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The Pedagogical Influence of Nehama Leibowitz

Anat Marciano Toledano

A Thesis

In

The Department

Of

Religion

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada**

March 2002

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ABSTRACT**The Pedagogical Influence of Nehama Leibowitz****Anat Marciano Toledano**

This study is an analysis of the pedagogic teaching style of a leading Bible teacher and scholar: Nehama Leibowitz. Recognized as being one of Israel's best Bible teachers, she has presented a new dimension to Bible study through her teachings and publications. Some of the most important elements contributing to her influence according to this research are: the pedagogical methodology that she used both inside and outside her classes, her contribution to Jewish education in the context of other changes in education, and finally her influence on some her former students as well as the community of Montreal.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere thanks to my advisor, teacher and mentor who has guided me graciously through every stage of this dissertation.

To my husband Michel,
And children Daniel, Aaron and Natanel.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the past century, many Biblical scholars, commentators and teachers have enlightened and enriched the study of the Bible, through various analyses and exposures to the text. Although many of these scholars have contributed to Biblical study in different ways, the focus of this dissertation will be on a popular and renowned Bible teacher and commentator: Nehama Leibowitz. Her pedagogic style, and didactic skills will be analyzed in light of her ability to translate classical Jewish exegesis into the language of modern generations, thereby transforming Bible study into an intellectual, emotional, and moral challenge.

Based on the research of several scholars who have studied her pedagogic approach such as Dr. Marla Frankel and Rabbi Stanley Peerless, her methodology and teaching approach will be analyzed in this dissertation. Furthermore, her influence on Jewish education will be viewed in the context of other changes, which occurred in the field of Jewish education. Finally, Nehama Leibowitz's influence on the Jewish community of Montreal will be assessed in light of the e the learning experience of some of her former students living in Montreal and working in the Jewish education field.

Nehama Leibowitz acquired the reputation of being one of Israel's best Bible teachers. She developed her own teaching method in the study of the Bible by incorporating different interpretations which she used not only as a means to bridge the gap between secular and traditional views of Judaism, but furthermore, she attempted to convey knowledge by providing the opportunity for the student to think and understand. Nehama Leibowitz was one of the first pioneer teachers who contributed to major changes in the way the Bible was being taught in Israel. In the context of this situation, the work of Nehama Leibowitz slowly started to stand out, and served as an important

tool to bridge the gap between traditional Judaism and non-traditional Jews especially in Israel.

As professor Auerbach writes:

“In circles which had distanced themselves from Torah study, Nehama Leibowitz” has restored the study of the Torah to its former glory.”¹

Nehama Leibowitz showed her students how to ask questions that opened their minds to the deeper meaning of the text. Any class she taught, whether small or large, was always the scene of a lively dialogue.

The focus of this dissertation will be on the analysis of some of the factors and pedagogical tools, which contributed to her popularity and distinction as an outstanding Bible teacher. She believed that in general people do not remember the content of what they have learned, therefore, they should be taught how to find knowledge for themselves. She implemented this for the most part using Biblical passages and different Biblical interpretations.

Nehama Leibowitz was born in Riga, Latvia on the 3rd September 1905. Her mother, Freydl, died while she was still a child. Her father, Mordechai Leibowitz, was a strict parent who cared deeply about books, learning, and the education of his two children. In 1919, Leibowitz’s father brought her to Berlin, which was a great center of intellectual life. There, she studied in the Universities of Berlin and Marburg, with an emphasis on German language and literature. In 1930 she received a doctorate from the University of Marbourg, for her work on “Techniques of Judeo-German Bible translation in the 15th and 16th century as exemplified by translations of the Book of Psalms”.

¹ Y.Amit “Some Thoughts on the Works and Methods of Nehama Leibowitz”, in Immanuel p.9

Upon her arrival in Israel in 1930, until 1955, she taught the methodology of teaching Hebrew in the Mizrahi Teacher's Seminary. In addition, she lectured widely, and was one of the regular Bible commentators on Israeli radio. Starting in 1957, she was a lecturer in Bible at the University of Tel Aviv and in 1968, was appointed Professor. She taught in programs specializing in training teachers from abroad, in teacher training institutes of Yeshivot Hesder, in the Open University, and in the Touro branch in Jerusalem.

Between 1954 and 1961, she published *Studies in Parashat Hashavua* (a commentary of the weekly Torah portion), which were published on leaflets and distributed in various learning institutions. Subsequently, these were printed in a book format and arranged according to the five books of the Pentateuch. These volumes were later translated to Dutch, French, English and Spanish and were used as a common resource for teachers, scholars, and students learning Torah. In addition, Nehama Leibowitz published numerous articles on Bible research and instruction. Available through the publications of Eliner Library, the Joint Authority of Jewish Zionist Education, and the Jewish Agency, several publications by Nehama Leibowitz are still widely available: "The Study of Torah Commentaries and Methods for Teaching Them", Studies in the five books of the Pentateuch "Book of Genesis", "Book of Leviticus", "Book of Exodus", "Book of Numbers" and the "Book of Deuteronomy", "*Gilyonot* for the Study of the Book of Jeremiah, Chapters of Consolation and Redemption" (with Meir Weiss), "Torah Insights" (a collection of articles), "Rashi's Commentary of the Torah: Studies in His Methodology" (with Moses Arens), published as a course text for the open University in Israel, Ramat Aviv.

Nehama Leibowitz's education combined universal and humanistic tenets with the principles of Judaism and Jewish education. Such a combination was a result of the achievements of the *Haskalah*, on the one hand, and the Zionist movement on the other. The *Haskalah*, Hebrew word for Enlightenment, began in Western Europe in the eighteenth century. Berlin was then the center of the Jewish Enlightenment movement. Many of the writers of the *Haskalah* were the forerunners of the Jewish national revival, which took place after the Russian pogroms in the late eighteenth century. This revival, later gave rise to the Zionist movement, in the early twentieth century, which finally culminated in the establishment of the Jewish State in 1948. Being raised and educated in Berlin, Dr. Leibowitz was influenced by the changes that Jewish people and Jewish education were going through during this period.

“Unlike traditional Jewish education, which focused on Halakhic literature, the *Haskalah* saw the Bible as a bridge between Judaism and Christian culture.”²

Jewish education in Europe had gone through many changes under the influence of the Enlightenment movement. Secular education was incorporated in the Jewish curriculum, and more and more women were provided with the opportunity to get an education. When Nehama Leibowitz entered the field of serious Biblical study, it still remained a strange and uncommon choice for a woman to undertake at the time.

Nehama Leibowitz earned her doctorate and was exposed to a new interest in Bible and Hebrew, which flourished in Eastern Europe from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. During this period, Jewish secular nationalism drew a deep interest in the Bible, on Hebrew sources of the past through a secular and humanist aspect.

² Y.Amit, “Some Thoughts on the Work of Nehama Leibowitz”, Immanuel Spring 1986, p7

“The impact of the modern return to Zion, the renaissance of Hebrew, the growth of the national Bible-centered school system led to flowering of Bible study richer in perspective than a purely historical and dry as dust scholarly approach and yet making use of its findings.”³

In reaction to this emphasis on the Hebrew language in the study of Torah through a secular approach, “Orthodox” commentators went back to the written Torah through a thorough analysis of the text in order to prove its connection with Oral Tradition.

Through this new exposure to the Bible study, and the love of Zion, Leibowitz was influenced by the Orthodox Zionist ideology that existed in Germany at the time, where she set out to prove the fundamental connection between Oral Tradition and the written Biblical text.

Living in Israel enabled Leibowitz to teach the texts she loved in the land where they made most sense. Nehama was full of a newly awakened pride that was instilled in many early Zionists. She expected to see the Bible being taught through a vibrant and exciting connection to the homeland. However, in 1930, upon making Aliya, she encountered new attitudes in the land of Israel, which reflected the uncertainties of the emergent society. She encountered a society where the emphasis was on the secular realities of life, and wherein religion and traditional Jewish culture receded into the distance. The Bible was therefore interpreted in light of a humanistic approach. Bible study was a dry and mechanical activity.

“Here (in Israel) the emphasis was on the secular realities of life, which meant that religion and traditional Jewish culture receded into the distance, and the Bible was interpreted in the light of humanistic or even Marxist approaches.”⁴

³ A.Newman , *Nehama Leibowitz Studies in Bereshit*, p.xxv

⁴ Y.Amit, “Some Thoughts on the Work of and Method of Nehama Leibowitz” in *Immanuel*, p.7

Dr. Leibowitz disagreed with this way of teaching Torah as she believed that students needed the exposure to the commentators to help them explore the underlying ideas and values of the text. She also believed that learning about the different commentaries contributed to the richness of the learning experience. By learning about the different interpretations of the passages, Nehama showed her students how the great sages struggled to understand a word or a passage, and more importantly, how relevant these views were to contemporary life. At this time, the Bible was treated in Israel, as a text to be learned by mere memorization, not probed or analyzed. Centuries of commentaries written by sages of the Diaspora were no longer regarded as useful, since the Jewish people were returning to their own land. Nehama disagreed with this view as she found that the commentaries had so much wisdom to offer.

One of the major contributions that Nehama Leibowitz was famous for were the *Gilyonot*, which were sheets of study questions that she started preparing in the early 1940's. The idea of the *Gilyonot* grew out of a class that Leibowitz conducted for a small group of religious Kibbutz women in 1941. The women had come to study with her in Jerusalem for six months and wanted to find a way to continue it. She offered to teach them by mail, preparing a study sheet for each week's Torah portion. Each sheet would include selected commentaries to analyze and questions to answer. The system worked so well that it spread, and others wanted to become Leibowitz's students by correspondence. By the late 1940s Nehama Leibowitz was conducting a one-person correspondence course on Torah with unlimited enrollment, eventually reaching more than forty thousand students around the world. Students mailed back *Gilyonot* from all over Israel and from as far away as England, Morocco, the United States, and South Africa. When the answers came back to her, she read them carefully, marked them with

her red pen, and returned them to her students. What's more, she always included at least two levels of questions, the more difficult ones marked with an asterisk so that more advanced students would be adequately challenged.

Methodologically, the *Gilyonot* were based on the use of primary Jewish sources and commentaries to understand and teach Scriptures. These sources were drawn from Talmudic and Midrashic material, as well as traditional commentators, such as Rashi and other rabbinic literature of the last centuries, the ethical teachings of the *mussar* (code of ethics) movement, and contemporary Jewish philosophy. The *Gilyonot* focused on critical analysis, which guides the student to a variety of sources. In her book *Iyunim Bessefer Devarim*, Leibowitz describes the purpose of the *Gilyonot*:

“The *Gilyonot*, require a great deal of effort on the part of the student in order to arrive at an accurate reading of the Torah, its commentators and the problems with which they deal.”⁵

The *Gilyonot* were therefore based on traditional Jewish commentaries from every period and included a series of guiding questions, which the reader-student was to answer by arriving at an understanding of the Biblical text, together with the midrashim and various commentaries. In addition Dr. Leibowitz paid close attention to the literary and narrative aspects of Biblical language.

Nehama Leibowitz used her *Gilyonot* to present a text in the form of a problem and searched for diverse solutions, concluding with a clear, and often single solution. When the question was asked to Leibowitz about the *Gilyonot* and the secret of their appeal, she offered two explanations.:

⁵ Frankel, Marla in a chapter on “The Teacher in the writings of Nehama Leibowitz” in *Abiding Challenges* p.360

“First the *Gilyonot* are puzzles and people enjoy solving puzzles about how to interpret a biblical verse. Secondly, subscribers who send their answers receive personal attention.”⁶

Therefore the *Gilyonot* created a basis for an ongoing intellectual and spiritual dialogue. The distinctive approach, of formulating questions on different levels of Biblical study through correspondence, made the *Gilyonot* challenging and exciting, enabling her to challenge students from different levels and background, within the same lesson. An analysis of the methods she used both in and out of her classes will be presented in the next chapter.

The *Gilyonot* were widely used, and served as a device to encourage many people from religious and secular background to appreciate the love of learning Torah. Another aspect which contributed to Nehama Leibowitz ‘ popularity was her unique personal teaching style. In all her writings, Nehama Leibowitz rarely addresses the teaching approach that she uses, but rather, focuses more on the actual study of the text. However, Marla Frankel has found embedded in her writings, indications as to how Nehama Leibowitz thinks the ideal teacher should function. According to Frankel, three of the main components which provide an overview of Dr. Leibowitz’s unique style of teaching, are: her flexibility, her pluralistic view, and her devotion to her students. These three important aspects of her teaching style help create the impetus for the pedagogic approach that she used in her classrooms, which will be described in the next chapter.

The first element, according to Frankel, which contributes to Nehama Leibowitz’s unique style of teaching, is her flexibility. In order to develop a flexible teaching

⁶ W.Z Harvey, “Professor Nehama Leibowitz: Israel’s Teacher of Teachers” *Canadian Zionist*, April/May 1981, p.11

approach, a teacher has to acquire two divergent roles: that of the facilitator, challenging all the different levels of her students, and that of the pedagogue, who gives answers over a discourse.

“Because the activities of the teacher in this setting focus on guiding the student through a maze of sources, we have entitled him “facilitator”. The other learner is confronted by the teacher who presents a type of explication: a discourse which begins with an exegetical problem, proceeds with diverse solutions and concludes with a clear resolution. In this setting the teacher will be called “pedagogue.”⁷

One of the roles of the facilitator, according to Frankel, is to generate engagement and involvement on the part of the students.

In order to accomplish the task of having interested and involved students in her class she often told stories.

“When Nehama taught Torah, she was always telling a story. She was the “narrator” par excellence, knowing how to create a dialogue between the text and the student.”⁸

Leibowitz used the stories as a memory and searching device which helps students discover on their own. She believed that by using the tools that she has provided her students with, and helping them discovering theories on their own, students have better chances of remembering what they have learned.

The second aspect of the flexible role of a teacher is the pedagogue. The “pedagogue” in Leibowitz’s writings personifies the problem solver.

“His discourse is one of “questions and answers”. He presents a problem in the text and solves it with the help of diverse sources drawn from the subject matter.”⁹

⁷ M.Frankel, in *Abiding Challenges* p.361

⁸ J.Rochwarger in “Words on Fire: Then and Now, In Memory of Nehama Leibowitz”, p.62

⁹ M.Frankel, in a chapter on “The Teacher in the writings of Nehama Leibowitz,” *Abiding Challenges*, p.361

When the “pedagogue” concludes his discourse with questions for the students to think about, the reader or student is encouraged to be an active and independent “problem solver”, these questions set limits to the “pedagogue’s” authority as sole interpreter and therefore provide the flexible approach attributed by Frankel to Nehama Leibowitz. The methods that Nehama Leibowitz created consisted of giving a set of typical “why” questions to her students, ones that required critical analytical thinking about the text. She then collected their papers, read out the answers and proceeded with her lesson according to the answers her students had given her

Apart from the different aspects within her flexible role as a teacher, her unique teaching style was also characterized by a pluralistic approach that she adopted in teaching Torah. This pluralistic approach is often characterized by the various religious and secular interpretations, which she brings into a text. A study of the *Gilyonot* reveals citations from the Mishnah, Midrash, Maimonides, the exegetes of France, Spain Provence, and Italy, Mendelssohn, Luzzato, Buber, Kook, Shakespeare, Gandhi, Steinbeck, and many more.

In a society filled with students and teachers of Bible, how can one person have had such a singular impact? Renowned scholar, Moshe Sokolow, states that Nehama focused on the aspect that students should learn Torah from all angles, and several Biblical interpretations, and understand how these interpretations apply to their daily lives.

“Erudition has existed before and since, but the panoply of pedagogical devices which she invented or refined was uniquely, and characteristically hers. If Torah teachers, worldwide, have trained their students to ask rhetorically”mah kashah leRashi?”, it is due to her fastidious attention to that exegete’s methodology. If a tried and true tactic of Torah teaching is to have students divide the Torah into its components parts, or to compare

versions of the same verse or event, it is because she introduced these “tricks” as stimulants to what today, we call “active learning”¹⁰.

Moshe Sokolow also refers to a pedagogical teaching style she has refined, by introducing aspects of the Torah, which were not common at the time. Although some Biblical scholars such as Maimonides had introduced secular philosophy into Torah texts, Nehama Leibowitz, relying on this approach, has refined this pedagogical device by using modern secular philosophers and thinkers that students could relate to, and therefore, made the Biblical passage being portrayed in a way that is relevant to modern times.

Nehama Leibowitz’s pluralistic approach is also demonstrated in the sources that she used in her Gilyonot. The questions often directed the students to see the biblical text from different perspectives.

“The Bible as our Rabbis taught has 70 faces, and Nehama’s questions direct the student to see the biblical text in different perspectives, and to appreciate the beauty of many different “faces” of the text. Such questions also lead the student to appreciate the wonderful pluralism of the Jewish tradition in the commentary.”¹¹

For Nehama Leibowitz, questions could openly concern the well-known medieval Bible commentators such as Rashi, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, and Nahmanides, but also the Talmudic midrashic masters, philosophers such as Maimonides, Abraham Isaac Kook, Franz Rosenzweig, and Martin Buber.

Nehama often asked students to write their answers down before discussing them in class, which served as a break for the lesson so it would not be exclusively frontal, and more importantly, to transfer the responsibility for the education from the teacher to the

¹⁰ M. Sokolow “Nehama Leibowitz: The Complete Didact” Jerusalem Report, May '97 p.15

¹¹ W.Z Harvey in Canadian Zionist, April 1981, p.11

pupil. In his comprehensive attempt to analyze Nehama Leibowitz's method, Moshe Arens points out three basic themes, which keep recurring in portraying the image of the kind of teacher Nehama Leibowitz was:

“(1)Entertaining actualization, which tempts students to take interest in the subject matter by showing its relevance. (2)rigorous adherence to the text: this serves as a sort of boundary to the theme , (3)selected exegesis, with a preference to the traditional commentators.”¹²

Most of the exegesis presented by Leibowitz comes from Jewish commentaries through the different eras: from classical rabbinic sages and commentators. According to Arens, three themes, often recurring in Nehama Leibowitz's teachings are: the choice of her sources, the highlight of new aspects in familiar sources, and rigorous adherence to the text. She frequently selects from subject matters that are appropriate to the student, those that challenge him/her intellectually, and are unlikely to be familiar to him. Secondly, we see in Leibowitz's teaching approach, the highlight of new aspects in sources that are familiar to the student, with the eventual integration of questions which builds on the students existing knowledge. Finally, the rigorous adherence to the text that she uses often elucidates that which is unique in each opinion. A discussion of the strengths and weakness of theses different interpretations further helps develop the critical thinking needed in understanding a Biblical text.

The secular philosophies that Nehama incorporated into Torah lessons is another aspect which demonstrates her pluralistic approach:

“This method which has elicited the approval of enlightened , critical scholars in her close reading of the text, reflecting the influence of the aesthetic approach of Buber and Rosenzweig in the Bible.”

¹² M.Arens, Scripture demands Study”(Heb) Bi-sedeh Hemed 1986, p.30.1

Her faithfulness to the principle of close reading has made Nehama Leibowitz a pioneer in the literary approach to biblical interpretation. With this approach, she has demonstrated the extent to which the literature of the Bible represents artistic creativity of unique distinction.

Through an inclusive approach to Torah study Nehama conveyed to her students an impression of wholeness. Although many subjects were of genuine interest to her, she integrated them into the central aspect of Torah study. Many of the passages she chose therefore represent her Zionist views, which played an important role in her life.

“Her religious-Zionism, which she exemplifies in all she does, is a statement of the degree to which Jewish living must take place in the everyday common world of land and nation. Actually, her idealism and devotion makes that common world look rather uncommon”¹³

As a teacher, Nehama combined her pedagogical skills and knowledge of Tanach and commentaries with a deeply felt affection for people and an unwavering love of Zion, demonstrating to her students the sources of Zionism and the love of people through the Torah.

The third element, according to Dr. Frankel, which contributes to one of the founding elements in Nehama Leibowitz' 's unique teaching style is her devotion. Nehama devoted herself to teaching, and students, rather than pure scholarship.

“In her long career, Nehama was one of the greatest *Marbetsei Torah* (spreaders of Torah) of our generation. However more than simply spreading facts and ideas, she influenced three and four generations of teachers throughout the world”¹⁴

¹³ R. Salomon, “Nehama Leibowitz Scholar and Teacher” in *Kol Emunah*, Spring 1987 p.16

¹⁴ N. Helfgot, “A Year Later: Remembering Nehama Leibowitz ZL” in *Canadian Jewish News*, April 2, 1998 p.9

She thus transformed the study of the Bible and commentaries for hundreds of thousands of Jews and especially for the entire educational world for both secular and modern Orthodoxy in Israel and the entire Diaspora. Through her devotion to teaching, her dedication to answer the questions of students all across the world for many years through the Gilyonot, she focused on the goal of increasing the love of Torah and demonstrating the importance of commentaries in the torah.

Nehama Leibowitz's devotion to teaching also conveyed the message to her students that Torah study could be both serious and fun. She tried to establish a connection with her students.

“There is nothing pedantic about her work in the classroom. She looked at her students attentively, she remembered things about them over long periods of time, she had something personal to say here and there”¹⁵

Nehama Leibowitz enjoyed a more personal relationship with her students, bringing the text to life by placing the person within the context of the story, the time, the period, and the historical circumstances. Nehama exemplified a person whose worldview was characterized by the use of Torah as a lens for contemplating and understanding the world, and she taught others how to utilize and interpret the Torah to this end.

Although Nehama Leibowitz's introduced many innovative and challenging teaching styles in the study of Torah, some teachers would disagree with some of her approaches. Her classroom was a in many ways the antithesis of the contemporary educational atmosphere, and of the pluralistic values that lie behind it. If another teacher today asserted him or herself to the extent that Nehama did , he/she might be labeled “authoritarian”:

¹⁵ A.Bonchek “Professor Nechama Teacher of Israel”, in Jewish Action, Fall 1993, p 23

“Nehama did not wait until students raised their hands but would rather direct a question at someone sitting in the class.”¹⁶

According to Professor Martin Locksin, former student of Nehama, although she was an educator par excellence, there also existed in her teaching method a limiting aspect in which her approach could be perceived as intimidating to students. By asking students to answer a question at a time where he/she was not expecting it, she created a situation where a student felt intimidated and therefore unable to think freely to answer her questions. Although many of her students enjoyed the kind of challenge that her classes offered, others found Nehama Leibowitz’s pedagogical outlook and methods very demanding on the recipients. The precision of answers that she required, could therefore be represented by some as a contradiction to her pluralistic view of learning about different interpretations, by expecting students to provide only one solution as a possible answer to her question. Nonetheless, Nehama Leibowitz’s work has not escaped official notice. In 1956 she received the Israel Prize for Adult Education. In 1980, she received the Liebman Prize for the Dissemination of knowledge of Torah ,and in 1982 the City of Tel Aviv awarded her the Bialik Prize in Judaica for her lifelong work in biblical exegesis.

Apart from being recognized for her outstanding teaching abilities, Nehama has also set a precedent in providing an ideal for the high level of learning that men and women can achieve.

“Many are the women seriously studying Torah throughout the country, who look upon Nehama as their mentor. Surely some of the growing thirst of women for Jewish learning can be attributed to her endeavors.”¹⁷

¹⁶ M.Locksin, former student of Nehama Leibowitz, in an interview.

¹⁷ R.Salmon, “Nehama Leibowitz Scholar and Teacher“in Kol Emunah Spring 1987 p.19

Her contribution can therefore be seen not only in the women that she has inspired but also in the distinction that she emphasized between knowing and understanding.

Nehama Leibowitz also helped in acquiring the respect of a female scholar and in providing women with the opportunity to acquire Orthodox rabbinic recognition.

“Nehama Leibowitz is the most astounding living Israeli rabbi”, a well-known Israeli scholar wrote in 1965. This may sound like an outrageous statement to make in a country where the ordination of women rabbis was, and remains, unacceptable to the religious establishment. ¹⁸

This statement portrays the strong influence that she instilled in the people around her and the fact that she was recognized by many as a great rabbi in a country where the ordination of women rabbis was not recognized by religious establishments. Rabbi in Hebrew means “our teacher”, and many agree that she deserves this title. This statement therefore demonstrates the impact of her influence in a society filled with students and teachers of Bible. Her unique teaching style and wealth of knowledge made her stand out amongst the numerous rabbis and Hebrew teachers. Furthermore, in her efforts to understand the deeper meanings of Torah and to share them with her students, she set a precedent for Jewish students, scholars and teachers as serious students and teachers of Judaism. Leibowitz’s amazing breadth of knowledge in the field of Jewish education, as well as her clear, and logical analyses, contribute to her deep understanding of both the Biblical text and the commentary itself.

Nehama Leibowitz passed away in Jerusalem on the 5th of Nissan 5757 (1997). Many scholars and teachers dedicated articles and books in her honor. Some of the research and insight that will be introduced in this dissertation will rely on scholars such

¹⁸ S.Segal, in Women Of Valor, P.102

as Dr. Marla Frankel, Rabbi Stanley Peerless, Moshe Sokolow, and Howard Deitcher who have all published material about Nehama Leibowitz's pedagogic style. Her influence on students and teachers, as well as the popularization of Torah study through her *Gilyonot* was kept alive through the contribution of the "Jewish Agency". Her weekly Torah portions could be read on this site, as well as questions on the weekly portion which are answered by readers and are corrected and returned in the format that Nehama Leibowitz used. Torah Community Connections still perpetuates the importance of her influence by offering some of her *Gilyonot* and providing the opportunity for users to learn through her methods and get some feedback on their answers.

"We have chosen Gilyonot which contain material which is different from that published in her books, and we have the supplementary Study Guide ("Alon Hadrakha") which Nehama wrote to accompany those particular Gilyonot."¹⁹

The Study guides mentioned in this quote by Yitzhak Reiner, director of the Department for Seminars and Advanced courses in Jewish Agency, contain material that helps the participant delve more deeply into the subject of the Gilyonot, or adds further commentary to elucidate a certain approach. Apart from her Gilyonot, which were kept alive, her books are also still widely used by students, teachers and scholars, and have been translated into many languages since the time of her death.

Nehama Leibowitz supported the notion that knowledge limits the person to what he has learned, whereas understanding requires thinking. Teaching students how to understand and think was therefore her main teaching goal and one in which she has created a great amount of influence on both men and women. Through her teachings,

¹⁹ Y. Reiner, "Nehama Leibowitz A Biography" in the Website of Torah and Community Connections, www.torahcc.org/nechama.bio.htm

Nehama Leibowitz popularized the skills she used in her teaching style, transmitting the narrating voice to the next generation. Her passion for Torah and the Jewish people has lead her to a variety of settings in her seven decades of teaching. She has taught all over Israel at army bases, community centers, village schools, kibbutz dining halls, youth group meetings, religious institutions and universities.

The portrait of the teacher emerging from Leibowitz's writings is one of a person who encourages his/her students to think on their own, and who is prepared to teach and learn alongside his/her students as partners. Since Leibowitz did not address her teachings and publications to Orthodox education only, her teaching style can be implemented and adapted in many instructional contexts, using the three fundamental aspects of her teaching style: flexibility of the teacher, pluralistic view of the text, and devotion to students. The following chapter will focus on an analysis of some of the pedagogical methods, types of texts, and approaches that Nehama Leibowitz used both in and outside her classroom, while basing her pedagogic teaching style on the three important elements mentioned above. These three fundamental characteristics of a teacher along with the important pedagogical tools of the methodology she uses, have helped contribute to the influence she had, and her recognition as a Master Teacher and scholar.

CHAPTER II
METHODOLOGY
OF NEHAMA LEIBOWITZ'S TEACHING STYLE

This chapter will focus on some of the aspects that contributed to Nehama Leibowitz's great influence on her students, both directly and indirectly. Leibowitz's influence extended over a wide variety of educational systems, encompassing many lessons and lectures, books and articles. The pedagogic approach that she spread was based on clear principles and was designed to draw the reader into an active encounter with the Biblical text. The pedagogic style of Dr. Leibowitz will be analyzed in light of Marla Frankel's analysis of the four components that contribute to Nehama's teaching style, which can be found in her dissertation²⁰. Furthermore, the methodology will be analyzed according to the research of Rabbi Stanley Peerless,²¹. Finally, the pedagogical tools that are portrayed by both Frankel and Peerless will be linked to the important influence that Leibowitz has had on thousands of students around the world.

Nehama Leibowitz's teaching method comprised first and foremost the of setting goals for herself as a teacher and for her students. In her lessons, lectures and studies, she tried to achieve at least three goals: to impart knowledge, to give students the skills for conducting independent analysis, and finally to transmit the love of Torah. In order to achieve these goals she developed specific methods that helped her target the different levels of knowledge that students had in her class. Consequently she tried to find the right tools to challenge all the students that were part of her classes. According to Marla Frankel, Nehama Leibowitz's teaching and writing could be analyzed in light of four common themes: the subject, the student, the teacher, and the environment.

²⁰ M. Frankel. "A Clarification of Nehama Leibowitz's Approach to the Study of the Bible", p.iii-ix.

²¹ S.Peerless, unpublished book on the methodology of Nehama Leibowitz's teaching style, p.11.

A: Subject matter

The types of texts, and commentaries that Nehama Leibowitz selected for instruction generally fell into several categories:

1. Texts that allow for comparison with other Biblical sections, therefore providing the opportunity for students to engage in an internal textual analysis.
2. Sections which contain textual difficulties, which provide the starting point for Biblical commentary.
3. Sections that exhibit unique literary style, reflecting unique formats that can contain additional layers of meaning.
4. Commentaries that help to better understand the text.

The subject matter, or text, as reflected in Leibowitz's writings, is comprised of a rich selection of sources that include: the Bible itself, Jewish commentaries throughout the ages, modern biblical research and Jewish and general literary and philosophical works. In the study of the Bible, a distinction is often made between two components of subject matter. The first component is the "text" *pshat*, and the second being the "commentary" *drash*. According to Frankel, the texts that Nehama Leibowitz often chose represent the authority of the divine Scripture. By distinguishing between the different messages, lessons, and morals that can be derived distinctively from the *pshat* and the *drash*, Nehama Leibowitz, tried to use an analysis of the text, which represents ethics that are focused both on the implicit and explicit aspects of religion. According to Michael Rosenak, the *pshat*, representing "explicit religion" often characterizes life in relation to community, while the commentary, *midrash*, symbolizes human individual attributes known as "implicit religion".

"In explicit religion we come into contact with God when we do His will. It is when we become conscious of a unique significance that is in us, in

moments, and in events that is perceived in the relations between persons.”²²

Leibowitz consequently chose passages that reflected the two religious aspects cited in the above quote by Rosenak. An example of a text that demonstrates explicit religion is the passage from Genesis which focuses on the sacrifice of Isaac. This passage demonstrates the strength and power of God where He has an active role in the story. In the story of Joseph and his brothers, on the other hand, we see an example of implicit religion, as God does not reveal Himself to Joseph, as he does to Abraham, but rather fortifies him with an inner strength. Nehama Leibowitz uses two different passages to demonstrate how God has the power to create an inner and outer strength within a person.

According to Frankel’s analysis of Nehama Leibowitz’s teaching style, Leibowitz provided an opportunity for the learner to choose between implicit and explicit religiosity by selecting texts that demonstrated the two important aspects of religion.

“Explicit religion concerns itself with what we believe and practice as faithful adherents to a specific religious community, as members of a religious congregation. Implicit religion concerns itself with existential encounters which originate in reflection and hope for salvation. It does not arise from the absolute divine demand but from human hopes and fears in perceiving the divine presence.”²³

In choosing texts that reflected both the implicit and explicit aspects of religion, Leibowitz wanted to portray the relevance of the biblical text to modern life. She believed that in highlighting the link between implicit and explicit religion, her students would understand and relate the text to the world that they live in. Ultimately, she would use the text to encourage her students to cultivate a responsible interpretation to different

²² M.Rosenak, “Commandments and Concerns”,p.113.

²³ Ibid p.112

Biblical passages. Leibowitz used this very important tool of selection of texts to achieve her goal of helping students use the biblical text as a source for personal reflection, and as a means to influence their everyday behavior.

B. The Student

The second important component in Nehama Leibowitz's teachings, according to Frankel is the student. The student is directly related to the first component, the text, as it is the choice of Biblical passages and characters that can lead the student in an active search for meaning, and can create a personal involvement with the text. Many of Nehama Leibowitz's writings consist of interpretations of Biblical texts presented in a curricular form, as according to Leibowitz, the primary educational context for a student is the family and close community. The inner feelings of a person reflect and influence the meaning that we attribute to a text.

“In reality, a person's inner world is concealed from the eyes of others. The inner feelings of a person are a world in itself. He who wishes to penetrate into it must do so by interpretation of the outer signs, such as bodily gestures, facial expressions, and what is said in the voice. We do not have a narrator who develops the character. He is capable of exposing the character's inwardness in an equivocal way, with no need for interpretation by the reader. For this there are other means. The teacher can summarize matters authoritatively, indicate the character's thoughts in a verbal fashion, or achieve a blend of the character's voice in his own voice.²⁴

It is, thus important for the teacher to be selective in the use of commentaries based on their relationship to the understanding of the text and the goals of the lesson. In selecting the texts that contain different midrashic interpretations, and thereby introducing challenging questions, the teacher facilitates the student to ask questions that

²⁴ F. Pollak, “Hasipur Bamikra” (Hebrew), p.30-32

will guide him/her to connect the commentary to the text and to their personal experiences. In considering the struggles and hardships that the Biblical passages represent, the student becomes directly involved in interpreting the issues that are dealt with. Consequently, the student becomes an active reader of the biblical text, engaged in an encounter with those same problems, challenges, and frustrations that are experienced in the text. Pollack, in his book "Hasipur Bamikra", emphasizes the importance of understanding the different kind of students that exist in a classroom by distinguishing between direct means and indirect means in the portrayal of Biblical persons. Character portrayal in the Bible often does not openly present the feelings, thoughts and actions of the biblical characters but instead imparts to the reader subtle indications, and require that the reader be active as an interpreter

Through the importance of the selection of the texts, as well as the guidance of the student through a path of discoveries, Leibowitz emphasizes the importance of understanding the different kind of pupils that exist in a classroom. According to Nehama, the teacher should be able to discern between different types of students and develop ways to encourage and stimulate students from different levels and backgrounds. In the role of the student, Frankel distinguishes between two categories of pupils: the reader, who passively absorbs discussions, and the student who struggles to answer challenging questions. After distinguishing between these two kinds of students, the challenge for the teacher remains to find ways to stimulate, challenge and motivate these two types of students in the same class.

C. The Teacher

Using Nehama Leibowitz's writings as a primary source, Frankel distinguishes between two important roles of a teacher, that of facilitator and that of pedagogue. In order to

examine the portrait of the teacher in Leibowitz's main writings, i.e. "Gilyonot Leinuy Be'parashat Hashavua", we will assume that Leibowitz herself embodied the teacher that she is portraying in her writings. In looking at Nehama Leibowitz's nature of questions and her answers, her choice of sources, what she articulates explicitly and what she prefers to reveal implicitly, we can identify the important roles that a teacher should acquire.

"In Leibowitz's writings, we find the "facilitator" who teaches experienced students maintaining the students involvement in the exegetical process. His role is to generate engagement. The "pedagogue" who teaches readers has the role of initiating the learner into the community of Limud Torah."²⁵

According to Frankel, in order to achieve the flexibility that a teacher must possess, he/she should first acquire the role of facilitator, which includes offering a wide range of sources for the student without offering solutions to the problem raised. Secondly, the teacher should also adjust to the needs of the passive student who absorbs information, by adapting the role of pedagogue and presenting a problem in the form of a discourse, proceeding with diverse solutions and concluding with a clear cut resolution.

In acquiring the role of facilitator, the teacher focuses on the learning process and the vehicles that help a student acquire an answer, rather than the answer itself. In addition to their extensive knowledge, teachers should also possess didactic skills. As mentioned before, an important aspect in the role of facilitator is the selection of sources from passages, which are appropriate to students, challenging him/her intellectually. In order to select these texts the teacher has to acquire a great amount of knowledge, which will enable him/her to make a selection, which is at the appropriate level his/her students.

²⁵ M. Frankel in "Abiding Challenges" p.369

“Teaching is in fact a learned profession. The teacher is a member of a scholarly community. He or she must understand the forms of subject matter, the principles of organizational conception, and the principles of inquiry which aid in answering the questions in his field.”²⁶

In other words, the facilitator should have strong intellectual capabilities as he/she should select the subject matter that he/she will present to the students, and assure that the students are challenged and stimulated.

The second important role for a teacher is one of the pedagogue. The role of the pedagogue exemplifies a teacher who offers a discourse of questions and answers which represent a problem in the text and tries to solve it with the help of diverse sources drawn from the subject matter.

“When the pedagogue concludes his discourse with questions for further study, the student who passively absorbs information is encouraged to become an active and independent problem solver.”²⁷

The pedagogue therefore has the role of initiating different types of learners, passive and active, through the right choice of questions, into the task of learning Torah. The portrait of the teacher emerging from Leibowitz’s writings is one who encourages independent learners through the role of facilitator and pedagogue, and who is prepared to teach and learn alongside his /her students

D:Environment

The environment that a student comes from bears as much importance in a classroom as the text, the student, or the teacher. Through Leibowitz’s writings about the methodology of her teaching style, two types of environments that affect the learning of students can be

²⁶ L.Shulman, “Knowledge and Teaching”, Vol 57, No1 (February 1987), p. 12.

²⁷ M.Frankel, “Abiding challenges” P.361

distinguished: the social and cultural. Nehama Leibowitz considered the cultural environment of a person as one which originated from generations of values and therefore influences a student's understanding of a text. As for the social environment of a student, Leibowitz considered to be constantly changing in light of moral, religious, societal changes.

“Regarding the cultural environment, her attitude is one of critical independence rooted in Jewish values. Regarding the social environment. Leibowitz’s discussions of social, moral and religious issues point towards social reform.”²⁸

Dr. Leibowitz considered the cultural environment of a person as one that has been formulated through the dialogue between Bible and rabbinic sources, and originated from Jewish values. As for the social environment of a person, Leibowitz considered it constantly changing in light of moral, religious issues and societal aspects. Therefore, she taught a Biblical text in a way that all her students could see the relevance, regardless of the social, moral, or religious background.

In distinguishing between these two types of environments, Nehama Leibowitz emphasizes the importance of a “distant environment” as a context for social, moral and religious discussions. The distance that Nehama Leibowitz recommends to take from the environment of the student, protects the instructional context from becoming either political or personal, while ensuring the language of discussion remains relevant. As a way to achieve the distance from the environment of the student, the teacher, according to Leibowitz should present the opportunity for a student to study with another student who does not have the same opinion as him:

²⁸ M.Frankel, “A Clarification of Nehama Leibowitz’s Approach to the Study of the Torah”p.vii

“This approach of bringing before students differing opinions is recommended particularly in those famous places which address those eternal questions which have been asked ever since Torah Neviim have been studied.”²⁹

This method of offering differing opinions to students amongst themselves gives the opportunity to students to be challenged by someone other than the teacher. More importantly, it creates the distance that is needed, according to Leibowitz, between the student and his /her personal environment which, could serve as an obstacle in his/her social, moral, or political background.

After analyzing the four important components that are essential through the teaching method of Nehama Leibowitz, we can see that the four aspects of text, student, teacher, and environment are all interdependent of one another and necessary in achieving the teaching style used by Nehama Leibowitz. However, one of these components bears a greater weight when seen through the pedagogical aspect. The selection of the text creates the basis for the class and one in which the other three components of teacher, student and environment rely on. In her studies, Frankel concludes that Nehama Leibowitz was very consistent with several specific types of biblical texts.

Rabbi Stanley Peerless analyzed the different types of texts that are commonly used in Nehama Leibowitz’s teachings and writings. Most frequently seen in her writings, are textual comparisons which reflect four common situations in which the Torah repeats itself and comparisons can be made:

- 1) Similar events**
- 2) Similar Laws that are repeated**
- 3) Recapitulation**
- 4) A Command and its Implementation**

²⁹ M.Sokolow “Nehama Leibowitz On Teaching Tanach”, p.29.

Comparisons of texts can be presented to students in a variety of ways. The teacher can ask open-ended questions, or can direct the student to compare specific items that relate to the lesson.

“Nehama suggested that a chart be utilized for comparison of a larger section, particularly if the comparison is complex. Furthermore, the teacher can allow the students to discover discrepancies on their own, or can present them with the comparative information for analysis.”³⁰

Comparison of texts is one of the most common methods used by Leibowitz to emphasize, highlight, and analyze a text. Nehama Leibowitz would encourage students to look for changes in word usage, additions or deletions of words, and changes in order. Recognizing the importance of the text, the teacher, the student and the environment of her students, Leibowitz would often try to draw her students to the attention of these four common themes.

1) Similar events

Nehama Leibowitz often selected texts containing events that manifested significant similarities, therefore enabling the student to examine and analyze the differences that exist between them. In comparing the similarities that exist between events, Leibowitz brings an example of two events in the book of Genesis.:

“Both Avraham and Yitzchak make treaties with Avimelech at Beer Sheva. It is interesting to note, however, that Avraham brings a sacrifice after he concluded the argument, while Yitzchak brings an offering before negotiating the treaty. Also both Avraham and Yitzchak give the name Beer Sheva to the place where the covenant was made, but for different reasons.”³¹

This example portrays the different questions that can arise from a teacher to his/her

³⁰ S. Peerless, Unpublished book on Nehama Leibowitz, p.17

³¹ N. Leibowitz, *Iyunim Besefer Bereshit, Parashat Toledot*.

students as a result of the comparison of these two Biblical passages. Students might be asked how these differences reflect the relationships that Avrahm and Yitzhak had with Avimelech. Also, analyzing the different elements on the literal and symbolic aspect can draw these two texts together. In light of these similar events, the teacher can introduce many issues that enable the student to think about the difference which link or differentiate these two passages.

2. Similar Laws that are Repeated

As in the narrative sections of the Torah, one finds laws that exhibit similarities and differences. An example often seen is one of the laws governing honor and fear of parents. Nehama Leibowitz sites a very common example in which the order of mother and father is not the same:

“Honor you father and mother...” (Shemot 20:12)

“A person must fear his mother and father...” (Vayikra 19:3)

According to Leibowitz, the teacher can use the comparison of these similar laws to differentiate between honor and fear. Furthermore, Rashi indicates that the change in word order reflects the difference in the relationships that normally exist between children and parents. In looking at similar laws that are repeated in different Biblical passages, the teacher draws the attention of the student to the meticulous details, such as the omission of words or the concept of before and after, that they should look for when studying Torah.

“Here the mother is placed before the father because it is revealed before Him (G-d) that the child fears his father more than his mother, and in the case of honor the father is placed before the mother because it is revealed before Him that the child honors his mother more than his father because she appeases him with words.”³²

³² Ben Yeshayahou & Sharpman Translation of “The Pentateuch and Rashi’s Commentary”, Leviticus 19:3

Although many students may not agree with Rashi's interpretation of these two laws written in different places, Biblical passages such as these are the tools that are used to develop a critical mind in a student, where he/she does not have to agree with everything that is written and think of other possibilities that could justify these differences.

Leibowitz uses such passages of comparison to get a student to draw his own conclusions before he/she refers back to the text, ultimately enabling the student to agree or disagree with different commentators.

3) Recapitulations

The repetition in the Torah often takes place through recapitulations, the description of an event that was previously described, or the transmission of information received by one individual to a third party. An example of a recapitulation is the dream of Pharaoh that is described in the Torah and is retold by Pharaoh in his discussion with Joseph. In bringing on passages that are told and then recapitulated Nehama Leibowitz introduces her students to the different approaches of the commentators regarding changes that are found in these recapitulations. The students get the opportunity to be familiar with two schools of thought: one who does not attribute significance to such changes, this is expressed in the commentary of Radak on the verse 41:17:

“We have already written that a person changes things by adding, subtracting, or changing words, and is only careful that it expresses the same idea-and so it was the telling of this dream”³³

The other school of thought, represented by Rashi, and Samson Raphael Hirsch, do attribute significance to changes in the recapitulation of a passage, claiming that otherwise, the Torah would not have unnecessarily repeated a passage.

³³ S.Peerless, according to the analysis of Nehama Leibowitz's teaching style, unpublished book p.13.

“Because there were new things in them (repeated passages) and details that had not been clear in the first one, and for each detail there is an explanation, as will be explained.”³⁴

The discovery of differences, the speculation of possible explanations, and the comparison of the perspectives of classical commentaries are elements that, according to Leibowitz’s pedagogic approach, have the power to engage students actively in the learning process.

4) A Command and Its Implementation

This format is very similar to recapitulation. It involves the comparison of the implementation of a command to the actual command itself. An example of this is Moshe’s first visit to Pharaoh in light of the command that had been given to him by God relating their first encounter.

God’s Command: “God commanded Moshe to gather the elders of Israel together. And they shall to your voice; and you shall come, you and the elders of Israel, you and the elders of Israel, to the King of Egypt and you shall say to him: The Lord God of the Hebrews, has met with us; And now, let us go, we pray thee, three days into the journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice unto the Lord God.”³⁵

Moshe’s Implementation: “And Moshe and Aharon went and they gathered all of the elders of Israel, and Aharon spoke all of the words which the Lord had spoken to Moshe and did signs and wonders in the sight of the people...”³⁶

A comparison of the texts reveals that Moshe did not initially follow the script given to him by God. In his first contact with Pharaoh, Moshe does not ask to go out of Egypt for three days, as God had instructed him. Nehama Leibowitz suggests that Moshe found himself in an unanticipated difficult situation, where he felt unable to negotiate on behalf

³⁴ Ibid P.14

³⁵ Ben Yeshayou & Sharpman Translation of “The Pentateuch and Rashi’s Commentary” Shemot 3:16, 18

³⁶ Ibid 4:29,30

of Benai Israel without the backing of the elders. He resorted, therefore, to a demand based on the backing of God's authority. Through the comparison of texts, Nehama Leibowitz enables students to analyze the details necessary to value every addition or repetition of words. This critical analysis of the text not only demonstrates the importance of studying the text in its original language, but also to acquire the precision of thought necessary in order to study the Bible.

In analyzing Nehama Leibowitz's presentation of selected Biblical passages, we can see common themes often recurring and appreciate certain characteristics of her pedagogical approach. The first important element in Leibowitz's selection of passages is the choice of the passages and her readiness to analyze these passages in depth, often posing provocative questions about Biblical characters. The second element is her readiness to challenge some of the deeds seen in the passages that she has selected and presenting an outlook of the Biblical character which the students have often not been exposed to.

"She believed that an open and candid study of the Biblical narrative will foster a sense of respect and appreciation of the text."³⁷

The third important characteristic of her pedagogical approach is her presentation of differing interpretations of the inner impulses that motivated some of the Biblical passages. The multiplicity of opinions did not always come from Nehama Leibowitz but often from the students themselves.

Dr. Marla Frankel and Rabbi Stanley Peerless have both studied in great length the lessons, articles, books and publications of Nehama Leibowitz. Both were former

³⁷ H.Deitcher, "Between Angels and Mere Mortals" P.21

students of hers and were definitely influenced by her teaching methods. However, the research that they both provide about her writings, focus mostly on her pedagogic teaching style, and the methods she used in analyzing the Biblical text in her classes. For the purpose of this dissertation, an understanding of the kind of atmosphere that belonged in Nehama Leibowitz's class will be explored through the direct contact that some of her former students have had with her. Walter Hertzberg, Alona Amsel, Carmela Aigen, Howard Klitsner, and Barbara Freedman, all former students of students of Nehama Leibowitz, provided the related information about her classes, describing the transfer of responsibility from teacher to student. Through her writings, Leibowitz emphasizes that flexibility should be part of a teacher's pedagogical approach. However, being part of her Nehama Leibowitz's class, according to these former students of hers, one felt did not feel this flexibility on her the part, by accepting only one answer as being correct.

According to Howard Klitsner, a former student of Nehama, classes were not conducted in the way that a teacher stands in front of the class with questions and answers to her students.

“One of the major teaching devices I have learned from her is that instead of the usual method whereby a student raises their hand to give the answer, here they had to write it down. She would then go down the aisles and check people's answers.”³⁸

According to Klitsner, this did not make up for the entirety of the lesson because that might become tedious, there could be ten minutes where people just worked on answers. These few minutes of quiet time, were used as a purpose for everybody to search the text and think. The answer often had to be one word, or four words, or one sentence. This

³⁸ According to oral interview with Howard Klitsner, former student of Nehama Leibowitz.

pedagogical technique forced the students to go beyond the lazy route of paraphrasing the commentary's words, and encouraged precision of thought. According to Klitsner, everyone in the class was activated by this method, where people could not hide behind the brightest students, who in a frontal class often give the teacher the false impression that everyone is following.

Another method that had its positive and negative ramifications on the student was the fact that unlike many teachers, Nehama Leibowitz used the Socratic method of teaching in her class. She did not wait until the students raised their hands but would rather direct a question at someone sitting in the class. In trying to achieve her role of pedagogue, mentioned in the first chapter, Leibowitz used this method to assure the participation of all the students in the class.

“The easier questions would always be directed at so-and so, and the more difficult ones would go to somebody else. This pattern was always going to stay the same.”³⁹

Leibowitz used this method of asking questions directly to her students as a way to determine where her students were, which would be a challenging question for them, and which would be completely unsuitable.

Nehama Leibowitz's request for a response from her students was very specific, often asking for a three-word answer and any other possibility was decisively wrong. If the answer contained five words, or was not phrased exactly in the format that she had designated, it was retuned with instructions to think it over and try again.

“As far as Nehama was concerned, it was the wrong answer even if you thought you were saying precisely what she ended up saying herself. This somewhat

³⁹According to interview with Alona Amsell, former student of Nehama Leibowitz.

inflexible method had its advantages and disadvantages, with the price for learning discipline and an important skill being paid in freedom of thought.”⁴⁰

This method forced the student to learn her methodology and encouraged the student to think the way she did. After a certain amount of time in her class most students got familiar with her method and knew what was expected of them when answering a question. However, for some students it sometimes was exasperating to have to force what he/she was certain was the right answer into exactly the right word quota and phraseology.

Nehama Leibowitz believed that people forget most of what they are taught. The only thing that remains when a person studies, according to her, is the thought process and the devise which help achieve the strategy by which students learn to discover themselves. By teaching students strategy for learning, it enables them to remember the tools to discover an answer rather than the answer itself. By discovering the answer themselves, students also have more chances of remembering it.

“Passivity during class weakens the muscles, weakens spiritual abilities which are given no opportunity to exercise, and pulls the blanket of sleep over the child. So pedagogues using Nehama Leibowitz’s teaching style, demand independent work by the student in lieu of the teacher’s work; discussions, analysis, and questions on the student’s part rather than the teacher’s lecture to paralyze the student.”⁴¹

As stated by Moshe Sokolow in “ A Teacher’s Guide to Teaching Tanach”, through the methods of Nehama Leibowitz, by having to discover answers, students discover important skills, namely the first way of looking at a text might not be the only way to understand it.

⁴⁰ According to interview with David Ben-Meir, former student of Leibowitz.

⁴¹ M.Sokolow, “Nehama Leibowitz on Teaching Tanach”, p.14

In looking at some of the analysis reported by Frankel, Peerless, and former students of Nehama Leibowitz, the text, the student, the teacher, and the environment all contribute to the important factors that contribute to effective teaching in a classroom, according to the teaching methods of Nehama Leibowitz. Furthermore, the importance of the selection of the text bears an even greater importance, as it serves as the vehicle which allows the teacher to demonstrate the similarities, differences, and recurrence of events in the Bible.

Through the personal experiences of Nehama Leibowitz's former students, the positive and negatives aspects of her approach as well as the kind of atmosphere that was encountered in her class is reflected. Although the common response by her students was one where they felt challenged and learned to develop a precision of thought, the student's perspective reflected the image of a teacher who was not flexible in the answer that she expected from them. Through the teachings and writings of Nehama Leibowitz, the concept of flexibility is emphasized in the different kind of commentaries that should be available to the students. However, through the personal experience of her teaching, it is clear that this flexibility was not attributed to all aspects of her pedagogic teaching style.

Nehama Leibowitz made a critical contribution to the study and understanding of Biblical texts. In her conscious attempt to highlight the Biblical character's strengths and weaknesses, Nehama launched an educational project that was rich in religious, philosophical, and moral challenges. Her approach repeatedly emphasized the contradictions, conflicts, controversies, and tensions that confronted the Biblical heroes in their various human interactions. She encouraged independent learning, and was prepared to learn as partners alongside her students, however, in many ways she did not

practice this independence skill in her class, by expecting her students to provide only one right answer. Although focusing on one specific answer reinforces the skill of acquiring a precision of thought, it could sometimes contradict the flexible role that a teacher should have, according to Nehama Leibowitz's teaching style.

CHAPTER III

NEHAMA LEIBOWITZ'S CONTRIBUTION TO EDUCATION

IN THE CONTEXT OF OTHER

CHANGES IN JEWISH EDUCATION

In the following chapter, Nehama Leibowitz's contributions will be analyzed in light of other contributions and changes which occurred in the past century in the field of Jewish education. Although many factors and people have affected Jewish education in various ways, this chapter will focus on the shifts that have been created through these changes, where in various ways could be similar or different from the changes that Nehama Leibowitz has introduced to Jewish education. For the purpose of this chapter the contributions to change are very different from one another, focusing on different areas of change in different times, and in separate places. Sarah Schenirer, founder of the Beis Jacob school for girls movement in Europe in the late nineteenth century, contributed to a major breakthrough and shift in Jewish education in providing Jewish education to girls, which was virtually nonexistent at the time. Although the goal of Sarah Schneirer was different from Nehama Leibowitz's, both women have opened up an opportunity for learning in the countries and epoch they lived in. Similarly, the work of Michael Rosenak, international education scholar, will also be analyzed in light of his published work and efforts to create programs, which could help Jewish studies teachers. He has worked with teachers in Israel and around the world in an attempt to find more relevant methods to teaching Bible in a secular society. Finally, the influence of Art scroll publications will be analyzed in light of the methods and approaches that were used in these books to publicize and popularize Torah knowledge. The work of Nehama Leibowitz will consequently be compared to these different contributions to Jewish education, which occurred at different times and in different places.

The first personality which will be analyzed in light of changes she has created is Sarah Schenirer, who has contributed to the inauguration of Jewish schools for girls in

the twentieth century. Unlike Nehama Leibowitz, Sarah Schneirer did not contribute to changes in Jewish education through her knowledge and erudition. Although she had obtained a Jewish education privately in her home, most Jewish girls were not able to afford a Jewish education at home. It was therefore the awareness of this situation that drew her strength of character and foresight that she had in taking initiative to create schools for girls in order to assure the survival of Judaism in Europe. The reason Sarah Schenirer was included as an element of comparison with Nehama Leibowitz, is to demonstrate that even though these two women lived in two very different eras, some of the factors contributing to the growth and integration of the Jewish people remain the same. The realization of universal religious education for girls had its roots in the Jewish Enlightenment period, which included as its key agendas, both the social and political equality of the Jews as citizens and exposure of the community to Western culture.

“One of the responses to Enlightenment in the west was the rise of religious movements whose goals were to achieve an accommodation between Judaism and modernity. These included the Reform movement, Neo-Orthodoxy, and the Historical School.”⁴²

The onset of the Enlightenment movement in Europe, affected the education field at large. Furthermore the attempt to bridge the gap that existed between Judaism and the Western world was one of the important goals of the founders of the Enlightenment movement. These changes therefore affected the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe and consequently their attitude towards formal Jewish education for women.

In the Orthodox community, until the end of the nineteenth century, the emphasis on education was placed on schools for boys. Many of the daughters of Orthodox parents

⁴² S Zloty. "And All Your Children Shall be Learned", p.264

were sent to Polish Gymnasiums. Gradually, from a religious viewpoint, it became apparent that this could be a potentially dangerous situation as many Jewish girls were being influenced by non-Jewish ideologies.

“Even had young Jewish girls not entered secular schools or joined the labor force, it is doubtful whether the home and local Jewish community still retained the ability and moral force to ensure the continued loyalty of the adolescent girl, and at least initially, to the adolescent boy as well.”⁴³

According to this quote, the admission of Jewish girls in secular schools was not the only factor contributing to the threat of Judaism at the time. Many other movements that were strong in the late nineteenth century such as Marxism and the growing feminist movement in Germany, contributed to the questioning of young adolescents of the religious values and traditions of their parents. The changes that were brought upon the Jewish community in Europe as a result of the period of Enlightenment could therefore be compared to the changes Nehama Leibowitz encountered upon her arrival in Israel in the early 1930: a Jewish community where the emphasis was on the integration into Western culture through the abandonment of some religious values.

Understanding the importance of the role of women in the survival of Jewish tradition, Sarah Schenirer set the goal to try to create a school for Orthodox girls in Europe. Borne in Cracow, Poland, in 1883, Sarah Schenirer attended a Polish elementary school for girls. Her religious education consisted of instruction given by a rabbi who visited the school twice a week for this purpose.

“Throughout her life, her greater pleasure was to study Jewish sacred texts, and even as a child, she spent every evening poring over the Bible, books of Jewish ethical literature, and the popular Tzena U-Reena.”⁴⁴

⁴³ N.Cohen, “Women and the Study of Talmud” pp.30-32

⁴⁴ S.Zolty, “And All Your Children Shall be Learned” p.275

Like Nehama Leibowitz who did not acquire her initial love of learning from a Jewish school, Sarah Schenirer acquired her love of learning Torah from her father and brothers who would study at home as Schenirer would listen in. After perceiving his daughter's deep love of learning, Sarah's father obtained for her a volume of talmudic legends translated into Yiddish.

The most significant turning point in Sarah's life occurred in 1914, when her family had immigrated to Vienna for a short period of time. There, Schenirer began to attend educational sermons, which were traditional in spirit. The ideas that shaped the educational activities Sarah was to undertake in Cracow were founded on three convictions based on her perceptive observation of the Jewish scene:⁴⁵First, the anomaly of the situation whereby boys received solely a Jewish education, and girls only a Polish one. As future mothers, girls would exercise influence on their children and therefore, according to Schenirer, required a Jewish education. Second, Sarah was attracted to the ways of Jewish Orthodox schools in Poland which existed at the time under the auspices of Dr. Moses Auerbach and Havatzelet schools. These schools attracted mostly daughters of well to do families. Third, Schenirer wanted to create an education for the broader mass of girls who did not have any access to Jewish education. The Polish language was also perceived by Schenirer as a threat to Jewish survival, as Polish became the mother tongue of Jewish girls, Schenirer feared that the whole Jewish outlook of girls would become Polish, consequently making girls more easily drawn into alien cultural circles. She wanted therefore to give an education to Jewish girls using Yiddish as the language of instruction in order to keep the language and the Jewish culture alive.

⁴⁵ Z.Kurzweil, "Modern Trends in Jewish Emancipation" p.269

In her endeavor to instruct formal religious education to girls, Sarah Schenirer was faced with opposition from a variety of sources. One of the biggest breakthroughs for Sarah Schenirer came in when Rabbi Israel Meir ha-Cohen(1828-1933), popularly called after his most famous work *Hafetz Haim* gave moral support Schenirer's endeavor.

“In response to critics on the religious right, he (*Hafetz Haim*) underscored the propriety of religious education for Jewish women in his day and age, stating that historical practices of the past ignored women's formal religious education were to be readjusted because times had changed.”⁴⁶

After getting the approval of one of the most influential spiritual leader of Eastern Jewry in the first third of the twentieth century, Sarah Scheneirer continued in her struggle to achieve the goal of creating schools for girls, which would produce integrated Jewish human beings who are integrated in the western world.

Sarah Schenirer, through the foundation of the Beth Jacob school for girls, contributed to a major change in Jewish education in the early twentieth century. Unlike Nehama Leibowitz whose extensive knowledge in Biblical and secular studies helped shape the contributions to Jewish education that she was well known for, Sarah Schenirer was not at the same level of knowledge. It is clear that even though many men and women were greater in erudition than Sarah Schenirer, it was the devotion to her students, and the dedication and perseverance of the cause she was fighting for which made her stand out as a human being.

Although Sarah Schenirer and Nehama Leibowitz's contributions to Jewish education are very different, many similarities could be seen in the background, family, and history of these two women. One of the common elements in the background of

⁴⁶ Z. Scharfstein, “*Gedolei Hahinuch BeAmeinu*” p.233

Sarah Schenirer and Nehama Leibowitz is the fact that they both lived in a period where Jewish people around them were integrating in the Western modern society and gradually losing some of their Jewish religious ideals. In the case of Nehama Leibowitz, she attempted to address these changes through Bible study. She associated some of the challenges that Israeli society was facing in Jewish education to the way the Bible was being taught.

“When she arrived in Jerusalem in 1930, Nehama was disappointed to find that the study of the Bible-so exciting to her-was a dry and mechanical activity. The Bible was treated as a text to learned by rote, not probed and analyzed.”⁴⁷

Upon seeing how the Bible was being taught in schools in Israel, Nehama Leibowitz, through her vast range of religious and secular knowledge introduced new teaching methods, which were later adopted by many of her students. The Enlightenment contributed to many important changes in education in Europe, and the integration to Western society in Israel also had a great impact on Israeli education. Some similarities could therefore be seen in terms of the effects that they have had on education. The fact that Biblical studies were taught in schools in Israel to a secular society, demonstrate some of the challenges that Jewish studies teachers faced and still face today. The contributions of Sarah Schenirer and Nehama Leibowitz were therefore similar in the kind of background that these women encountered upon creating changes. Both these women had the foresight to understand the deeper implications of the situations and circumstances that they lived in. Furthermore, they both used education as a way to develop and strengthen identity in a society facing challenges.

⁴⁷ S. Segal “Woman Of Valor” p.104

Sarah Schenirer and Nehama Leibowitz both had a love and devotion to Torah, as well as the commitment to create a change in Jewish education. However, many elements contribute to the differences that exist in their ultimate goal and the approach of reaching it. One of the differences that exist in their achievements, is the purpose of their changes and contributions. Sarah Schneirer found ways to make Jewish education accessible to Orthodox girls in Europe. Her emphasis was not based on Torah or the depth and richness of the text, but rather the Beth Jacob curriculum consisted of providing an education, which was mainly focused on maintaining a religious Jewish identity.

“The curriculum of the Beis Jacob schools was designed to realize the movement’s goal of producing well-integrated religious graduates, knowledgeable about the world, but fortified by a deep, religious identity to protect them from succumbing to external temptation.”⁴⁸

Sarah Schenirer’s contribution to Jewish education has not only enabled Jewish women to get an education, but has also contributed to providing the respect for women’s intellectual capacities.

“Sarah Schenirer helped not only in the training of Jewish girls in traditional Judaism, but also in restoring the self-respect of Jewish women, by bringing about a veritable renaissance among them.”⁴⁹

Sarah Schenirer’s goal was therefore to preserve Jewish identity in the girls of Poland through their training and exposure to traditional Judaism.

One of the most important element which distinguishes Sarah Schenirer’s contributions from Nehama Leibowitz’s is the use of the Biblical text. Nehama Leibowitz used the Bible text as her main focus to draw people to love and appreciate the

⁴⁸ D. Weissman “A Woman’s Educational Movement in Polish Jewish Community” p.80.

⁴⁹ A. Wholgemuth, “The Jewish Woman in Eastern Europe”, p.173 .

Jewish tradition. It was one of the main tools she used in order to demonstrate to a secular culture in Israel that Biblical study should be preserved, as it was relevant and necessary in modern times. Unlike Shcneirer, who focused on the strengthening of the Yiddish culture and the study of Bible in Yiddish, Nehama Leibowitz attributed great importance to the Hebrew language and its precision. She used the text in its original Hebrew language as a way to demonstrate the strength, beauty, and accuracy of the content being taught. Furthermore, the goal that they were both trying to achieve in implementing changes was also different. Sarah Scheneirer saw her role as being strictly aimed at women, whereas Nehama Leibowitz taught both men and women and tried to achieve the goal of creating an interest in the Bible by both men and women.

Sarah Schenirer, introduced an interest in education for Jewish girls in the beginning of the twentieth century, which has flourished all over the world until present times. There are currently several hundred Beth Jacob institutions and teacher's seminars in Israel, the United States, Canada, England, Belgium, France, Switzerland, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, and Morocco. The concept of school for girls has been accepted by the right-wing religious Orthodoxy, which originally was deeply opposed to the Beth Jacob movement.

Another person who has contributed to many important changes in the field of Jewish education is Michael Rosenak. Like Nehama Leibowitz, Rosenak struggled with finding ways to keep Jewish education relevant to modern times and developed ideas, strategies and institutions which helped in the reconciliation of religion and the overwhelming power and strength of the modern secular society. Through the publication of many of his books and articles, Michael Rosenak aimed his efforts at

trying to develop Jewish values programs which would serve as one of the many tools to help teachers teach Torah and Jewish Studies in a world that is predominantly secular.

“Jewish education is troubled not only because we do not always do it well, but more importantly because we do not have an adequate conception of what it means to do it well. On a question in need of attention, therefore, is not how we can better educate Jews, but rather what it means to do so.”⁵⁰

In the publication of the book “Commandments and Concerns”, Rosenak provides for his readers an understanding of the challenges inherent in teaching Judaism today. Like Nehama Leibowitz, Rosenak recognizes the fact that Jews in Israel and in the Diaspora are integrating and interacting more and more with modern society, and therefore he aimed his goals at creating a Jewish values programs which was more accessible and challenging to students. This program would be geared to students of all religious backgrounds in a way that can see the relation between Jewish education and their modern daily lives.

Rosenak focused his research on trying to find ways to teach Judaic studies in a secular world, a world in which many Jewish students did not perceive religion as being part of or necessary in a modern world.

“Philosophically, the secularists insist that Jewish religious education tends toward “authority rather than freedom”. Culturally, they claim that Jewish religious education is ineffective at strengthening Jewish loyalties because most Jews are secular. Theologically, they hold that it is dysfunctional because it teaches nothing of personal use for children in life.”⁵¹

In trying to respond to the above secular claims that religion is not essential in the Israeli education system, Rosenak attempted to prove the need of religious education and

⁵⁰ H.A Alexander, “Recent Trends in the Philosophy of Jewish Education: Chazan, Rosenak, and Beyond”, in *Studies in Jewish Education* Vol. 6, p.121

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.131

making it more accessible to secular society. Rosenak formulated a response to each of these three secularist claims by stating that the teaching of Jewish education is largely dependent on convictions about truth, which did not come from many students' households, and therefore needs to be taught in school. Secondly, according to Rosenak religious education is very effective at fostering morals and values in children, in a society which is lacking in those areas. He cites the example theologians such as Rabbi Soloveitchik, who have argued that a religious perspective can offer an important counter point to secular culture. Finally, the dysfunctional character of religious education may signal the need for a more plausible conception of teaching Jewish studies in a way that students feel that it is very relevant to their daily life.

Thus Rosenak determined the integration of Jewish studies into secular culture to be of utmost importance, and in the main purpose of his study, he tried to implement ways of teaching Judaic studies with reverence, openness, and search for meaning, so that young students, living in a predominately secular society, can attribute relevance to religious education. Like Nehama Leibowitz, he attempted to create links between secular common knowledge and the values of Torah. Both Rosenak and Leibowitz recognized that using broad secular knowledge in Judaic studies classes would create a more appealing and accessible approach to teaching Torah in a secular society.

Rosenak's concept of religious education attempts to take into account two perspectives: explicit religion, and implicit religion. The outsider's view, which Rosenak calls explicit religion, is based on to the assumption of secular scholarship, where the concern is on the belief and practice of members of a religious congregation. Explicit religion, according to Rosenak, sets up norms that exist in a society, which help identify religious members. The insider's view, implicit religion, according to Rosenak, is

developed according to a person's understanding of traditional Jewish religious beliefs and practices. Implicit religion therefore focuses on the search for meaning, which often does not derive from the absolute divine demand, but from the human hopes in perceiving the divine presence. The distinction between implicit and explicit religion becomes another important theme in Rosenak's publication, in which he tries to address ways of integrating implicit and explicit religion into contemporary Jewish education as a response to bridge of the gap that exist between these two different kinds of religions. Rosenak's dilemma can be restated as follows: Explicit Jewish religious education has a normative philosophy of education,

“But it is not convincing to most Jews in the modern age. Implicit religious education can be shown to be...relevant to the modern person...But it has no normative philosophy of education beyond what amounts to a commitment of existential virtues...Jewishly speaking, this commitment lacks specificity and religious depth.”⁵²

In order to accomplish the task of creating the relevance of religious education in a modern person, Rosenak believed that the curriculum should be used as one of the most vital tools. Using the curriculum as a base, teachers should try to implement thought-provoking discussions and comparisons, which he analyzes in detail in his books, which thus allow the students to experience the depth, sophistication, and relevance to modern life of the Torah.

“The content of Rosenak's curriculum is neatly summarized by the titles of the two central chapters of his book *Commandments and Concerns*, dealing with the theory of explicit teaching.”⁵³

⁵² Rosenak, “*Commandments and Concerns*”p.159-160

⁵³ H.A. Alexander “*Studies in the Philosophies of Jewish Education: Chazan, Rosenak, and Beyond*” in *Studies in Jewish in Jewish Education VOL.6* p.134

In the first chapter, Rosenak attempts to define the perspective of explicit Jewish Theology in what he calls the sociological characteristics of the community into which the student is to be initiated.

Rosenak believed that in understanding the differences that exist between implicit and explicit religion the teachers would find ways of getting young people “on the inside” of the cultural language. Furthermore, the educator has to appreciate and consider to what extent children live in a cognitive and effective world. In synopsis, Rosenak sees the central problem of modern Jewish education as a confrontation between Jewish religious culture on the one hand and modern secular on the other.

“The challenge of today’s Jewish educator is to seek the “elusive norm”. That is to determine in thought and in practice how traditional Jewish norms can respond to a human condition that transcends the confines of modern culture and touches the depths of our souls.”⁵⁴

Michael Rosenak still continues in his search and struggle to create programs, which inform teachers of the methods and approaches that they can use in order to achieve the goal of reaching out to students who come from a background where there is not a great interest in Judaism. Through the use of these programs, teachers can learn how to portray Torah knowledge in a manner that students could learn and understand its relevance.

Rosenak and Leibowitz both searched for ways to bridge the gap that exists between the religious and secular culture in Israel. However, they each utilized different means to achieve their goals. One of the major differences that exists in their approach is the focus on the text. Unlike, Nehama Leibowitz, Rosenak did not use the text to resolve the conflict between the relevance of religion and modernity, but rather focused on

⁵⁴ Ibid p.135

training teachers to teach Jewish education in a more relevant approach. Leibowitz's most important aspect of proving the relevance of Biblical study in a modern world was the text itself, whereas for Rosenak it was the teaching approach that can help achieve this goal.

In the period in which Nehama Leibowitz popularized Biblical studies, and Michael Rosenak was struggling to find ways to teach Jewish studies in a secular society, another kind of Biblical popularization surfaced by the Artscroll series and publications. Beginning in the early part of 1976, the Artscroll series presented Biblical translations in English and many other languages. A translation with a rabbinic anthology commentary and various additions is presented to the reader in English enabling readers who do not speak Hebrew to acquire Biblical knowledge in a traditional format, which otherwise would be very difficult for them to learn in the original language. This translation of Biblical passages in English not only helped popularize Biblical study but also made learning and exposure to the Bible more accessible. In the pages that follow, we will look at the importance and changes in the popularization of the study of the Bible, in light of the work of Nehama Leibowitz and the difference in the approaches that Nehama Leibowitz and Artscroll publication used in popularizing the study of Torah.

Artscroll publications accomplished a great achievement in enabling people who do not speak Hebrew to learn Torah. However, several problems exist in their translation and publication of Biblical passages. Dr. Barry Levy, Dean of Religious Studies and professor at Mc Gill University in Montreal, has published several articles exploring the accuracy of Artscroll publications. According to his research, several inaccuracies and misconceptions exist in their translations. Each biblical book published by Artscroll is presented in easily read Hebrew or English, where the source of the commentary is often

not indicated. One's initial understanding could therefore be that the rabbinic anthology commentary is the essence of the text, where in reality there are several different interpretations which exist in the Hebrew text, each deserving individual treatment. The different commentaries and disputations between commentators on the original Biblical text in Hebrew will often be eliminated in the Artscroll where only one of the commentators would be published.

“Though various types of commentaries are available, all, it would seem to the editors, suffer from being scientific, apologetic, critical or untrustworthy. These faults extend to the translations on which they are based as well as the exegetical attitudes they express.”⁵⁵

Although in many cases, the goal of translating a text is to make it available in the target language, in a manner that comes as close as possible to the original meaning of the text, in the case of Artscroll, this purpose is often not met. In order to harmonize the different opinions that sometimes existed between commentators, the Artscroll translation has been designed to follow Rashi, one of the most widely renowned commentator, or in a few cases, one of the other classical commentators.

One of the major contributions of the Artscroll series is that its translations served as a helpful tool to enable a reader who would otherwise not learn Torah in its original language, understand the text and some of its interpretation. By omitting several commentators and their interpretations of Biblical passages of the Torah, the Artscroll series is not providing a complete and accurate interpretation of the Bible, eliminating a very important aspect in Torah learning where the reader might be able to compare, think and understand a passage through different aspects and on many different levels.

Contrary to this approach, Nehama Leibowitz used these very different interpretations to

⁵⁵ B. Levy, “Our Torah, Your Torah and Their Torah, an Evaluation of the Artscroll Phenomenon”, p.141

demonstrate the depth, variety, and precision of the Bible. The different commentators and interpretations were used by Leibowitz in deep, and thought provoking analyses of biblical passages. The variety of commentators and interpretations were some of the elements lacking in Artscroll publications, which Nehama Leibowitz used as the specific tools that served to popularize the serious and deep study of the Bible.

Although Artscroll and Nehama Leibowitz achieved similar goals in making the study of Torah more available to people, the approaches they used were very different. Working with a translated text contributes to one of the major differences, as the text undergoes a certain amount of manipulation based on the perspective of the translator and therefore loses its authenticity. Leibowitz, focused on the importance of studying the Biblical text in Hebrew, stressing the importance of every additional pronoun or repetition, which can make a difference in the understanding of the text. Her meticulous analysis of the text required a high level of understanding of the Hebrew language, which could be expected in Israel, but could not always be used when Hebrew is not the first language being studied. The audience and purpose of the Nehama Leibowitz and Artscroll publications was very different. Artscroll provided the Biblical information under the assumption that its readers did not have any knowledge of the Hebrew language or of the Bible, and therefore, these publications did not explore the modern scientific standings available through different commentators. Nehama Leibowitz emphasized the importance of the exposure of different commentators, which Artscroll was more selective about. Leibowitz, assumed people have knowledge of the Hebrew language and of the Biblical text but did not think there could be a relevant use to Bible study in a modern world.

“To a large extent the problems of reconstructing biblical history depend on the careful reading of many narrative passages, and these are the texts that have been subjected to the most midrashic manipulation. Thus, if one is to probe biblical history, he must first peel off the layers of midrashic analysis and get down to the bear text.”⁵⁶

Artscroll omitted the translation of some Bible interpretations, which could demonstrate a conflict between different understandings a Biblical passage. The translation often focuses on one Bible commentator without offering the wide range of commentators which provide a critical and thorough understanding of the Bible. Nehama Leibowitz focused on the purpose of the different *midrashim*, especially medieval commentaries that exist in a passage, and offered the opportunity for the reader to think critically about the possible reasons these *midrashim* were part of the text (i.e.: to teach a moral lesson, or halachic reasons which other commentators represent as important theological and philosophical statements). Leibowitz therefore assumed a certain level of sophistication in the knowledge of her students, where they could appreciate a plurality of views. Artscroll however, provides the translations of Biblical texts through a simple, one-dimensional interpretation often appropriate for the not yet educated person.

In looking at the different approaches that were used over the past several decades to popularize the study of Torah, we can see a very different target in the goal and types of people that Nehama Leibowitz and Artscroll publications were aiming to attract. A positive aspect that could be perceived through the translation of Artscroll, is the opportunity to study the Bible for the population that it targets: Jews who are *Baaley Teshuva* (Jews becoming observant) and have not yet been exposed to a deep level of

⁵⁶ Ibid, p.164

Bible study. Artscroll can therefore give them the basic background which will possibly encourage them to look at other sources and develop the interest in learning more.

According to Dr. Barry Levy, Artscroll publications translated only some of the Biblical commentaries and often not accurately. Furthermore, the aim of Artscroll seem to want to eliminate some commentaries.

“The prefaces of the various volumes (particularly the early ones) and occasional comments scattered throughout the work leave no doubt that one of the major interests of the Artscroll efforts is the replacement of certain unacceptable Jewish commentaries.”⁵⁷

Traditional Jewish hermeneutics offer a commentator the choice to accept a *midrash* (commentary) as history or not. In the Artscroll approach however, a *midrash* is viewed as a primarily historical source since it presents a view of the Torah, eliminating therefore the option for the reader to choose whether or not he/she will portray a particular *midrash* as being part of history or not.

Although the goal of Artscroll publications may be to make Bible study more accessible and available in today’s modern society, it does not offer the opportunity for the reader to understand the Torah as an ongoing evolving concept, and not one that is limiting or limited to certain commentators that existed in the past.

“It is crucial that readers see the process of biblical interpretation as an ongoing (perhaps never-ending) open search. They should rely on the classical, medieval, and modern traditionalists for contributions in the areas of their strengths, but together with these, they must seek out, examine and assimilate the relevant elements of the scientific contribution of modern times.”⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Ibid, p.167

⁵⁸ Ibid , p.171

It is clear from reading Artscroll publications that this approach is not used, but rather one or more commentaries of the bible are portrayed as being the only possible rabbinic interpretation. The reliance on classical, medieval, and modern traditional texts to demonstrate the validity of the Bible, such as Nehama Leibowitz would do in her classes, would not seem as an acceptable way of learning and understanding Torah according to the Artscroll method of study.

In this chapter we have seen the different ways that Sarah Schenirer, Michael Rosenak, and Artscroll publications have struggled to find ways to create changes in Jewish education. The contributions to change in Jewish education have all focused on different areas in the field of education: providing Jewish education for girls, creating programs which help teachers present Jewish studies in a relevant and interesting way, and publishing books which provide the opportunity of learning Torah to those who do not speak Hebrew. Sarah Schenirer, Michael Rosenak, and Artscroll publication have all focused on three important aspects: the love of Torah, love of the traditional approach to learning Torah, and encouraging the notion that the values of Torah are teachable and necessary in modern society. They all wanted an Orthodox view of Torah and understood and implemented an approach in reaching their goal. They have all faced different obstacles in order to achieve their cause, but more importantly the change in culture and society they faced, and perseverance they demonstrated in their contribution to change make their experiences very similar to the journey that Nehama Leibowitz had undergone in order to implement her innovative teaching style and adherence to the text, in a changing Jewish society.

CHAPTER IV
THE INFLUENCE OF NEHAMA LEIBOWITZ’
PEDAGOGICAL TEACHING STYLE
ON THE
MONTREAL JEWISH COMMUNITY

In the previous chapters, the influence of Nehama Leibowitz was assessed in light of her students and publications. The following chapter will focus on the impact that she has had her former students in the Jewish community of Montreal. According to a survey compiled by Charles Shahar, research coordinator in the community planning department of the Federation of Jewish community Services of Montreal⁵⁹, Montreal is a community of about one hundred thousand Jews. Almost three quarters of Montreal Jews (73%) have received some form of Jewish education, whereas in the United States this number is 67%. There are almost twenty Jewish elementary schools in Montreal ranging from Hassidic, Orthodox, to traditional Jewish schools. Most of these schools have demonstrated a growth in the number of students that attend their schools (see graph on schools registration).

In order to assess the influence of Nehama Leibowitz on some of the teachers in Montreal schools, several teachers, coordinators and community planners, have been interviewed in order to share their experience of learning with her. The influence that she has had on them while they were part of her class, as well as the influence that she has had on these teachers' own classrooms will therefore be assessed. The people interviewed for this chapter are Barbara Freedman, teacher and coordinator of Jewish studies at Hebrew Academy, Shlomo Shimon, executive director of the Bronfman Jewish Education Council of Montreal, Carmela Aigan teacher, and coordinator of Jewish studies at Akiva School, Tova Shimon, curriculum developer at the Bronfman Jewish education Center, and Dr. Barry Levy, professor of Jewish studies and Dean of Religion at McGill University.

⁵⁹ C. Shahar, "Issues of Jewish Identity", p.19

As previously stated, according to the survey by Shahar, Montreal has one of the highest rates of attendance in Jewish education, in North America. Also, according to this survey, the rates of various ritual observances, synagogue affiliation is also among the highest, if not the highest on the continent. One of the reasons the community has such a high rate of Jewish day school attendance is due to the lower tuition costs of Jewish day schools in Montreal when compared to the United States. Government subsidies contribute to reduce the education costs even more for families in need of financial help. Financial help and government subsidies are not accessible in the United States as they are in Montreal. The community of Montreal has a tradition of helping children whose parents cannot afford to pay for a Jewish education.

“According to the Association of Jewish Day Schools, about 32% of students attending day schools receive some financial support. Clearly, the community recognizes the need to make Jewish education more affordable and accessible for all its children, regardless of socio-economic standing.”⁶⁰

Based on the statistics seen in this survey, Jewish day school could be seen as a high priority in the Montreal Jewish community, much more than any other city in North America. A childhood Jewish education has been identified in Montreal, as playing a significant role in terms of instilling the values and beliefs that form the essential ingredients of one’s Jewish perspective in life.

In order to portray different aspects of the Jewish community of Montreal, the people taking part in this research all come from different backgrounds of the Jewish community, and are all former students of Nehama Leibowitz. Barbara Freedman is a high school teacher and Judaic Studies coordinator of Hebrew Academy, a Modern

⁶⁰ Ibid, p.19.

Orthodox elementary and high school in Montreal, and recipient of the Harrold Greenspoon Award for Excellence in Jewish Education in 2002. Freedman had the opportunity to study with Nehama Leibowitz when she was a student at Mahon Gold in Jerusalem in 1969. Fifteen years later, when Leibowitz was no longer teaching in a University, Freedman had another opportunity to study with Nehama in her house where she was giving private *shiurim* (weekly classes). Freedman has very fond memories of how Leibowitz captivated every one of her students in her class through the choice of material that she offered to her students and her approach at teaching it.

“In presenting to her students material which required precision of thought, she developed in us the love of learning. Furthermore her approach of asking a question and walking around the classroom to check the answers has influenced my teaching approach as well.”⁶¹

As a high school teacher in a school where Jewish studies are taught on a high level of learning, Barbara Freedman incorporates some of Nehama’s teaching style both in her teaching approach and in the choice of material that she uses for her students, by using Nehama Leibowitz’s teaching approach of focusing her lesson on the choice of text. The text chosen, according to Barbara Freedman should be understood through different Bible commentators in a way that invites critical thinking, and a deep critical analysis.

According to Barbara Freedman, Nehama’s greatest contribution to education is the analysis, the synthesis, and the democratization to different Bible commentaries that she introduced. The fact that her books are a relevant source in Bible Study, and that her *Gilyonot* are still being published today and are used through electronic mail, demonstrates the relevance of her work. Barbara Freedman often bases the selection of

⁶¹ According to interview with Barbara Freedman, June 12, 2001

the texts that she will teach in her classes on the Biblical passages that are analyzed by Nehama Leibowitz in her books and publications. Using some of the pedagogical approaches used by Nehama, Freedman strives to achieve the love of learning in her students through the depth and richness of the text which was transmitted to her.

Barbara Freedman does not believe that Nehama Leibowitz accomplished her scholarly achievements through the inspiration of feminism, by trying to achieve an equality between men and women, but rather believed that Nehama shared the opposite view on feminism. She recalls having a conversation with Nehama Leibowitz about the subject of feminism, where Nehama demonstrated her disagreement of achieving a scholarly level of learning for the achievement of feminist goals, but rather one had to strive to achieve the love of learning, regardless of their gender.

“Nehama Leibowitz was in a unique class of her own, setting a precedent to women scholars and encouraging both men and women to learn different interpretations of a text.”⁶²

Nehama Leibowitz has influenced Barbara Freedman in her teaching style even thirty years after their initial study session together. According to Freedman, Nehama was an educator ahead of her time, in the assessment that she chose, in her active learning methods that she promoted, and in the constructive thinking that she helped develop in her students. Many of these methods are being used today by Bible teachers.

Another person who was influenced by Nehama Leibowitz’s teachings from the Jewish community of Montreal is Shlomo Shimon, executive director of the Bronfman Jewish Education Council of Montreal. Shimon attended several of Nehama Leibowitz’s classes during visits to Israel in the early 80s. He describes Leibowitz’s influence on him

⁶² Ibid

as being a model for Torah learning. According to Shimon, Nehama's influence on modern Orthodox Jews came at a time where a shift started to occur where the *midrash* was starting to lose some of its credibility due to modern scientific standings.

“With the evolution of the Zionist movement, shifted the emphasis of *Torah Shebeal Peh*. This shift went from a rabbinic to a literal approach of studying the Biblical text. Nehama therefore brought back the emphasis on *midrash* and the different values that are embodied in a text.”⁶³

According to Shimon, the *Mizrahi Mamlahi Dati*, a modern orthodox approach to teaching Bible in Israel, was the most influenced by Leibowitz's teachings. Many teachers started to emulate her teaching style, searching for comparisons and looking for the delicate fine lines which distinguish texts, finding the relevance needed to link the text to modern day life.

In his role of Director of the Bronfman Jewish Education council, Shimon has had many consultations with teachers from various schools in Montreal. He claims that in the seventies and eighties, most of the teachers who came from Israel to teach in Montreal (*Shlihim*) taught through the pedagogical methods of Nehama Leibowitz. Furthermore, according to Shimon, Leibowitz did not have a strong influence on the secular world, her impact was mostly seen in the modern Orthodox world and high levels of Bible study mostly seen at the University level. Contrary to the opinion of many elementary teachers in Montreal, according to Shimon, Nehama's method should not be limited to higher levels of learning in higher grades, but rather should be implemented in the schools of Montreal by more teachers. Her methods could be used in all levels, and it would be the role of the curricular developer to give a chance to students to be enriched by her method.

⁶³ According to Interview with Shlomo Shimon, June 21, 2001

Shlomo Shimon, like Barbara Freedman, determined that Nehama Leibowitz has set a precedent. According to him, she is one of the first women to be recognized and accepted in the modern Orthodox world as a respected female scholar. Through this acceptance and recognition, she has transmitted to both men and women, the love of learning and the serious approach to understanding the Bible. According to Shimon, the influence of Nehama Leibowitz on the community of Montreal is limited to a small circle of people as most educators find her methods too sophisticated to teach in some of the elementary and high schools. However, as stated above, according to his opinion, in focusing mostly on the skills and behaviors that should be used in a classroom, teachers from all Jewish schools and from all levels could benefit from an active way of teaching. The approaches that Nehama uses are easily adaptable in any classroom where challenges are developed by the teacher, and aim to develop in students interesting and valuable learning skills.

The next person to be discussed is Carmela Aigan, coordinator of Jewish studies at Akiva elementary school of Montreal. Apart from being coordinator, Carmela also teaches Kindergaden and grade one, as well as teaching Bible to adults. Recipient of the Harrold Greenspoon Award for Excellence in Jewish Education in the year 2000, Aigan studied with Nehama Leibowitz in the summer of 1997 as part of a study in Pardes Yeshiva. She was also her student 35 years ago as part of a Kibbutz seminar where professors and teachers in Israel came to meet Kibbutz teachers. Aigan recounts the tremendous impact and influence that her experience of learning with Nehama Leibowitz has had on her teaching career, and the valuable teaching skills that she acquired through their encounter.

The books and publications of Nehama Leibowitz serve as the most important tools for Carmela Aigan in teaching her bible classes to adults. According to Aigan, Nehama's analysis of different commentators invite deep and challenging conversations which encourage her students to try to understand the different dimensions that exist in a text.

“Her legacy is the incredible amount of intellect in the text and in the books that she has created. Her books allow students to explore texts with challenges and questions which help them solve problems.”⁶⁴

Carmela Aigan uses Nehama Leibowitz's approach mostly in the Bible classes that she gives to adults, and further states that her methods are too sophisticated to be used in the elementary school where she serves as Coordinator of Jewish Studies. According to Aigan, although Nehama's pedagogical approach was very innovative, it is focused mostly on the text, where the discoveries are “text oriented”, whereas modern day education, according to Aigan, focuses more on the child and his/her specific needs. In that aspect, Aigan found Nehama Leibowitz to be more of an adult teacher rather than an elementary or high school teacher. Although Leibowitz, according to Aigan, may use in her books the same literary style as other Bible scholars, the variety and richness of the different *mefarshim* (commentators) are not comparable to other Bible scholars and therefore provide the unique teaching style that she implemented when teaching the Bible.

Tova Shimon, curriculum developer for Jewish day schools at the Bronfman Jewish education center was also interviewed for this research. Tova Shimon studied with Nehama in 1964 and 1965, as part of an extra curricular activity created by one of

⁶⁴ According to interview with Carmela Aigan, July 27, 2001

her high school educator in Israel. At the time, Nehama was teaching at Hebrew University, and Shimon was attending her class once a week. Shimon's first impression of Nehama was that she was harsh, pedantic, and insisted on accuracy. Her teaching style was very different from the teaching experiences that Tova had otherwise encountered. Shimon was strongly influenced by Nehama Leibowitz's teaching style and impact on learning. She inspired her as a woman studying Torah and teaching it to both to men and women, she initiated in her students the active participation needed in a classroom, and she got people interested in *Parashat Hashavua* (weekly Bible commentary). Although she describes Leibowitz as meticulous and punctilious, Shimon also saw the human aspect of Nehama Leibowitz as as a teacher.

“Her precision of thought and clarity of language were part of the caring of the soul of the learner and therefore created the personality of who she was. Some of her teachings, that I still remember to this day are the many anecdotes which she shared in class with us and demonstrated human nature and the place of God in the.”⁶⁵

According to Shimon, Nehama characterized herself as being a people's person: she responded to people and wanted to know about people. Her focus was on teaching the skills that one needs to know in order to study all subjects. Shimon describes her as having a sharp sense of humor and would not hesitate to shame people into their inadequacies. One of the shortcomings of Nehama according to Shimon's experience is that in achieving her goal of active participation, she put the person on the alert, which sometimes made a person aware of their mistakes. Her methodology encouraged everybody to think for themselves, but sometimes, people were not ready for it.

⁶⁵ According to interview with Tova Shimon, August 28, 2001

Leibowitz's greatest contribution to education according to Shimon is her setting a precedent. The fact that many men and women around the world could learn from a woman put her in a category of her own, distinguishing her through three aspects:

“1) She molded her scholarship not as a woman but rather by a woman. She did not really care for the feminist point of view. 2) She accomplished successful, true scholarship that one brought from all ways of life. 3) She used the tools that were used in general studies for the study of Torah.”⁶⁶

Shimon therefore attributes great importance to the fact that Biblical study was by a woman and respected by men and women, rabbis and secular scholars. Like Barbara Freedman, Shimon did not associate her achievements with feminist or egalitarian goals that she tried to attain, but rather believed that she was driven by the love of study.

The second important contribution which characterized Leibowitz's unique teaching style, is her ability to bring to Bible study, ideas from all aspects of students' lives, which was not a very common way of learning Torah. Finally, she demonstrated the relevance of Bible study by using the same level of intellectual challenge in her classes as the one used in secular subjects. According to Shimon, these three contributions distinguished Nehama Leibowitz's pedagogical approach to teaching Bible as well the human approach that she developed through them. She met people at their human level and exchanged ideas on a Jewish level.

In order to explore the influence of Nehama Leibowitz on a higher level of learning Dr. Barry Levy, professor of Jewish Studies at McGill and Dean of Religion at McGill was interviewed. Dr. Levy had the privilege of meeting and learning with Nehama on several occasions and stated that Leibowitz developed an interest in

⁶⁶Ibid

Parshanut (Bible commentary) where she established a system of teaching in a sophisticated way. According to Levy the system that she developed advocates three elements:

- 1) Recognition that texts could have more than one meaning,
- 2) Disagreements between commentators about interpretations reflect those meanings.
- 3) Understanding of the different meanings that exist in a Biblical text.

These three important elements, according to Levy, contributed to her sophisticated teaching style which exposes the students to the different meaning of text and his/her understanding of the text.

According to Dr. Levy, Nehama Leibowitz's greatest contribution is her teaching approach, using the three pedagogical aspects mentioned above. Furthermore these approaches have been accepted and are being used amongst the teachers and Orthodox intellectuals.

“She gave depth, and got people to think, understand and discuss how the text works. However, she was not systematic and was not a systematic teacher.”⁶⁷

Professor Barry Levy attributes great importance to her teaching style. Contrary to the opinion of others, he does not believe she was a Bible scholar, but rather a good teacher who encouraged people to be interested in the Bible. He attributes a great importance to her publications, but highlights the fact the main asset she brought into Bible study is primarily her teaching style rather than her Biblical scholarship.

Professor Levy describes his experience of learning with Nehama Leibowitz as

⁶⁷ Interview with Dr. Barry Levy, August 14, 2001

being intellectually elevating, and attributes some of his interest in *parshanut* to her teaching style. The most insightful of her forms of teachings, according to Levy, are the questions she chose to analyze during her classes. He portrays his encounter upon answering these questions as ones that stirred up the imagination and got people to think on a deeper level. Dr. Levy also describes a very intimidating side to her teaching approach. He recalls students in her class being taken aback by the harsh way she could sometimes embarrass a person in class. By taking for granted the fact that all her students in her class had background knowledge about the Bible, she often called upon a student who was not necessarily ready to answer her question, and prompted an unexpected reaction on the part of the student.

Barbara Freedman, Carmela Aigan, Shlomo Shimon, Tova Shimon, and Dr. Barry Levy, all former students of Nehama Leibowitz have been influenced by their learning experience in her classes in different ways. Although many more students around the world have been affected by their experience with Leibowitz, as seen in previous chapters of this dissertation, these five people are all involved in different aspects of the Montreal Jewish community. In analyzing the response that each one of them has had upon implementing her methods in their classrooms, most of these candidates stipulated that her teaching style is most suitable in higher levels of learning (such as high school and university). Her books and publications however, serve as a valuable asset for Bible teachers in their preparation and understanding of the text, in presenting the text in a way that could be more enriching for their students. Barbara Freedman uses Nehama Leibowitz's teaching style in her high school classes, and Shlomo Shimon sees the possibility of many more teachers in the Montreal Jewish day schools using her pedagogic teaching style. There exists in Montreal, a language barrier that does not exist

in Israel, where Nehama Leibowitz and many of her students practiced her pedagogical approach. The fact that Hebrew is learned as a second or third language in Jewish day schools of Montreal, serves as an obstacle to the meticulous and precise understanding of the Bible that is needed in order to use Nehama Leibowitz's pedagogical teaching style in these schools. Due to the fact that most of her publications have been translated in English, many of her teaching methods can be adopted by Montreal Jewish day school teachers. Her selection of passages and commentators, which often help in elevating Bible study, can easily be implemented through the translation of her books. The translation of her books can be used in many Bible classes of different level, as a tool to understand the different dimensions, and the richness in content that a Biblical text contains.

In analyzing the influence that Nehama Leibowitz has had on these five community members, three common elements could be derived from the different experiences that each one of them has had in her classes. The first element is the cross curricular skills that she encourages a student to develop by incorporating various unrelated texts to Bible passages. The second element would be the critical thinking skills that she promoted through her selection of passages as well as the choice of her questions. Thirdly, the non-frontal approach that she uses in giving students the opportunity to answer a question other than raising their hand, such as the traditional way of teaching, but rather, in written, or through debating it with a partner in class.

The first common element, the development of cross curricular skills, could be seen through the incorporation of the different secular notions and philosophies into her Judaic studies curriculum. Dr. Barry Levy reflects on this very important aspect of her teaching style:

“At the center of the lesson stands the chapter, the verse, the story, the law, the issue, the idea. But, on the other hand, the commentaries are not superfluous, they serve as a purpose for their designation: they help us understand in depth the chapter, the verse, the issue, and the idea.”⁶⁸

The teaching style described above by Levy, demonstrates the importance of the text or subject being taught, but more importantly, demonstrate the focus on the means and the tools to understand a text, and the ability to link information learned to ideas in other areas of learning. Guiding the student to link his knowledge to other areas of concentration through the deep understanding of the text and of the commentaries was one of the most important skills to come across Nehama Leibowitz’ teaching style, in achieving the goal of broadening knowledge through cross curricular skills.

The second important aspect of her teaching style according to the five members interviewed is the development of critical thinking skills. Nehama Leibowitz used the text as one of the primary goals to achieve critical thinking in students. She drew the attention of students to the precision of the Biblical text, which in turn helped develop in student a love and appreciation of Torah.

“Nehama Leibowitz ensured that all the students in her class are learning and are adequately challenged. She used the text of the Bible to meet the different intellectual levels that could exist in a class.”⁶⁹

Nehama Leibowitz, focused her curriculum around the text and the different ways she could encourage her students, through the text, to develop an interest and love of learning.

The third important aspect of Nehama Leibowitz’s teaching style according to these Montreal community members is the non-frontal teaching approach that she used in

⁶⁸ According to interview with Dr. Barry Levy, August 14 2001.

⁶⁹ According to interview with Shlomo Shimon

class. Leibowitz adopted this method by requesting that her students write down the answer to her question, where she would walk around and correct the answers or by sharing their answer with a partner in class. This way she ensured that everyone in her class was thinking about the question to answer.

“By working in groups, students learn the mastery of formulating their own questions and finding possible solutions. In this way, the student adopts a more active role in the class.”⁷⁰

Leibowitz used this non-frontal teaching method to encourage a student to contribute to the class by offering his/her solution, rather than the passive role of listening to a teacher ask a question, and getting an answer from one or two students.

Although to some students, it could have been intimidating to have the teacher correct their answer in front of all their peers, many of her former students, like Tova Shmon recognize it to be an effective way of learning.

Barbara Freedman, Carmela Aigan, Tova Shimon, Shlomo Shimon, and Dr. Barry Levy represent different educational environments of Montreal, from Kindergarten to the University level. According to the account of their learning experience with Nehama Leibowitz, her influence in Montreal could be assessed as bearing great importance in terms of her contribution, publications, and elevation of the study of the Bible. Although some of these community members use her teaching style in their class, they are all limited in the use of her methods, by a language barrier. The Hebrew language serves as an obstacle to fully implement her pedagogic teaching style, and therefore, some of these community members, such as Dr. Barry Levy, found, that her teaching methods can only be implemented in Montreal, in a higher level of learning. Due to the fact that her

⁷⁰ According to interview with Tova Shimon

teaching approach requires a high mastery of the Hebrew language, many of the important teaching tools that are necessary in her methodology, such as the similarities of events, and precision of language in the Biblical text, would be lost when taught to students who have not yet acquired this level of understanding in Hebrew. The translation of her books cannot be used in class, as Bible is often taught in Hebrew, but can be used by the teacher in his/her preparation, to highlight the elements that contribute to the richness of her approach. Based on the encounter with these five community members, and their learning experience with Nehama Leibowitz, it is evident that her books and publications are used and respected in the field of Jewish education in Montreal. Although her influence on teachers and the impact of her pedagogical teaching style is more predominant in Israel, her publications and their translations have influenced teachers in Montreal in the thought and preparation of a Biblical text.

CHAPTER V**CONCLUSION**

The pedagogical teaching style of Nehama Leibowitz analyzed in this research, has demonstrated the importance of her contribution to Biblical scholarship and to Jewish education in Israel and the Diaspora. She was most renowned as a teacher par excellence of the Bible, her contribution and impact on Jewish education and on her students around the world has demonstrated that she had the love of Torah, the devotion of a teacher, and the foresight to teach in innovative pedagogical styles. While many of her students consider it an honor to have studied with her, being a student of Nehama Leibowitz was not a privilege limited to a scholarly elite. Anyone at all could have studied with her. Many of her contributions could be appraised in light of her popularization of Bible study which she introduced in Israel, her innovative teaching style that she imparts with every one of her students, and her setting a precedent as a woman scholar who has inspired both men and women to attain a high level of intellectual study of the Bible.

Over the years 1953 to 1971, her self-instruction sheets *Gilyonot* (Torah portion), were distributed around the world. The *Gilyonot* played a very important role in the popularization of Torah study. Not only, did Leibowitz introduce the *Gilyonot* at a time where Torah study in Israel was not very popular, but also they created an ongoing dialogue, and an interest in learning Torah which reflected the love and devotion that Leibowitz had for teaching. Students answered the questions she posed, and she offered corrections in red ink. These weekly *Gilyonot* are still available and widely used by many readers on a weekly basis through electronic mail. The questions for further study are still on the *Gilyonot*, and the system of correcting answers that are mailed in, is still being implemented by the Jewish Zionist Organization in Israel. Nehama Leibowitz's *Gilyonot* and books are still a major source in Biblical interpretation. Although her resources and publications are used by students, rabbis and scholars, the *Gilyonot* were

initially aimed at reaching a working class of men and women who did not have time to learn. Her students, which included young mothers, factory workers, and street sweepers, used her study sheets to learn the Torah portions on their own. Through her radio appearances and the distribution of the *Gilyonot*, she was therefore able to popularize Torah on a human level, attracting and encouraging anyone who wanted to learn.

Beyond the *Gilyonot*, radio appearances, and publication of her books, Nehama Leibowitz's unique teaching style in itself popularized the study of Torah. By using the methods used in secular studies, as well as incorporating philosophy and modern day writers into her pedagogical style, Leibowitz contributed to making Torah study come alive again, in a society where the study of Bible could have been seen as irrelevant. An example of modern Jewish philosophy that is incorporated in her studies could be seen in her book *Studies in Vayikra* in a passage relating to the *parasha* (Weekly Torah portion) of *Kedoshim*⁷¹. In regards to the passage In Leviticus (19:2)

“Ye shall be holy, for I am the Lord your God am holy”

Leibowitz describes holiness as a term entailing separation. However, in order for one to achieve this separation, she did not think that it implied a person must withdraw from life, or the foregoing of social activities, but rather quotes modern philosopher, Martin Buber's interpretation of holiness:

“God is the absolute authority over the world because He is separate from it and transcends it but He is not withdrawn from it. Israel must in imitating God by being a holy nation similarly, not withdraw from the world of the nations but rather radiate a positive influence on them through every aspect of Jewish living”⁷²

⁷¹ N. Leibowitz, “Studies in Vayikra”, p.167.

⁷² M. Buber In Hebrew essay : Behirat Yisrael, in the collection : Darko shel Mikra, Jerusalem, Bialik Institute, 1964, p.96

Leibowitz uses Buber's understanding of holiness in order to give the proper value of separation through the concept of holiness. She begins by describing the separations that exist in life between war and peace, food and drink, the joy of the feast and the mourning of the dead, and then incorporates her understanding of the Biblical passage by asserting that the separation cited in this passage cannot imply the withdrawal from life, but rather of prohibitions of both ritual and humanitarian nature such as the laws of purity. She brings in Buber's definition of holiness to reinforce this position, and award a relevant approach to the understanding of the text. This example of the different means that she used both in class and outside of class to make Torah study significant on different levels, has remained in Bible study still today, where many scholars, educators, and people interested in higher learning of Torah refer to her work and resources, and find ways to bring in secular notions to the study of the Bible.

The second important aspect in Nehama Leibowitz's contributions according to this research, is the innovative pedagogical teaching style, which she transmitted to her students through her classes, publications, and radio appearances. These have also helped in contributing to her reputation as Israel's outstanding teacher of teachers.

"For years she gave weekly radio lessons. Her studies, placing Bible in the context of ancient and modern Jewish Bible have been edited to the best selling and widely translated six volume in the weekly Sidra, complete with questions to spur on further learning."⁷³

One of the important aspects of Nehama Leibowitz's teaching style is the inclusive approach she used in opening her classes to anyone who wanted to learn. Although she was teaching Bible on an intellectually high level of learning, there were no prerequisites

⁷³ V. Ochs, "Words on Fire", p 268

upon entering her classes. Furthermore, her books, publications, and radio appearances served as the apparatus to publicize and encourage others to use her pedagogical teaching style.

As seen in chapter two of this research, the methodology that Leibowitz used in her classrooms contributed to the unique teaching style that she developed as a teacher. Adopting the role of both facilitator and pedagogue, she focused, among other aspects, on her choice of sources, and nature of her questions, and was ready to analyze them in depth. In her role of facilitator, according to Marla Frankel, Nehama Leibowitz focused on the learning process, and attributed less importance to the solutions.

“In contrast, the pedagogue, in most cases, formulates clear cut resolutions that attest to explicit values; a lesson to be learned and an orientation to a way of life.”⁷⁴

The uniqueness and importance of Leibowitz’s teaching style was knowing how to interweave together these two important teaching aspects and consequently implementing the right role of facilitator or pedagogue when needed.

Another important aspect of Nehama Leibowitz’s methodology is the tools that she developed in order to attain the goal of transferring responsibility to the student by teaching students strategies for learning. One of the reasons that many of the students who have studied with Leibowitz have had an unforgettable and enriching learning experience is due to the fact that she taught more than Torah, she taught a person the art of learning.

“Nehama manages to teach you all you could ever wish to learn. She teaches you how to open a text you’ve never seen before. She teaches you

⁷⁴ M.Frankel, “Abiding Challenges”, p.360

how to read it, how to lest the text uncover its meaning, and most important, how you can teach it to others.”⁷⁵

In working on this research, and gathering information about people who have studied with Leibowitz, it is clear that she distinguished herself as a teacher not only through the classes that she was teaching, but through the many other classes she enabled a person to teach him/herself.

Although Nehama Leibowitz used a methodology which allowed her to challenge and create active learning in the class, in trying to reach these goals, she was also perceived by some, as being a very rigorous teacher. Dr. Rachel Solomon, now lecturer in the Department of English at Bar-Ilan, recalled that when she first began to study with Leibowitz some years ago, she was unable to pronounce the words of the Torah correctly when her turn came to read aloud:

“I was told to leave the room. I soon had a companion. Nehama informed us that we could not rejoin the class until we had read the entire Torah, verse after verse, aloud to each other, and that we were not to attend any other lessons either until we completed the task. Permission was granted- if Nehama said so, it must be done.”⁷⁶

From this particular experience that Solomon had in Leibowitz’s class, we can perceive the severity that some of her students often refer to. Although many of her approaches could be adopted in modern day classes, the kind of austerity described in the above quote, is not often seen and accepted in modern day teachers. It is clear that she encouraged independent learning, however, she sometimes accomplished this goal through a very demanding approach.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p.271

⁷⁶ R. Solomon “Nehama Leibowitz Scholar and Teacher” Kol Emunah, Spring-Summer p.18.

Furthermore, during her classes, the answers that students wrote down in their notebooks for Leibowitz to correct could only be answered in one way. This precision of thought challenged and encouraged students to think on the one hand, but did not leave room for much independent thinking on the other hand. The pluralistic approach that she taught in her classroom, to understand the meaning through different *parshanim* (commentators), did not apply to her classroom, where she understood the different kind of students she had in her class, but still expected only one answer and one logic of thought to be correct.

The third important contribution that Nehama Leibowitz has brought upon Jewish education was the setting of a precedent, in inspiring men and women to achieve a high level of knowledge in Bible study. Nehama Leibowitz was one of the few women who acquired a level of knowledge where she could teach and be recognized as an outstanding Bible teacher by both men and women.

“Although she became of Israel’s most renowned Bible teacher, she was still able to maintain her privacy, avoiding interviews, insisting her disciples not write about her while she is still working. The teaching is what counts, the rest is superfluous.”⁷⁷

Throughout her great pedagogical achievements, she managed to maintain her privacy, and led a very modest life. She was often invited to give conferences in various cities in the United States, but seldom accepted to leave Israel, even for a short stay.

Due to the privacy that she liked to maintain, in all the documents that have been written about her, many questions still remain unanswered. Vanessa Ochs, in her book “Words On Fire” formulates some of these mysteries:

⁷⁷ V.Ochs, “Words on Fire”, p.270

“How frustrating not to know what had given her the confidence, the stamina to go into Torah when the feat seemed so much more staggering for a woman. Had more doors been open to her because she taught Bible and not Talumd? She was the world’s acknowledged role model for women in Torah learning.”⁷⁸

Vanessa Ochs describes some of the questions that many would like to know about the challenges that Nehama Leibowitz encountered in her journey as a renowned Bible teacher. Although we cannot determine any definite answers in analyzing Nehama’s writings, we could possibly find some clues.

Some of these clues can be found in the studies that she wrote. An example would be in one of her books: Studies in Bereshit, where Leibowitz discusses the Biblical passage of Rachel and Jacob:

“When Rachel saw that she had borne Jacob no children, she became envious of her sister; and Rachel said to Jacob, “Give me children or I shall die.” Jacob was incensed at Rachel, and said, “Can I take the place of God, who had denied you fruit of the womb?”⁷⁹

In her book, Nehama Leibowitz presents the different Rabbinical interpretations that could be associated with this passage such as Ramban (1194-1270) who says, that according to our sages, “whoever is childless is accounted dead”. Nehama then turns to Radak, Rabbi David Kimhi (1160-1236), where he blames Rachel for “attributing power to Jacob rather than to God to whom alone is the power.” The third commentary Nehama turns to that of Isaac Arama (fifteenth century).

“The two names” woman” (Ishah and Eve) indicate two purposes. The first teaches that woman was taken from man (ish), stressing that like him you many understand and advance in the intellectual and moral field just as did the matriarchs and many intellectual and many righteous women and prophetesses and as literal meaning of proverbs 31 about “the woman of worth”(eshet hail) indicates. The second alludes to the power of

⁷⁸ Ibid, p.281

⁷⁹ Genesis, 30:1-2

childbearing and rearing children, as indicated by name Eve-the mother of all living. A woman deprived of the power of childbearing will be deprived of the secondary purpose and be left with the ability to do good or evil or good like the man who is barren.”⁸⁰

In light of this third rabbinical interpretation, Nehama Leibowitz explains that Jacob became angry with Rachel because she had forgotten that the main purpose of her existence could be no different than that of a man’s. Nehama Leibowitz describes Rachel’s reaction as a treasonable repudiation of her function:

“... A flight from her destiny and purpose, a shirking from the duties imposed upon her, not in virtue of her being a woman, but in virtue of being a human being.”⁸¹

Through Leibowitz’s interpretation of this passage, where she bases her analysis on Rabbi Isaac Arama, we can understand that she attaches a great importance to women being treated as intellectual, moral human beings. In complaining to her husband about childbearing, Rachel may have missed the point of her being, according to Leibowitz’s opinion. Through her commentary and understanding of this passage, we can relate some of Leibowitz’s passion and aspiration for the high intellectual level that she achieved in her life, believing, as she describes in this passage, that both men and women play important roles in learning and achieving intellectual growth as part of their responsibilities as human beings.

In reading the different interpretations that Nehama Leibowitz brings in to this Biblical passage, as well as her own interpretation, we can associate some common elements between the text and Leibowitz’s life. Nehama Leibowitz did not have any

⁸⁰ N. Leibowitz, “Studies in the book of Bereshit” Parashat Vayetsch.

⁸¹ Ibid

children, and dedicated her life to teaching and learning Torah. Through the analysis that she conveys of this Biblical passage, some of the reasons that motivated her to achieve a high intellectual level of knowledge may be discerned. Like Rachel, Leibowitz may have wanted children, but still recognized the importance of the different roles that every person, man or woman, bears in this world. In assuming Leibowitz' interpretation of this biblical passage, we can associate some of her contributions to education to her understanding of her own responsibility in this world, which she may have defined as a passion to bring the Biblical text to life through its study.

Although some of our uncertainties about Nehama Leibowitz will still remain, we can only speculate and try to identify some of her views through clues that she may have left in her writings. We can determine, through the personal encounter of people who have studied with her, such as Barbara Freedman, and Tova Shimon in chapter four of this research, that Nehama Leibowitz was not driven by obvious feminist goals as an inspiration for her numerous accomplishments. However, many of her achievements have attained some feminist goals by enabling women to be considered human, intellectual, moral, and responsible. She may have simply done it for the love of learning, or as seen through the preceding example of her writings, through the belief that it is important for both men and women to attain a high level of intellectual and moral knowledge as human beings.

While recognition of Nehama Leibowitz's Bible teaching is nearly universal, during her teaching career, there still were some doors that remained closed to her because she was a woman. In 1987, after Leibowitz found herself at the center of a dispute over her right to do what she had always done: teach Torah to all kinds of Jews:

“The controversy arose when the head of the Or Torah Yeshiva, Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, invited Leibowitz to teach in one of his programs, an institute for training graduates of Israeli yeshivas to serve as rabbis throughout the Diaspora. One important part of the program would be the study of Chumash, the five books of Moses, which he wanted his students to learn through the methods of his former teacher Nehama Leibowitz. Rabbi Eliezer Schach, leader of the ultra-Orthodox Agudat Yisrael movement, said it was not proper for a woman to stand before a group of men engaged in the study of Torah.”⁸²

Leibowitz was surprised at the attention that this event caused, as she had taught both men and women without any gender concern for many years. However, she did not protest or issue any public statement. Instead, she offered to resign so that her former student, Rabbi Shlomo Riskin would not be put in a difficult situation. Riskin did not yield to the threat of losing half the participants in the program who would abide by Shach’s ban to study with a woman. Leibowitz continued to teach at the Or Torah institute where half the students honored the ban and withdrew from the program. This example, may be one of several more incidents which have not been reported, and demonstrate the challenges that Leibowitz encountered in her teaching career as a woman scholar in the Orthodox world. These however, did not deter her from the task of teaching Torah to anybody who wanted to learn, and therefore acquiring her recognition as one Israel’s best Bible teachers.

Through Nehama Leibowitz’s teachings and writings we can discern the great influence that she has had on her students and on Jewish education in general. Her emphasis and strength throughout her teaching career remained on the text, which she used to derive the richness and depth of Bible study. Although many people have contributed to Jewish education, in the past century, her contribution to education is

⁸² S. Segal, “Women of Valor”, p.113

distinguished by the strong weight and value she gave to the Biblical text. This focus on the text required a very thorough understanding of the Hebrew language, which contributed to some of the reasons many teachers considered her pedagogic style to be too sophisticated for young students. Consequently to this language barrier, her influence on teachers and students remained more prominent in Israel than any other country, and her lasting contribution attain those who have studied with her or who use her publications which are translated in many languages. Although many former students and teachers of Leibowitz, working in the field of education, do not implement her pedagogic style in their classrooms, their account of their learning experience with her, demonstrates an impression that remains with them, as a valuable, enriching and enlightening learning experience, where they have not only learned about the Bible and its relevance to modern times, but more importantly, the apparatus for effective learning which remains with them for a lifetime.

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APPENDIX 1: List of Interviews of Former Students of Nehama Leibowitz

Aigan C.: Interview on July 27, 2001

Amsel A: Interview on Jan 14, 2002

Ben Meir D: Interview Feb 12, 2001

Freedman B: Interview on June 12, 2001

Hertzberg W: Interview on June 15, 2001

Klitzner H: Interview on July 22, 2001

Levy B: Interview on August 14, 2001

Locksin M: Interview on July 22, 2001

Shimon S: Interview on June 21, 2001

Shimon T: Interview on August 28, 2001

APPENDIX 2: Nehama Leibowitz's Publications

**Studies in Bereshit, Eliner Press World Zionist Organization,
Jerusalem 1974**

**Studies in Shemot, Eliner Press World Zionist Organization,
Jerusalem 1976**

**Studies in Vayikra, Eliner Press World Zionist Organization,
Jerusalem 1993.**

**Studies in Bamidbar, Eliner Press, World Zionist Organization,
Jerusalem 1993**

**Studies in Devarim, Eliner Press, World Zionist Organization,
Jerusalem 1993.**

**Torah Insights, Eliner Press, World Zionist Organization
Jerusalem 1995**

**Limudei Parshanei Torah Ouderahim Lehoraatam, Sefer Bereshit
Eliner Press, World Zionist Organization**

**Gilyonot LeInuy Sefer Yirmiyahou. Hamahlaka Lehinouch Veletarbut Bagola.
Jerusalem**

**Lilmod Oulelamed: Eliner Press. World Zionist Organization
Jerusalem**