

**Active Learning in the Teaching of History
In Elementary and Secondary Schools**

Professor Nechama Leibowitz

**Translated from the Hebrew by Moshe Sokolow
Introduction by Jon Bloomberg**

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Introduction

Although the article for which the following serves as an introduction is certainly dated, and is predicated upon an educational scene which is rather different from the prevailing reality in our schools in the United States in the latter part of the 20th century, it is remarkable that so much of what Prof. Leibowitz wrote some 50 years ago remains relevant to today's Jewish history classroom.

In particular I would like to point to her advocacy of what might be termed the "inductive method", in which the teacher begins with the careful study of a specific primary source (or group of sources) and proceeds toward appropriate historical generalizations, a method which the five sample lessons illustrate well. My experience has shown this type of approach to be an extremely effective one in the high school classroom, not only from the standpoint of increasing student motivation but also from the standpoint of promoting understanding of the subject matter and furthering students' "skills development" in the study of history. In addition, such an approach fits nicely into the educational program of Torah high schools in an overall sense, in that it stresses that which is universally proclaimed to be a central element in a Torah education: the development of sensitivity to the meanings and nuances present in a text.

I would also cite and heartily endorse Prof. Leibowitz's suggestion that fictional works, inasmuch as they are frequently able to evoke social, cultural, and political milieu in a way that more "objective" source materials do not, be utilized as a resource by the Jewish history teacher. To mention one example which might be added to hers, for a number of years I have used a chapter from I.J. Singer's novel *The Family Carnofsky* to help students get a sense of German Jews' reactions to Hitler's rise to power in the early 1930's. The use of such works, incidentally, presents an opportunity for some integration within the curriculum, if the Hebrew literature courses and the Jewish history courses can be coordinated so as to be dealing with the same periods at the same time.

As to the concern for "literalism", with which Prof. Leibowitz begins, I would regard this as something which remains a problem to a degree. My most unscientific perception is, however, that it is not a major issue in the teaching of Jewish history in our day schools and high schools today, for the simple reason that the danger of overdoing it with abstractions and jargon is greatest when the teacher has been trained at the university or graduate level in history. Unfortunately only a small minority of today's teachers of Jewish history are in this category. I would add, though, that notwithstanding Prof. Leibowitz's comments, which I accept, I do think it both useful and worthwhile to introduce high school students judiciously to technical terminology and historical generalizations, provided that these are properly explained and illustrated, since this is the language of the discipline of history, of which Jewish history is a sub-category.

My final comments return to the matter of methods. It is my view that Prof. Leibowitz's strong condemnation of the frontal lecture method is too extreme. The lecture method has its place, so long as, like any other method, it is not overused. Lectures which are structured so as to engage the mind of the student succeed; an example might be a lecture

structured around three or four provocative questions to which the teacher suggests and evaluates possible answers. It should be added that, thankfully, Prof. Leibowitz's survey of conventional teaching methods in Jewish history is out-of-date; I have never encountered, for example, a teacher who employs the "textbook lesson". Today's skilled teachers, moreover, use additional methods which are extremely useful in overcoming the problem of student passivity. In particular I would mention the use of role-playing, either by individual students or by groups of students; this is an enormously effective way to get students involved in what they are studying. Also worthy of mention is the discussion method, in which students discuss and issue, not just the meaning of a text; this can be a particularly valuable tool for promoting critical thinking skills, since students are asked to present their own views, while considering and evaluating the merits of the views of their classmates (and their teacher!).

In conclusion, let me emphasize that the use of someone else's methods, strategies, and approaches always requires individualized adaptation to one's own strengths in terms of knowledge and teaching style. Teachers reading this article are urged to adapt its suggestions and to apply them in a way which will work successfully for them in their own classrooms.

Jon Bloomberg

Primary-source Anthologies: A Selected Bibliography by Period

Post Biblical and Rabbinic Period

1. N. Glatzer, ed., *The Judaic Tradition*
2. F. Kobler, ed., *Letters of Jews through the Ages*, v. 1
(Each of the above contains one section on this period)

Medieval Period

1. I. Abrahams, ed., *Hebrew Ethical Wills*
2. I. Agus, *Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg*
3. R. Chazan, ed., *Church, State, and Jew in the Middle Ages*
4. B. Z. Dinur, ed., *Yisrael ba-Golah* (10v.)
5. S. Freehof, ed., *A Treasury of Responsa*
6. F. Kobler, ed., *The Jew in the Medieval World*
7. N. Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands*

Modern Period

1. W. Ackerman, ed., *Out of Our People's Past*
2. Y. Arad, Y. Gutman, and A. Margalit, eds., *Documents on the Holocaust (Yad VaShem)*
3. L. Dawidowicz, ed., *Holocaust Reader*
4. N. Glatzer, ed., *Modern Jewish Thought*
5. A. Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea*
6. P. Mendes-Flohr and J. Reinharz, eds., *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*
7. I. Rabinovich and J. Reinharz, eds., *Israel in the Middle East*
8. M. Schappas, *A Documentary History of Jews in the US: 1654 – 1875*

J. B.

Preface

There are two major dangers which always lie in wait for the teaching of history and it requires great caution and special shrewdness to avoid them:

- A) The absence of contemplation, the empty exaggeration, the abstraction and generalization of expression; in a word - literalism.
- B) The absence of activity on the part of the student; in a word – passivity.

A. Literalism

Of all the school subjects, it appears to me that none is taught in such opposition to the age old demand for analysis and anti-literalism as history, and not only in our midst but throughout the world. Even before Pastalucci schools were fighting for analysis, for illustration, and from its inception the new Hebrew schools (as opposed to the Cheder) took pride in analysis and fought against the empty conceptualization devoid of tangible illustration. Only in the study of history does empty exaggeration rule the day. If, in the study of Bible, the modern teacher makes fun of the “Melamed” who explained “eilon ve-‘alah” as: ‘a type of tree,” and “tziyim ve-‘iyim” as: “an animal,” and does not rest comfortably until he explains them to his students and exhibits them at least in picture form or drawn on the board (even though sometimes the recognition of the noun neither adds to nor detracts from the understanding of that prophecy or psalm, and, quite to the contrary, it is liable to deflect the students’ interest from the main object, which is the idea), in the teaching of history the teachers feels free of the need to illustrate and he allows his lectures, the text book, and the students to use such generalized expressions and empty and vague words that no student can imagine anything when he says them other than the way the letters look when they are spelled.

With us, as with other nations, history teachers and text books—even in elementary schools are permitted to use such expressions as: “the economic collapse which followed the change of government,” “the high cultural status,” “the influence and mutual fructification of the two cultures, the Jewish and the Arab” (7th grade); “The Hellenism which led our youngsters astray” (6th grade), and many like them. An American pedagogue¹ who deals with the subject of history reports that the reason –supplied by the textbook—for the Puritans’ emigration to America, is “because they couldn’t behave as they wished in their own country,” and faithfully guarantees that in many classes the teacher will accept this answer from his students with complete satisfaction and without requiring any supplement.

While it is clear that the study of history does not allow illustration, contemplation and exhibition of subject matter to the students to the same degree as they are feasible in natural science or civics, does that mean we must conclude that they are entirely impossible and abandon our search for means of bringing the subject to life, illustrating it and exhibiting it before the student to observe and contemplate it with his minds’ eye?

¹ Henry Johnson: *Teaching of History in Elementary and Secondary Schools* (NY, 1920)

B. Passivity²

It would appear that no school subject paralyzes the student's independent activity as does the subject we are discussing. The student's entire activity consists, most of the time, of repeating the words of the teacher or the text. It makes no difference whether he is in the 6th grade in elementary school or in an upper high school grade; in both cases the student sits and remains silent. In other subjects—even outside of natural science—the opportunities for independent work and activity are obvious. The *Tanakh* student can wrestle with a difficult verse (rough comparison with other subjects, by analysis of commentaries, rational deliberation and his own knowledge of grammar) and pave the way towards his own interpretation; in learning a foreign language he can approach comprehension by means of a dictionary and a grammar book; in mathematics he solves equations and problems by utilizing rules and forms which he has learned.

In all other subjects we can see the student activating his spiritual abilities and training them, while in studying history we see him sentenced to be the recipient, the one being influenced, the silent one. All work is done by the teacher, only the reception and memorization—the unproductive and uninteresting part of the job—are done by the student.

Must the situation be this way?

The three conventional ways to study our discipline—both in our and other types of schools—have impeded the demand for observation, contemplation, internalization, the creation of a (learning) experience for the student, on one hand, and the strengthening and training of his skills, on the other.

(1) The first approach—which held sway in the past, even the near past (some would whisper: it still exists!), primarily in European countries—is the presentation of new subject matter by the teacher's frontal lecture. I shall not waste words on its negative aspects since it has been well criticized in didactic literature. Many have pointed out its drawbacks, every language of explanation has been used to point out—through bitter experience—that this approach is not useful either for formal goals, since it does not teach the student to work or think, nor for material goals, since the material presented in lectures is not absorbed and, in general, leaves no impression in the students' heart, not

² That method of teaching history which truly wishes to introduce “activity” and “contemplation” (borrowing the terms from natural science, transferring them without change, and applying them to our subject), but which concerns itself with pictures and diagrams of furniture, buildings, and clothing of different periods, or their manufacture by the students out of clay, cardboard, etc. – is clearly not a method of teaching history (which is a discipline of the humanities) but for teaching the history of objects and manufacture. Even if this has, from time to time, a value for the understanding of history – there is certainly no being satisfied with this alone, nor making it the focus (of a lesson).

The entire method only came about on account of an erroneous understanding of the application of the term “contemplation” to the discipline of history and of the restriction of the term “activity” to manual crafts which have almost no place in this discipline.

Details about this method and its application in schools may be found in Ulr. Peters: *Methodik des Geschichtsunterrichts an hoheren Lehranstalten* (Frank. a.M., 1928). 14-15.

even while the class is going on!³ Even if, once in a while, the material is swallowed up, it is spit out as soon as the lesson is over. In spite of all the above, while the frontal lecture has been chased out of all didactics it still cannot be budged from the teaching of history.

(2) The second approach to obtaining new material is reading the textbook during class and giving explanations after the teacher's every pause. The "textbook lesson" rules the day in America, and it has some followers in Israel, too.

Yet, there is a rule in didactics that learning occurs primarily from the individual, specific case and not from generalizations (this is well known to propagandists who in order to impress even an audience of adults by describing the troubles and suffering of a group, prefer to describe the predicament of an individual or single family in that group in order to play on their emotions), while summations which are lacking all the contemplative points which could possibly leave a lasting impression on (the student's) mind.

As we approach the lower grades and the need for observation and tangible illustration grows greater, the textbook gets even more brief and, in its desire to limit itself to the unimportant and fundamental, it becomes increasingly general, noncommittal, and bland. If we were to say—as the older methodicians advised—that the teacher should provide, from time to time, the tangible, individual material and place flesh and skin on the skeleton of the textbook, then there is no difference between this approach and the frontal lecture and all the criticism we noted above applies here, too.

In addition, the method of annotated reading does not suit textbooks at all, rather source books, such as *Tanakh*, *Mishnah* and literature, because those books were not written for schoolchildren and they require explanations, or because they have to be read very closely and between the lines. Textbooks, on the other hand, are written from the outset for schoolchildren in a simple, comfortable style which demands no penetrating analysis.

(3) The third approach, which was followed in most German schools before the war, is the developmental approach. The teacher does not lecture on all the material, rather he relates some of the parts and asks the students questions about causes and results, the sequence of events and their relationships. This way the teachers "extracts" the new material from the students.

This approach, while it appears to activate the student and converts him from silent to speaking, is really an illusion. The teacher isn't "extracting" from the student but depositing the desirable answers into his mouth, by means of his questions. The student

³ Even if we assume that the teacher is an exceptionally gifted lecturer who can excite the students and motivate them, in any event the strong effect he may be able to create at the start of the school year will surely wear off after a few weeks on account of the repetition of these periods of excitement on fixed days and at fixed time each week. By the second month of the school year the students' interest and excitement will dissipate and their place will be taken by a gentle sweet sleep just like every other class which depends upon frontal lecturing.

does not have to think and his answers are not born of his spiritual endeavors but they are simply what his teacher wants to hear – like a mechanical echo of the teacher himself. (Students who are accustomed to learning by this method develop a kind of sixth sense by which they guess the answers the teacher wants and they can answer without any thought.)

Besides this, it is worse than the other two approaches on account of the lack of truth in it, and on account of the false impression it conveys that historical occurrences do not have to be studied from documents or traditions (oral or literary), rather they can be arrived at by rational deliberation, and logical analogies (like mathematics, for instance). In doing so, this approach falls wide of the mark set by its own discipline.

“The emotional and intellectual participation of the learner in the experiences of (past generations,”⁴ without which there is surely no value in studying one’s national history, cannot be achieved by means of any of these three approaches. Not emotional participation, since how can the student feel the experience, how can his passion be kindled, if instead of showing him fathers, mothers, and children; a particular tailor, butcher or tanner; living conditions improving or impoverishing; persecutions, emigrations, studying Torah and dying for her; instead of flesh and blood human beings like himself and his father – he is fed “situations,” “social strata” (high and low), “regimes” (social and economic) which are either “strengthened” or “collapsing”, and with all this, lines and lines of names, names, names...

Nor is there room here for intellectual participation since the student has no opportunity to think, to understand, to comprehend, to distinguish between things or compare them to one another, because everything is generously provided to him ready-made and all he has to do is listen repeat, and remember.

In the following five examples of lessons for both elementary and secondary schools, I would like to demonstrate different approaches to the study of Jewish History by which means it is possible, I think, to avoid the mistakes described above and to meet the requirements of which I spoke. These approaches: the use of a single source, a group of sources, belle lettres, a source and belles lettres, are not novelties and in didactic literature.⁵ One can find instructive examples from general history or from an author’s

⁴ B. Dinabourg (= Ben Zion Dinur). “The Last 100 Years in our Schools,” supplement to *Davar* #2209; 24 Av 5692.

⁵ Keating: *Studies in Teaching History in Secondary Schools* (London, 1927), which cites many examples of the use of sources, and written exercises based on sources, for the middle high-school grades. Cf., in particular, E. Willmanns: *Die Quelle in Geschichtsunterricht* (Berlin, 1932), for the high-school.

The teacher of Jewish history will find particular interest in the lesson about the battles of the Hasmoneans –based upon 1 Maccabees cpt. 1—brought in the *Lehrerbuch zum Grundriss der Gesch. Fur Oberstufe* (Der Neue Geschichtsunterrichts, Band I; Teubner, 1929).

A good, detailed example of the use of ancient literature can be found in an interesting book by Kaweran: *Alter u. neuer Geschichtsunterricht* (1925).

The first and last book on this list—and all other mentioned in this article—can be found in the national library in Jerusalem.

national history. Rather, the conditions in those authors' countries are different from our own; they have historical chrestomathies, booklets of sources for every era and of every type, and numerous reference books which make the work of the teacher much easier.

I should like to show by means of these examples that even if we lack all these we can use these approaches, in any event, even before we acquire all the means at the disposal of the teachers abroad. All these lessons were given once or several times in class during the past years and are, therefore, the fruits of experience and not of imagination.

The sample lessons are:

- (a) the activities of the men of the Great Assembly (6th grade)
- (b) life of the Jewish villager in 18th century (8th grade)
- (c) the kidnapped children (8th grade)
- (d) the essence of Hassidism (Upper high school)
- (e) the Jewish question at the Congress of Vienna (Upper high school)

Lesson 1: The Activities of the Men of the Great Assembly (6th grade)

I have deliberately chosen material without wars, or other tangible activities such as building cities or discovering countries, and without names (those same names which often are of so much help, particularly in our area, in creating for teacher and student a false sense of knowledge where none really exists), but abstract material, since my intention is to demonstrate how abstract material, too, can be made tangible.

Let me stipulate that the purpose of the lesson is to impart to the students a concept of the activities of the Men of the Great Assembly, and to demonstrate that they desired “to educate the people through worship and deed, to realize the ideals of Torah in their national life in such a manner that Judaism would not longer be monopolized by a few but would become the possession of the general public in a form which each and every person will find suitable.”⁶

When students are learning new material, it is good to first pose a question to them and then present the new material as an answer to that question. Otherwise we teachers appear, all too often, as someone trying mightily to solve a great problem for a friend while the friend doesn’t feel it is problematic at all. It is even better if the teacher doesn’t actually pose the question but directs the class in such a way that the question arises by itself. Although, in truth, it is the teacher who is stimulating the questioning, the students will feel as though it were their own and that will arise their interest.

For this purpose it is good, perhaps, to begin this lesson...by reading Nechemia 12: 15-16 (which begins): “In those days I saw people in Judea threshing wheat on Shabbat,” etc.⁷ (I presume that these verses are not new and that they were studied in previous lessons.) Immediately thereafter the teacher should read aloud the following passage from I Maccabees 2, 32-41:

“They (the Greeks) arose, suddenly, to fall upon them on Shabbat saying to them: how long will you refuse to obey the King? ...And the men in their midst did not raise their hands to hurl a stone or to silence them...and they fell upon them on Shabbat and killed all those in the cave.”

The teacher should indicate the number of years which had elapsed between the two

⁶ Talmudi: “The Talmud”, *HaShiloach* 7, 496.

Clearly all analyzes of the relationship of the Great Men of Assembly to the Soferim and the latter Prophets—or whether the Great Men of Assembly and the Soferim are identical—have no place in elementary school. It is also possible to posit a different goal for this lesson but that is not my concern now. My intention is only to show the ways which can be taken to insure that the teacher’s goal (whatever it is) won’t remain unachieved but will be made into a reality.

⁷ There is no need to describe, necessary, and even easy to teach the era of Ezra and Nechemiah in elementary school through selected chapters. I deliberately did not want to bring a model lesson from this period because it is methodologically simple and straightforward. The chapters concerning the building of the walls and the opposition of the Samaritans, etc., have all the necessary ingredients for a vibrant lesson, close to the child’s heart.

incidents and since numbers don't signify much to children in this grade, he should concretize the number by counting the number of generations or the like.

After the preliminary reading—and certainly after a second reading—the question should arise in the class regarding the striking change in the nation's attitude towards Shabbat. Immediately the class will take a critical attitude: How can we speak of “the nation” when we don't know whether everyone behaved this way? (Students at this early age—and not only at this age—are quick to offer superficial generalizations and the battle against this must begin in the lower grades. If you draw the class' attention to this error, it will try itself to correct these kinds of mistakes. Here we are helped by a psychological factor: the joy in catching someone—even oneself—in a much repeated error; the joy of making progress.)

The question regarding the instruments of this change leads us to the question of the people's leaders and educators between these two eras and to the means they employed to exert their influence. At this point it is possible to review, briefly, the means and activities utilized by Ezra and Nechemiah. Now we come to the main part of the lesson, to the presentation of new material: What were the means used by the leaders who followed Ezra and Nechemiah? Here there is a need to supply the student with facts; it is not the place for deliberation or for questions and answers.

Each student should be given a sheet with the following four texts:

א) עשרה תקנות תיקן עזרא שקורין במנחה בשבת וקורין בשני ובחמישי ודנין בשני ובחמישי (בבא קמא פב, ע"א)

ב) אנשי כנסת הגדולה תקנו להם לישראל ברכות ותפלות קדושות והבדלות (ברכות לג, ע"א)

ג) עמדו נביאים שבירושלים וקבעו כ"ד מעמדות כנגד כ"ד משמרות כהנים ולווים (תוספתא תענית ד', ב')

אלו הן מעמדות לפי שנאמר " צו את בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם את קרבני לחמי לאישי ריח ניחוחי תשמרו להקריב לי במועדו". וכי היאך קורבנו של אדם קרב והוא איננו עומד על גביו? התקינו הנביאים הראשונים כ"ד משמרות. על כל משמר ומשמר היה מעמד בירושלים של כוהנים, של לווים ושל ישראלים. הגיע זמן המשמר לעלות- כהנים ולווים עולים לירושלים, וישראל שבאותו משמר מתכנסין בעריהן וקורין במעשה בראשית. (משנה תענית ד', ב')

ד) כיצד מעלין את הביכורים?

כל העיירות שבמעמד מתכנסות לעיר של מעמד ולנין ברחובה של עיר ולא היו נכנסין לבתים. ולמשכים, היה הממונה אומר: "קומו ונעלה ציון אל בית ה' אלוקינו". (משנה בכורים ג', ב')

ר"ע מברטנורא: כ"ד מעמדות היו בישראל כנגד כ"ד משמרות כהונה. ואנשי המעמד הישראליים היו שולחים מכל ישראל לעמוד על הקורבן עם הכהנים והלויים שבאותו משמר כל אחד בשבת הקבועה לו. והן נקראין: "אנשי מעמד".

הקרובים מביאים תאנים וענבים והרחוקים מביאים גרגורות וצימוקים. והשור הולך לפנייהם וקרניו מצופות זהב ועטרה של זית בראשו. החליל מכה לפנייהם עד שמגיעים קרוב לירושלים. הגיעו קרוב לירושלים שלחו לפנייהם ועטרו את בכוריהם. הפחות, הסגנים והגזברים יוצאים לקראתם לפי כבוד הנכנסים היו יוצאים. וכל בעלי אומנויות שבירושלים עומדים לפנייהם ושואלים בשלום: הכינו אנשי מקום פלוני, באתם בשלום. (שם, ג, ג)

Before we begin our analysis, let us examine these texts one by one. Numbers 1 and 2 need no linguistic explanation beyond the word “kedushot” since the students do not know that it refers to the Kiddush of Shabbat eve. 4 should be known to the students from previous grades since it is printed in 4-5th grade readers and is studied in the context of Bikkurim. 3 requires explanation.⁸

Now the class should be asked whether it can detect an overall line or direction among all these four sources, or among some of them. This direction will emerge—bit by bit—from the classroom discussion. Permission to speak should first be given to the more superficial students, those who see the external and obvious. Let them make their own contribution first, followed by the better students, and, finally, the penetrating ones who spot what the others have missed. Finally, the review and summation can be conducted, again, by the moderator or weak students. The Superficial students spot the connection between 3 and 4—an external connection since both mention the Beit haMiqdash and the service connected with it which is performed outside the Beit ha Miqdash but in conjunction with it. The fourth text emphasizes celebration, publicity, mass participation – the participation of the Israelites in the service of God; even if they are forbidden to offer sacrifices, they are given another way of participating.

From this observation, the students—or the teacher—can make the connection to text: The Great Men of the Assembly were not satisfied with the situation (described in 3 and 4, i.e. of “vicarious” participation), so they instituted individual prayer; not only in the Temple, not only in public, but even at home, alone with the family, and including women and children. The value of Kiddush and Havdalah for establishing a pattern of religious life within the family is well-known to every child in whose home they are observed. In any event, it will be easy for the teacher to arouse the feeling of their importance.

Here the students, too, can easily see—even without the teacher’s help—that the Great Men of the Assembly intended to beautify and sanctify the Shabbat; not be content with the prohibition of work which, by itself, is negative and spiritually unfulfilling. Afterwards attention should be paid to the institution of Berakhot and Tefillot. What is the value of a fixed text for national unity? What is its individual educational value? When we move along to text we will encounter the value of public Torah reading and of including the whole community in its understanding, and we will recognize that the Great Men of the Assembly were continuing the policy which Ezra began.

⁸ One must always pay attention that the text which the teacher wishes to use for a history lesson should be easily understood linguistically and thematically so that the lion’s share of the time can be devoted to using it for the main purpose of the lesson—learning history. If the text requires many linguistic or thematic clarifications before the class can get to the heart of the matter then it has lost in time whatever it might have gained (in content).

One can, of course, follow the opposite course, beginning with Ezra's institution of Torah reading in 1 and continuing with the institution of prayers in 2, and so on. Choose whichever way promises to open the class up and just make sure they don't digress.

In conclusion:

The Great Men of the Assembly tried to bring all the people (not just certain elements) nearer to a life of Torah and to have a knowledge and love of Torah penetrate each and every home, and they are the ones who fashioned the practices which are the most characteristic of the religious Jewish experience down to our own day.

The use of sources in this lesson is not intended to instruct the students in historical analysis, to bring them into the historian's workshop, or to show them how an edifice is constructed of small and scattered stones; none of these purposes suit an elementary school. The sources were cited before the class only to insure that the final conclusion, the goal of the entire lesson, will not be abstract and empty of all meaning—just “words”—but full of insights and capable of awakening in the students desirable associations.

Even though the text, in this lesson, serves as an illustration, it will nevertheless lose all its values—methodologically—if it is brought down only as an illustration (as textbooks habitually cite sources), that is to say after the main abstract has been made by the teacher or by the textbook. In such a case the student only has to listen and absorb the new material which is being served to him in an already crystallized form (by the teacher or the book) and studying the source does not require more than affirming what he has already heard.

This work is not individualized work and deprives the student of any opportunity for activity or thought. The source—if we utilize it—must be given to the student before he knows what he is expected to discover in it, and it really must serve as a source from which the student will draw his knowledge by means of intensive study.

Lesson 2: The Life of the Village Jew in 18th Century Poland (8th Grade)

The objective here is the same as that of the preceding lesson: The students' acquisition of concepts through activity – this time carefully utilizing literature.

I shall not expound here on the theoretical question of to what extent literature may be used for the sake of learning history and what are its mandatory limits, advantages and risks, because the objective of this essay is to give examples of applied work. I shall make just one prefatory note: Historical belle-lettres should not be limited to stories or poems woven about historical figures or events.⁹ Such stories—even if most of the details they provide or events they describe are actually historical—will make only slight impressions if they do not contain any of the *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the era under discussion.

For these reasons there is no point in using such books as *Zikhronot le Beit David* despite the fact that children enjoy reading them. There is no cause, of course, for objecting to their being read at home—they will even help in the recollection of the facts—but they will provide no help in understanding an era or its spirit. Preference should be given to historical stories whose heroes are not historical figures but anonymous, and whose deeds are not important historical events but fictional ones, stories about “human nature,” providing their heroes belong to the era under discussion and their deeds, thoughts, speech and manners are imbued with the correct *zeitgeist*.

It seems to me that the story *Ba'erev* by Feierberg fills most of these qualifications. (The story was printed in artistic anthologies and its major part—which is important for us—was also printed in *Lashon VaSefer* vol. IV which students can easily obtain.) For the purpose of this lesson on Jewish village life in Poland the students should prepare the story at home. A class which is first beginning to study according to this method should be told in advance to look out for specific items. A more experienced class should be told nothing and its students should determine, while reading, what they will have to discuss during the next lesson and they can even be educated to the point where many of them can even prepare the syllabus in advance!

First the students should examine the economic aspect of Jewish life. Through the example of Yosef, the tax farmer, in our story they will clarify the terms: *Mokhsan* (tax collector) and *Chokher* (tax farmer), and through the example of his master, term *Paritz* (squire). What is the attitude of the Paritz towards the Jew? The story says that “he liked him.” What does that mean? “He could command him to sing Zemirot of Shabbat before him.” Every quotation must be examined from all sides. The students should also read between the lines to discover the meaning of this “liking” and of these dances.

⁹ This specificity can be found in many methodological books dealing with the problem of historical belles-lettres and their place in the study of history. See the book by Keating cited above (#5).

In opposition to this specificity one can read the instructive views of Kaewran: *Sociologischer Ausbau des Geschichteunterricht* (Berlin, 1921).

On account of this “liking,” the Paritz did not charge him heavy interest on his tax payments so “Yosef dwelt in peace”, and “made a living, thank God.” The students, however, will discover immediately that all of Yosef’s peace and quiet was contingent upon the whim of the Paritz and had no stability. “In eight days you must bring me all your back taxes” (he could demand), and he could also demand more than he deserved. He could even demand his son and forcibly baptize him and there was no one to whom to turn because the Paritz was a law unto himself: “And if you don’t—I’ll throw you and your wife into the dungeon.” Nor was this an empty threat: “The Paritz has commanded that you be given 50 lashes with a damp whip.” Where was justice? Where were the authorities?

There is less to be learned from this story about the attitude of the village farmers towards the innkeeper. Because the Jew was “correct and proper and engaged all day in Torah and prayer,” the Gentiles knew that Yoske was “a holy man of God, and they respected him,” which did not prevent them—when they were drunk or thirsty for whisky—from “tearing down the walls of his house until not a stone stood in place.” The one-sidedness of this description is conspicuous and it would do well to complement it with a passage from A.Z. Rabinowitz: “In the Days of Chelmnitzky,” which describes entirely different attitudes of gentiles towards Jews. Nevertheless, the words of one village youngster to the son of the Jewish tenant farmer are quite instructive: ‘My father told me that your father, the Zhid, was a good man who never beat his wife.’ The way the students will discover, one by one (without the teacher lecturing or asking questions which are really a lecture in disguise), the main outlines of the life of a Jewish tax farmer. Instead of the expression: “Semi-enslaved status subjugated to the nobility,” or similar expressions which appear in the textbooks and say nothing to the students, there appears before them a real-life man, flesh and blood, in whose joy they can rejoice and whose pain they, too, can suffer.

The pupils’ assignment is abstraction and generalization and the teacher must be on guard and attentive to what in the story is typical and given to generalization, and what is incidental and an exception to the rule.

Only after this phenomenon—the Jewish tax farmer—stands before the students clearly and tangibly, will they be prepared to hear the teacher address the causes of this phenomenon. If the teacher lectures them now on the absence of a middle-class in Poland, about the inability and unconcern of the nobility to manage their own affairs on one hand, the boorishness of the peasants on the other, and the in-between situation of the Jew with all its dangers and disadvantages, there is a hope that even these abstract notions will now find a receptive ear since they are coming to explain a concrete phenomenon which they already know.

I cannot agree at all with R. Archer: *The Teacher of History in Elementary Schools* (London, 1916) who recommends the opposite approach: first, to explain the problem in abstract terms and then to enliven and animate it through readings in literature. (He states) “The nature and cause of the problem must be clearly stated and when an intellectual comprehension has been secured subsequent lessons and reading will gradually make the impression vivid.” The problem, as I see it, is that at this age there is

no intellectual comprehension of the problem before the tangible illustration has created an impression.

In general, at this age only a description of a situation is possible and not its causes and developments. The causes which brought the situation about and the slow developments (often hidden) which preceded it, are of no interest at this age. The student can speak about them (using the words he heard from the teacher or read in his textbook) but there is always the suspicion that he is mouthing words he doesn't understand and cannot imagine. At this age it is better to give something experiential than evolutionary.

A question may arise during class (and if not, it is worth the teacher's while to raise it) whether we can rely upon the story for our facts as though it was historical source. Even if we assume that its author studied the sources, analyzed and inspected them, there is still the possibility that he exaggerated or falsified them. Most of the time the students will have to rely on the teacher's say so and accept those facts but in our case we can give them the opportunity to criticize the author by themselves. Each student should receive this text which is an actual unprocessed historical source which they can compare to the story and discover how successful the author was in keeping his descriptions truthful"

"From the diary of an average Paritz in Vilna in the mid-18th century:"¹⁰

January 5th. The tax collector, Hirschke, still owes me 91 thaler. I had to demand payment. According to the conditions, if he does not make payment I am entitled to imprison him, his wife and his children for as long as it takes him to pay.

Yesterday I gave orders for him to be arrested and shackled and kept with the pigs in the sty but his wife and children I left in the Kretchma (inn), except for the youngest, Leize, whom I brought to the Church and instructed that he be taught the catechism and prayers. He is a boy with many abilities and I intend to have him baptized. I have written the Episcopus (church official) in this regard and he promised to attend this ceremony with pleasure and to help in his preparation.

At first he refused to make the sign of the cross and recite his prayers, but the instructor beat him and today he already ate pig. The priest, Bonefacius...an excellent monk, worked hard at his conversion and tried to break his childish stubbornness.

(Three weeks later he writes:)

Jews from Berditchev have paid Hirschke's debt of 91 thalers, plus a gift...I ordered Hirschke's release but I wanted to hold on to the boy who had entered the bosom of the Catholic Church but the Jews badgered me without letup until I had to release him, too. I am sure, however, that the

¹⁰ S. Dubnow: *Toledot haChassidut* Vol. 1, p. 10.

Jew will miss his next payment and Leize will fall into my hands and become a Christian. I must wait until March 24th.

It is more difficult, though no less important, to use this story for the recognition of the spiritual side of Polish Jewish village life in the 18th century. The story shows the students, the fears, the terror and the panic which surrounded the lives of the Jews and which appear in the guise of demons and spirits (such as Lillith and Samael) which can be overcome only by oaths, incantations, charms, etc., which only special individuals—such as the Ba'al Sehm Tov or Rabbi Leib Sarhas—know how to prepare.

Strange things such as these cannot easily be explained to students who lack the assumptions necessary for their understanding. The story, however, makes them somewhat more intelligible by identifying Lillith and the demons with the world of the Paritz, a world of drunken revelry, while the rabbis and his charms attract the boy to the world of Torah, a world of purity, modesty, and goodness.

It is possible that things appear more rational this way than otherwise, perhaps more superficial, but in any event out of the atmosphere which permeates the story the child will get an idea of what that life was like and what it entailed. This is significantly better than telling students that “there appeared in Poland, at that time, many books about theoretical and practical mysticism, as well as books about moral behavior, which made their readers melancholy,” or, as one text book puts it: “that the pogroms of 1648 poured a spirit of confusion over the impoverished Jews of Poland.”

What can students do with sentences such as these? What can they add to them?

A Note:

The same material, on “Polish Jewish village life in the 18th century,” is studied in high-school on the basis of an historical source which is not inferior to the story discussed above, namely the biography of Solomon Maimon, part one. Detailed description appears, here, on a broad background. A long line of characters appears before the reader: (Maimon's) grandfather; his father the scholar; the teacher who cannot teach; the rabbi studying to teach; the trespassing tenant; the lazy and indolent tenant; the impoverished tenant whose bedroom, inn, kitchen, chicken coop and barn are all in one and the same room – and who still hires a teacher for his sons; the wealthy innkeeper trying to find a learned groom for her daughter; the Paritz and his antics; the priest who arranges a blood libel; the government official who is subservient to the Paritz; etc., etc.

This picture is rich and multi-colored, yet it sets before the student a specific methodological task. This source, like all memoirs, is subjective, and the personality of the author—unusual and strange, sarcastic and ironic—required special caution and criticism. It is best, then, to have the students read the whole book (except for the philosophical parts) in order to recognize the author's personality, his character, and the events in his life, and only afterwards should they approach the analysis of part one—

which deals with Poland—in order to understand where and when things appear to him as though in a crooked mirror.

We should also point out that if the teacher wants to rely upon entire books during his lessons—memoirs, diaries, etc.—the students should not be required to read them from one class to the next or even two weeks in advance, this work should be done over summer vacation. Students' reading over the summer tend to be accidental, disorganized, and fruitless. It would be preferable if the Jewish History teacher, along with the Hebrew literature teacher, would arrange the students' readings over the summer according to the era and the subject they will study during the coming year.

Lesson 3: The Kidnapped Ones (“Cantonists”) – 8th Grade

This lesson, while also relying upon literature, will take another direction. The students prepare:

- A. Peretz: *BiZekhut Mi*
- B. Asch: *Ba’ Akhsaniah*
- C. Y. Cohen: *HaChatufim*
- D. Steinberg: *HaChatufim*
- E. Shimonowitz: *Doron*

(All appear in *Terumot*)¹¹

In the Mizrahi schools, where *Terumot I* is read in grade 7 and II in grade 8, this material is within easy reach of every student.

Before us we have an example of how two subjects, Hebrew Literature and Jewish History, can work together even if they are not being taught by the same teacher. The students read some of these stories and poems at home, and others in Hebrew class – clarifying any linguistic difficulties (although none of them pose any special problems). Next they have to organize the material and write a syllabus for the topic “The Kidnapped Ones” according to those sources.

The superficial ones among them write a syllabus such as this:

- I. “The Kidnapped Ones” according to the story, “Akhsaniah.”
 - II. “The Kidnapped Ones” according to “BiZekhut Mi.”
- Etc.

Better students can easily point out that this agenda is impractical. Since there are items which appear in each and every source, this agenda would have us repeat ourselves over and over again. On the other hand, no one story presents all the information in all its facets, and according to this agenda it will remain fragmented.

Most students will arrange the material chronologically:

- I. The children before the kidnapping

¹¹ The *Terumot* reader, in three volumes, is very useful for the study of Jewish History in this fashion, and provides numerous opportunities for cooperation between the Hebrew and Jewish History teachers.

For example (apart from the examples brought in this, and in the following lessons), we can cite the sources it brings pertaining to the various “aliyot” to Israel; The letter of Nachmanides; of the Shelah (Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz); of Rabbi Avraham of Kalish (all in Vol. II). Sources pertaining to the history of Zionism appear in Vol. III.

If this book were only used to its maximum the teacher of history—in certain eras—will not be able to complain about a lack of suitable sources to enliven the material and make it tangible.

- II. The kidnapping itself
- III. The children between the kidnapping and their military service
- IV. Military service
- Etc.

Into each topic will go the appropriate material from each and every story. The students can compare the two syllabi and easily see the advantages of the second.

There will be some more sophisticated students who will arrange the material according to characters. Here is such a syllabus which I once received from a student:

- I. The child's teachers before the Kidnapping
 - A. His Parents
 - B. His Rebbe
- II. The Kidnapper
- III. The educator who instructed him after his kidnapping
- IV. The Kidnapped child
 - A. The child who withstood the ordeal
 - B. The child who did not withstand the ordeal
 - Etc.

This activity, writing syllabi, comparing one to another, and criticizing them, has a great formal value when it is assigned to students. (It is a good idea to give all the syllabi to a committee of 5 to 7 students to sort them, and to arrange them according to categories. Then they should write representative examples of each category—with typical advantages and disadvantages—on the blackboard, side by side, so the entire class can compare them and judge them.)

Up to this point the work is done during Hebrew class; now we turn to the Jewish History class. After the material is sorted and clarified it will allow each student to “participate, emotionally, in his national past;” to feel the pain of the father, the suffering of the child, the cruelty of the kidnapper, and the heroism of the martyred soldier. Now he will be both interested and prepared to receive information on how this phenomenon came about, on military law, on the position and responsibility of the Jewish community vis a vis the government, etc.

A class which has been trained in this method of active learning and independent thinking will certainly sense that something is missing from all these stories: Not one of the relates the fate or status of these kidnap victims after their return home. What was their status within the Jewish community? What was their economic status? What shape or form did their Judaism take? Questions such as these—if they arise by themselves—are the surest sign that the material was studied well and they are the most important fruits of the active learning method.

As an answer to these questions the students should be reminded of Peretz's *Meshulach* which they have read in Hebrew class. This story tells of a “Cantonist” in his old age, and the class should discuss the common denominators between the *meshulach* and many of

his coreligionists, as opposed to what his unique characteristics were. Some of the better students can be assigned to read the memoirs of Mazei regarding his meeting with “Nicholaiev Soldiers”, and to report on this to the class. The teacher can also report on his readings of cantonist memoirs—just relating various incidents without drawing any conclusions—without saying that cantonists “generally resided in...,” or generally found it difficult to associate with...,” etc. Making these generalizations is the students’ responsibility after hearing the typical fate of several isolated incidents.

While in Lesson Two the students’ major activity was correct reading, examining every single detail, and acquiring a feeling for the “Zeitgeist”, this lesson requires, in addition, making connections between facts, combining them, and drawing a picture of an historical phenomenon based upon various stories.

Lesson 4: The Essence of Chassidut (High School, Upper Grades)

In this lesson I shall illustrate a different combination of literacy and historical sources. In explaining the essence of Chassidut, its idea and aspirations, to high school students, there is the omnipresent danger that a student (who has never before heard of the principles of Chassidut and whose teacher has no occasion to teach them on account of this fundamental ignorance) will latch on to the superficial, assimilate 2-3 phases from the textbooks about the emphasis on emotion and intention—as opposed to the actual performance of a mitzvah or Talmud study—and arrive at an erroneous impression. He might conclude that the Ba'al Shem Tov and his students wanted “approximately” the same thing as the Reform rabbis in Germany—except that the latter were, apart from this, “terrible assimilationists” while the former apparently were not. (Moreover, there certainly are things, even in the analytical literature, which are not far from this notion, or which are capable—after they have rolled about a bit—of creating this impression when they arrive in the student’s mind in their final incarnation.)

In order to combat such erroneous idea and in order to provide the students with a full and complete understanding of such abstract material, it is good to assign them to read the story of the boy who whistled in shul on Yom HaKippurim—as it appears, in its source, in *Shivchei haBesht*—and compare it to S. Asch’s adaptation, entitled: *The Village Tzaddik*.

The story, in its original form, was published both in *Terumot* Vol. I, and in Kahana’s *Chassidut*. For the ease of the reader I will present it here in its entirety:

God desires (Good) Intentions

A villager, who always attended Yamin Noraim services in the Beit Midrash of the “Besht”, had a retarded son who could not even learn in the alphabet—let alone recite a holy passage—and his father never took him to town on Yamin Noraim because of his ignorance. When the boy became Bar Mitzvah his father took him along for Yom HaKippurim in order to make sure that he wouldn’t eat on account of his lack of knowledge and comprehension.

The boy had a flute which he always played while he sat in the field tending his sheep and cattle. He took this flute in his pocket without his father’s knowledge. All day long the boy sat silently in the Beit Midrash. When it came Mussaf time he said: “Father, I have my flute with me and I want very much to play it.” His father was astonished and growled at him: “Don’t you dare do that!” The boy was forced to restrain himself.

At Mishnah time he said, again: “Father, let me play my flute.” His father cursed him roundly and warned him strenuously not to dare do it, but he could not take the flute away from the boy because it was “muqtzeh.” After Mincha he again asked his father to let him play something, and

when the father recognized his overpowering desire to play he asked the boy: “Where are you keeping the flute?”

The boy showed him, and his father grabbed hold of the pocket to prevent him from playing. He continued to pray the Ne’ilah service while all along holding fast to the pocket with the flute. In the midst of the service the boy could restrain himself no longer and he forcefully freed the flute from the pocket and played a loud note. All the worshipers were astonished, but the “Besht” cut his regular prayers short and said: “This boy, with his flute, has elevated all of our prayers.”

He then explained: This boy cannot say a single word. Yet when he saw and heard—all this holy day long—how Jews were praying, his own spark of holiness was fanned into a veritable flame. A learned person can clothe the burning holy passion with the words of prayer before God, but this is ignorant and did not find within any other means to satisfy his thirst than to play his flute before God.

The more his father tried to prevent him the greater his desire grew, time, and time again, until his soul almost burst, and with the force of his passion he played his flute with a truthfulness of purpose and without misdirection for the exclusive sake of God’s own name. God desires (good) intentions and his pure breath was so pleasing before Him that it carried up with it all of our prayers.

(From the *Shivchei HaBesht*)

(“*The Village Tzaddik*” is printed in almost all the popular anthologies in Israel.)

The students have to prepare the two stories at home and compare them. (The teacher can also require a written comparison in either of two forms: (a) The students should note for themselves the principal differences in the form of slogans which they may consult during the class discussion; (b) They must prepare a detailed comparison and hand it in to the teacher who will begin the class discussion by returning those papers and reading aloud one of the weather ones.)

Someone without a sharp eye, or who has never taught critical reading in school, will only see the external difference: A literary form, descriptions of nature, psychological insights into the boy—in the adaptation, and simplicity, brevity, and just plain fact—in the source. It is quite possible that someone will get up and say that there are no differences in fact and that they share a common idea. An answer such as this affects the good, intensive students like a battle cry and they will immediately fall upon the one who says so and prove him wrong.

In order to introduce some order into the discussion the teacher can ask for a comparison of the characters: the boy – in the source and in the adaptation. It is also possible to begin at the begin at the end with the words of the “Besht” which express the central idea, and

show how they were changed in the adaptation. At this point it is possible to see the tendency of all the changes and then show how they are manifest in the details of the two stories in both marginal affairs and in the characters, until it is clear that the entire subject received a different form in the adaptation because the adapter gave his story a different purpose. This is what should be clarified in class: The boy in the source is not the ideal religious chassidic type and his flute playing is not superior to established forms of prayer—as Asch suggests in “The Village Tzaddik”—but quite the opposite. The ideal, always, is the established text of prayer—if it is accompanied by the necessary intention—and it was this which kindled the flame within the retarded boy whose prayer was accepted, willingly, because he had no alternative: “He did not know how to dress the holy flames of his passion with the words of prayer.”

Since communal prayer, in the source, is not regarded as dead rote, frozen and diametrically opposite to the living true religious feeling, neither did the community, in the source, wish “to trample and the whistling child”—as Asch states, but they were only “astonished by the sound.” Therefore the boy, too, in the original, is not the wonder-child of the adaptation, but an ordinary and simple retarded child who never heard the voice of God in the field in the croaking of frogs, neither was it his habit of whistling as a sign of thanks to God, but it was only in the Shul, and under the influence of the community of worshippers. Nor is there room in the source for him to symbolically run out of the shul—something of which Chassidut, of course, never dreamt.

The source does place a higher (than usual) value of the *‘am ha’aretz*; it is compassionate towards the simple and the foolish, but it wages no war against established prayer and against tradition, which is quite the aim of the adaptation. The discussion can be expanded from here to include correct and erroneous views of Chassidut and an explanation of how, and why, the latter came about.

This lesson—and the entire discussion takes no more than an hour—is important not only for itself as an explanation of a Chassidut notion, but even more important as a paradigm of all kinds of historical forgeries and perversions. The student sees, visibly, how later generations read their own thoughts own previous movements, and this sharpens his historical insight and critical acumen—surely a worthwhile return on an investment of one hour’s lesson.

Lesson 5 – The Jewish Question at the Congress of Vienna (High School, Upper Grades)

In the upper high-school grades, of course, the need for observation and substantiation is not as great as in lower grades because the students' ability for abstract thinking has grown in the interim. (Here too, however, the teacher must check periodically to see whether the student understands what he says and here, too, the danger exists of meaningless chatter.) On the other hand, the requirement of independent work on the part of the student has grown considerably and now includes spiritual perseverance and the use of rational abilities in problem solving.

We distribute to the students the following sheet (entitled): 'The Jewish Question at the Congress of Vienna.'¹²

A) The Prussian Resolution:

The three Christian religious sects enjoy rights throughout Germany and members of the Jewish faith should be granted equivalent civil rights – provided they fulfill all their civil obligations.

B) The Austrian Resolution:

Members of the Jewish faith continue to enjoy the rights they obtained in Germany in the past and they will be eligible to obtain civil rights to the extent that they assume all civil obligations.

Humbolt's Objection:

The statement that Jews are "eligible to obtain (civil) rights" does not suit, nor apply to, political legislation. If we say that they are eligible for rights then we are obliged to grant from their rights, apart from the fact that it is exaggerated to speak, in generalizations, about "civil rights."

The Prussian version can be interpreted variously and yet it still is clearer and more beneficial for the Jews. The promise to uphold past rights runs the risk of arousing great opposition in countries which are governed by the French monarchic system.

Objections:

1. Bavaria opposes the first paragraph and declares: "This paragraph has no place in the first document of the treaty and these reforms—as long as they do not limit the internal affairs of states—should be submitted for discussion to all the treaty nations."
2. The Hanseatic League objects as well and states that the problem of Jewish citizenship is such an inclusive topic that it cannot be dealt with in this basic legislative document.

¹² Collected sources from Salo Baron: *Die Judenfrage auf dem Wiener Kongress*, and Max J. Kohler: *Jewish Rights at International Congresses*.

The proper time to deal with this problem will be in a discussion of freedom of the press or the organization of general charitable institutions and will appear as such before the forum of the treaty nations.

C. Holstein Resolution #1:

Members of the Jewish faith—as long as they fulfill all of a citizen’s duties to his country—will be guaranteed established civil justice. Details of this justice can be discussed at a forum of the treaty nations.

D. Holstein Resolution #2:

Members of the Jewish faith—to the extent that they fulfill all of a citizen’s obligations to his country—are guaranteed a civil justice which will protect them from persecutions, pressures, arbitrariness, and the revocation of rights previously obtained.

Frankfurt’s Objection:

Since the custom of the Duke of Frankfurt was to treat the Jews of Frankfurt in a manner superior to that of any other state in so doing—against all rules of statecraft—caused great harm to the citizens of the city and its Christian inhabitants, violating their legal and just rights, and even causing harm to the Jews themselves—the authorities of the City of Frankfurt declare that no new decree of said Duke, whatever form it may take, will be binding upon its representatives and will have no validity.

E. Resolution No. 5:

The forum of the treaty nations will inquire how to implement—equally and in all states—the improvement of the status of the members of the Jewish faith in Germany, and particularly how to guarantee them civil rights on condition that they fulfill their civil obligations. In the meantime, the rights which have been given to the Jews in (individual) treaty nations will remain in force.

F. The Final Resolution

The forum of treaty nations will inquire how to implement—as equally as possible in all states—the improvement of the civil status of members of the Jewish faith in Germany, and how to provide them civil rights and to guarantee their existence on condition that they fulfill their civil obligations. In the meantime, however, the rights which have been given to members of the Jewish faith by (individual) treaty nations will remain in force.

This sheet, without the teacher asking question, is a strong “incentive” to comparison as it arouses in the students the questions of how all these resolutions differ one from another, and which of them is preferable.

The students will analyze each resolution, explain its necessary consequences and possible dangers, examine every expression and, often, every word. They will have to distinguish between the first two resolutions (A-B): the word “equivalent”, missing in B, limits the granting of rights and there is no mention (in B) of the rights granted in A. Humboldt’s critique will appear to be a paradigm of a critique of the text of a legislation and its analysis which they can emulate on their own. They can distinguish the success of the objectives of the of the antagonistic states: from resolution C an on there is no longer an attempt to solve the Jewish question at the Congress but a postponement of its solution until the forum of treaty nations—just what those states wanted.

The students will see how a law granting rights to the Jews can be formulated in such a way it has no positive content without appearing negative: (e.g.) The first Holstein resolution (C) promises “established civil justice”---yet a total denial of rights is also “established civil justice.” Superficial students will think that resolution D is good, because it seems so humanitarian in its opposition to pressures and persecution. Here is an opportunity for better students to show that it is actually the worst of the lot because it demands fulfillment of all civil obligations while promising only protection from persecution; protection in place of rights.

The distinction is very fine—and therefore very instructive—between the last two resolutions. In order to give all the students time to think, the teacher should stop the discussion here and require each student to answer—in one sentence—the question: “What is the major distinction between these two resolutions, and what practical difference does it make?” Four to five minutes should be enough for examination, contemplation, and writing, and this way the student with quick grasp of the situation can “steal” the answer from a slower student. This method is also good for strengthening the tension in a classroom. Each one works industriously; maybe, maybe he’ll get the right answer.

Meanwhile the teacher should walk among the desks in the classroom and see who is sharp-eyed enough to spot that the whole distinction (in the Hebrew translation, of course)¹³ consists of the changing of one word: Instead of “in their states” (E)—“by their states” (F).

What a major distinction this is, though. Very few Jews had already been granted rights by their (individual) states; most of the Jews of Germany had been granted them by Napoleon (directly or indirectly) or by the government which ruled in his name or by his leave. By means of this small change thousands of Jews were deprived of the rights of settlement, work, trade, etc. It is conceivable that only a few in each class will find the distinction and its outcome by themselves because even among delegates to the Congress there were many who were not aware of it and thought that the last paragraph was a great victory for the Jews, but the analysis and tension created by the search for the right answer are very valuable by themselves.

¹³ In the German original: “En” in E, and “Von” in F.

The value of this lesson, again, is not only in the acquisition of this information – one can read about the Jews at the Congress of Vienna in a history book just to know (the details). This lesson, though, is not unique unto itself but an example for all those cases wherein the struggle for guidelines, rights and the opportunity for national and political existence takes the form of a battle over their (legal) formulation. (Students who have already encountered Halakhic Midrashim, who have studied Chumash with Rashi, Mishna, and—certainly—Gemara, will find no novelty in this linguistic exactness, in paying attention to every single word and letter, but they will rejoice, nevertheless, to encounter it in another discipline.)

At the conclusion of the lesson—and the whole preceding discussion need not last for more than an hour—the students should receive, as a summary, the following text:

W. Humboldt's Letter from the Congress of Vienna—to his Wife:

Yesterday I declined to accept a valuable gift. From the beginning of the Congress the Jews have tried to obtain certain civil rights in Germany. I have always expressed agreement with this manner. I know, however, that you, my dear, think otherwise, but I have given the matter much thought at different times and remain firm in my opinion. Moreover, it is an idea born in my youth as Alexander and I were regarded—while still children—as defenders of the Jews. I became even more involved on account of the fact that the Jews here in Prussia already enjoy full rights and it is preferable, then, for us that these rights be granted everywhere because otherwise *all the Jews will be coming here*. For several weeks now I feel that the number of those seeking the welfare of the Jews is increasing, and since Guntz is at its head it was clarified at once. I heard, with absolute certainty, that Hardenberg even signed a written commitment, but I have not been approached with any recommendation. There is an old man in Prague, however, whose personality I find pleasing because he does not belong to the modern Jews, who has approached me several times to commend the matter.

I composed a resolution reflecting my views. In the current consultations the matter has become one of the major points of discussion, not on account of a lack of more important issues but because it is almost impossible to discuss more important issues since it is known from the outset that they are more likely to explode than to unify. Metternich, Wassenberg, Hardenberg and I supported the matter as best we could.

Reichenberg, Darmstadt – Hissen, and the Hanseatic cities led the opposition. The issue was debated during two sessions. Metternich, as is his wont, nearly backed out, but I fought for it, found new arguments, and gave it a *non-dangerous form by pushing it into the next meeting of the treaty forum* while obtaining confirmation of those rights which the Jews have already secured. Much has been said about this issue, everyone know

I composed the resolution and gained its approval. Yesterday the elderly Jew came again and thanked me numerous times, offering me three rings, and an emerald housing large diamonds, and if I did not want them, he would deposit 4,000 ducats for me in his bank. I declined, of course, to accept them or the money and you cannot imagine the man's astonishment when I told him, without opposition or coquetry, that all I have done has been only for the sake of the Jews and that I shall not accept anything in compensation—save that I shall call upon him for a favor should the need arise. I told no one of the matter except the Chancellor and Hardenberg but I heard from Guntz that it has nevertheless become public and made a great impression.

The elderly Jew will not be complacent, however, as he now suggests to order a silver table service and send it to me next year. I told Guntz that even in another ten years I will accept nothing, and certainly not this, but he is so lacking any notion of doing something without such compensation that he explained to me at length that he finds me an enigma since it is no crime, nor impolite, neither am I doing it as a show of arrogance to demonstrate that I accept no gifts from a Jew. He said this in all sincerity! The truth is these are the principles by which all holders of government positions, throughout the world, conduct themselves. I replied to him that someone who is as accustomed to defending his affairs with as much passion as I am must have, as a precondition, a clean conscience. I know of nothing as ungracious as not being clean and pure in political affairs.¹⁴

(If there is no opportunity to duplicate the text or to copy it, it will suffice for the teacher to read it (aloud) since it is quite straightforward and needs no special exactness, nor reading between the lines, nor focused analysis on every line – activities which require that a copy of the text be placed, at the outset, before each student.) This source will entirely serve the purpose of illustration. The student will see here, clearly, what were the motives of those who befriended the Jews, and he will see with great clarity what went on behind the scenes of an international diplomatic congress. All (other) explanations are superfluous!

¹⁴ Baron, *op. cit.*