

Prof. Nehama Leibowitz *zt"l* (1905-1997) was a master teacher of Bible and commentaries to students, teachers, rabbis and scholars for close to seventy years. Through her legendary classes, weekly study sheets and numerous books on Torah, the Prophets and pedagogy, she had a profound influence on the study of Bible through most of the last century.

“ACCEPT THE TRUTH FROM WHEREVER IT COMES”

Prof. Nehama Leibowitz *zt"l*

To the Honorable Rabbi Yehuda Ansbacher,

It is a great honor for me that you commented on my words on *Parshat Pekudei*. I don't recall why I didn't cite the *Tanhuma* at the time, and whether I had a reason for doing so, or simply didn't consider it. But after your comment, I carefully considered your words and the words of the *Midrash*, and saw that the parallels in the *Tanhuma* are not of the same type that I wanted to emphasize and of which [Franz] Rosenzweig mentions in his essay.

Rosenzweig's intention was to parallel the rise of Moshe and *haKadosh Barukh Hu*, and therefore “*vayera . . . vayera*”, “*vayevarekh . . . vayevarekh . . .*” Verbs are paralleled to verbs.

The parallels of the *Tanhuma* are different, as are their intentions: “*vayehi mavdil bein mayim . . . vehivdilal haparokhet*,” “*yishretzu hamayim ve'of ye'ofeif . . . kenegedan la'asot korbanot, kevasim, ve'ofot*,” and in *Bereishit*, “*vayivra et ha'adam, uvemishkan ketiv adam, shehu kohen gadol*.” So you see that the intentions of the *Midrash* and its methodology are completely different than what was quoted in my book.

But more to the point, [let me turn] to the latter part of your comments. It is true that I cite the words of people who are not observant of the *mitzvot*, if their words seem correct to me, and can reveal the light of Torah and display its

* The following is a translation of a Hebrew letter written by Prof. Leibowitz in response to a letter from Rabbi Yehuda Ansbacher *z"l* (1908-1988), who served as the rabbi of the *Ihud Shivat Zion* community center on Ben Yehuda St. in Tel Aviv for many decades. It originally appeared in *Alon Shvut-Bogrim* no. 13 and was translated for this journal by YCT student Avidan Friedman. It is reprinted with the kind permission of Dr. Aviad HaCohen, editor of *Alon Shvut Bogrim*. The footnotes were added by the editors.

greatness and holiness to the student. [I work] according to the principle: "Accept the truth from wherever it comes."¹ What can I say?

Benno Jacob was an extreme Reformer, who served in the *Sontag Gemeinde*² and certainly transgressed an enormous portion of our holy Torah's *mitzvot* (in addition to the fact that he was an anti-Zionist, etc. etc.). Yet, I learned from his books (*Aug um Auge* has excellent proofs that "an eye for an eye" according to the simple meaning refers to monetary compensation; *Quellenkritik und Exegese, Genesis, Exodus* is a forceful work against the Documentary Hypothesis) more than from many books written by bona-fide God-fearing Jews. His claims against biblical criticism and his proofs of their frivolousness and their errors—no one has ever written things better than them, even Rav David Hoffman, zt"l (as difficult as it is to mention the name of this *gaon* together with B. Jacob) as well as Yissachar Jacobson, a"b and Dr. Muriel who wrote a work on the Torah. Many of my friends—among them, Rabbi David Carlebach zt"l who for many years taught with me in the Seminar in Jerusalem—also learned from his works. He opened our eyes to see things which we had not seen before, and [therefore] toward a true understanding of the Torah.

Prof. [Umberto] Cassuto z"l, who was God-fearing and scrupulous regarding the *mitzvot*, said a number of things that are very far from my belief in *Torah meSinai*, and I won't be part of their dissemination. And therefore I will not pay heed to **who** said it, but only to **what** is said.

There is no need to say that [Martin] Buber was not a "good Jew"—according to the normal understanding of this concept. I knew him—and he was not in any way a man after my heart! Absolutely not!

The story that that gentile wrote seems to me to be slightly far from the truth. At the end of the day, this was not an innocent off-hand remark but rather one made by someone interested in proving a point, but if it is true, then this shows me—which I already knew—that Buber flattered gentiles, and if he truly said what is written, this is an abomination—although according to what he said to me he didn't love Christianity at all, and certainly didn't believe in these things, and if he said them, it was in order to flatter the gentiles, and this is the absolute worst. But what can I do, as I and many religious teachers learned many correct things from him in *Tanakh*, especially the whole concept of the key word, *Lietwort*, and the deep meaning that its application in Torah hints to, and although our Midrash also recognized this principle ("ne'emar kan . . . vene'emar sham", and similarly "midah keneged midah" and more), it is nevertheless the merit of Buber, and even more so Rosenzweig, that they expanded this concept and revealed several places that I have not found in any early sources. I will not withhold this good from students by hiding this from them.

¹ From Maimonides' introduction to his classic work on ethics, **Shemonah Prakim**.

² A Reform congregation that held prayers on Sunday instead of Saturday.

In truth, even non-Jews, at times, (though in my opinion, rarely) offer an interpretation that is good and sharp and proper to present, and even Abravanel in select places brings the words of a Catholic bishop, and accepts his opinion over the opinions of Radak and Ralbag.

Several times, I showed *talmidei hakhamim* details from Benno Jacob's important book, *Aug um Auge* and they thanked me and rejoiced as if discovering a great treasure. Should I then hide the name of the author? This I cannot do. "Who are those whose waters we drink and whose names we don't mention?"³

This is my opinion, which I have held to my entire life.

I thank you for writing nice things to me about my class in the *beit kneset*, and I wish you and your family a happy and kosher *Pesah* and good health, and may we merit to see a *Pesah* that brings the rebuilding of the Temple.

With great respect and thanks for your consideration,

Nehama

³ *Horiyot* 14