Note the shift in the first verb, from the original אומר to the current מביא. I had heard the מביא version used before (by a prominent scholar of Jewish Studies, no less), and decided to check if it was in contemporary common usage. Sure enough,

thousands of google results show that the phrase appears nearly as often with **המביא** as with **האומר**, and it is even featured in an online Modern Hebrew dictionary [entry](#).

With the shifting of terms demonstrated in common parlance, the question then becomes, ‘why and how did this shift happen?’ I wanted to suggest two complementary theories, one stemming from literary form and the other from modern Hebrew etymology and loan translation:

1. Literary Form: The Talmudic form of this proverb includes a string of three verbs - **מביא**, **אומר**, **אומר**, in an AAB pattern. There is a certain structure to this, as the speaker is connected to the one who formulated the statement – one “says” the statement while referring to the one who originally “said” it. However, shifting the formulation to **מביא**, **אומר**, **מביא** creates an ABA structure, which features the relatively more attractive [inclusio](#) or envelope structure. It thus avoids the somewhat clunky repetition of **אומר**, **אומר** as presented by the *Avot* source. Given the fact that the verb **מביא** was already present at the end of the adage, there is a natural tendency to move it up front.

2. Loan Translation: Additionally, the word **מביא**, in pre-modern Hebrew, never could have been used in the context of a citation. The word **מביא** does not begin to take the meaning “to cite” until the modern period. Somewhat surprisingly, this

meaning does not appear in the Ben-Yehuda [dictionary](#) (1910), although it does appear in Hebrew literature as early as in the 1838 work [Bohen Tzaddik](#), authored by Hebrew and Yiddish author [Joseph Perl](#). The emergence of this new meaning for the phrase מביא דבר can presumably be attributed to a calque, or a novel meaning for a word on the basis of a back-translation from another language. In some European languages, the word “bring” is used in the context of citing. See this [entry](#) on the Yiddish word ברענגען or אראפברענגאן, meaning “to bring” or “to bring down,” which likely influenced the Hebrew language to develop this calque, expanding the semantic field of מביא to include citation. Just like the expression “bring down” emerges with the citation meaning in [Jewish English](#) (and [Yeshivish](#)) from the Yiddish, the phrase מביא דבר becomes viable in Modern Hebrew from the same source. Once מביא begins to mean “to cite,” the Modern Hebrew “modified” version of the rabbinic source becomes viable, and maybe even preferable, given the literary concerns above. Or, in other words: Authors mis-citing citations on authors citing authors. What gives? Yiddish.

To summarize: We should be sure to not only cite quotations with attribution, but also that the citation be accurate. But when it’s not, we have the holy, even redemptive calling of investigating the origins of the newfound version.

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