

[How] Should the Documentary Hypothesis be Taught in Modern Orthodox High Schools?

RCA STATEMENT of Jul 31, 2013 –

In recent days there has been much discussion regarding the belief in Torah Min HaShamayim. We maintain that it is necessary not only to assert the centrality of this bedrock principle in broad terms, but also to affirm the specific belief that Moshe received the Torah from God during the sojourn in the wilderness, the critical moment being the dramatic revelation at Sinai. The Rambam and others have included this in their various Principles of Faith but its centrality is so evident that an appeal to these Principles of Faith is almost superfluous. The very coherence of traditional Jewish discourse concerning the authority of the Torah she-bikhtav and the Torah she-be`al peh rests upon this conviction.

When critical approaches to the Torah's authorship first arose, every Orthodox rabbinic figure recognized that they strike at the heart of the classical Jewish faith. Whatever weight one assigns to a small number of remarks by medieval figures regarding the later addition of a few scattered phrases, there is a chasm between them and the position that large swaths of the Torah were written later-- all the more so when that position asserts that virtually the entire Torah was written by several authors who, in their ignorance, regularly provided erroneous information and generated genuine, irreconcilable contradictions. Beyond a shadow of a doubt, none of the abovementioned figures would have regarded such a position as falling within the framework of authentic Judaism.

While we recognize and respect the theological struggles that are a feature of many a modern person's inner religious life, the position in question is unequivocally contrary to the faith requirements of historic Judaism.

גליון הש"ס לרבי עקיבא איגר שבת נה:

1. תוס' ד"ה מעבירים כתיב וכו' ובכל ספרים שלנו.
2. וכן מצינו בנדה דף לג ע"א תוס' ד"ה והנושא שכתבו דהמסורת שלנו מחולק עם הש"ס.
3. ובמגילה דף כב ע"א כתבו תוס' דויחל הוא ב' פסוקים סמוך לפרשה שלפניו וכן והקרבתם, ובס"ת שלנו ויחל הוא ד' פסוקים מהפרשה, וכן והקרבתם ג"פ, וכמ"ש מהרש"א שם.
4. ובפסחים דף קיז ע"א בתוס' ד"ה שעומדים כתבו שלא יתכן שיהיה מזמור ב' פסוקים, ואלו בספרים שלנו מזמור קי"ז הוא ב' פסוקים. עיין מהרש"א שם ע"א.
5. ובסנהדרין דף ד' ע"א פירש"י שם דבכבשה דיחיד כתיב קרנות מלא, ובס"ת שלנו כתיב חסר.
6. ובדף ד' ע"א כתב רש"י דבפרשה והיה כי יביאך כתיב לטטפת חסר, ובפ' והיה אם שמוע כתיב מלא, ובס"ת שלנו גם בפ' והיה כי יביאך כתיב מלא.
7. ובדף כ' ע"א כתיב להכרית וקרי להברות ובספרים שלנו גם הכתיב להברות.
8. עוד שם דף קג ע"א, ויחתר לו ויעתר לו מיבעיא ליה, ובספרים שלנו כתיב ויעתר.
9. ובב"ב דף ט' ע"א הלא פרוש בשין ובספרים שלנו כתיב בסין, ועיין בח"א שם במהרש"א.
10. ובקדושין דף ל' ע"א והתגלח חציין של פסוקים ובתיקונים בפרשת צו בפסוק ויאפוד לו בו ציין דשם חצי התורה בפסוקים. ובירושלמי שהביא תוס' בכתובות דף ז' ע"ב דבמקהלת ברכו א-להים חסר, ובספרים שלנו כתיב מלא.
11. וברש"י בחומש פרשת תרומה ואת כל אשר אצוה הוא וי"ו יתירה ולפנינו כתיב את בלא ו'. עיין ברא"ם שם.
12. ובמדרש רבה שיר השירים בפסוק אחזו לנו שועלים שעלים א"ר ברכיה קדמאה מלא תניינא חסר, ובמסורה אינו כן אלא תרווייהו חסר.
13. ובברכות דף ז' ע"ב כתיב לכלותו ובספרים שלנו בד"ה א' י"ז כתיב לבלותו.
14. (ובפסחים דף ג' ע"א ו' דטהור, ובספרים שלנו כתיב טהר חסר ו').
15. ובנדרים דף לז ע"ב את דהוגד הוגד קרי ולא כתיב, ובספרים שלנו הוא קרי וכתיב כמ"ש הר"ן שם.
16. ובפסוק אני ה' א-להיך אשר הוצאתיך איתא בירושלמי פ"ה דסוכה דחסר י', ובספרים שלפניו הוא מלא יו"ד.
17. ובמדרש ויקרא רבה פ' ט' ושם דרך, א"ר ינאי ושם כתיב, ובספרים שלנו כתיב בסין.
18. ובפירש"י בחומש בראשית כ"ד הפילגשם חסר כתיב, ובכל הספרים איתא מלא.
19. ובמדרש בראשית רבה פרשה ע"ז ר"ל אמר הנתרת כתיב, ובכל הספרים שלנו כתיב הנתרת.
20. ובערכין דף ל"ב ע"א בתוספות ד"ה אשר דרש"י כ' דהכתיב ויקרא כ"ה אשר לוא חומה, והם כתבו דהכתיב אשר לו והקרי לא, ובספרים שלנו הכתיב לא באל"ף והקרי לו כמ"ש התי"ט שם.

(How) Should the Documentary Hypothesis be Taught in Modern Orthodox High Schools?

Sara Susswein Tesler sarabatya@gmail.com has taught Tanakh and Jewish Identity at the high school and post high school level for over fourteen years. She completed her MA in Bible at Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies at Yeshiva University, and studied at the Drisha Institute's Scholar's Program. She currently resides in Efrat, Israel with her husband and five children.

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“But what do you believe?” That was the question usually hurled at me by my high school students after teaching them about the documentary hypothesis in an introductory biblical scholarship course called “The World of Tanakh.”

From 2010 to 2015 I taught the half-year senior elective course at a co-ed Modern Orthodox high school. The self-selected group of students had at most limited exposure to the world of academic Bible study from their families or friends. In fact, the idea for the course came about from lunchtime conversations with students who wanted to explore other areas of Bible study not discussed in a traditional Tanakh class. The school did not have specific guidelines about how I should teach the course other than a directive from the principal to “be responsible.”

My Personal Journey

While teaching these students, I was on my own personal journey, trying to formulate a theological framework that respected both tradition and academic scholarship. As someone who was raised in the Orthodox educational system and discovered academic scholarship later on in life, I was searching for a convincing philosophical basis of obligation and commandedness. The task was an exhausting and overwhelming journey of introspection and self-discovery.

My career path as a teacher in a Modern Orthodox school was linked with a certain ideology and bound by sociological boundaries, so there was the added layer of apprehension and anxiety. Nevertheless, my connection to Torah grew as I delved into biblical scholarship and Jewish philosophy. The text became richer and contradictions finally made sense, while the fields of archaeology, philology and history added color to the black and white words on the page. My conception of God was freed from the constraints of having to believe in a perfect Torah.

Avoiding Theological Questions

For the most part, my syllabus went out of the way to avoid creating any existential religious crises. We focused on the canonization of the Bible, early translations, the Masorah, ancient Near East historical context, and biblical philology. I introduced the history of biblical scholarship and briefly mentioned the documentary hypothesis. I was comfortable teaching most of these topics but did not feel confident approaching the issue of Torah MiSinai. After all, that is perceived as the core of Orthodox belief. Perhaps more significantly, I was at a loss as to how to reconcile the scholarship with traditional belief and thus did not have any Orthodox resolutions to offer my students. Thus, I became adept at dodging any theological questions, resorting to bland pronouncements and subtle dismissals. Most of the time, I was able to segue into another topic, such as the riveting story of the Dead Sea Scrolls, with the hope that they would forget to follow up the next day.

Nevertheless, avoiding the theological issues left me feeling irresponsible and dishonest; irresponsible because I was exposing my students to a field of study that was antithetical to their belief system, and dishonest because I undoubtedly gave them the misimpression that I was not struggling with traditional Orthodox beliefs about Torah MiSinai. The inability to share my own religious journey made my talks feel stilted—at least, that is how they felt to me. When students later came to my home, I regretted not being able to share my library with them or to speak openly about what I was studying.

(How) Should the Documentary Hypothesis be Taught in Modern Orthodox High Schools?

Survey of the Course's Impact

Considering that the course was exposing students to new academic approaches without dealing with the theological implications, I was curious if my class had any effect on their religious outlook. So after teaching the course for two years, with the support of the school and the principal, I decided to track my students' religious growth during the course of the semester as well as through college by surveying current and former students. I asked them about their personal belief, their practice, what they took away from the class, if they recommended the material be taught to a wider audience in high school, and what impact it had on their religious lives. I also compared how my students described their religious beliefs at the beginning and end of the course. Additionally, I interviewed some of my students' parents to help me understand where the parent body stood theologically. In total, I surveyed over forty students, and had extended conversations with fifteen of them.

My students were aware of the controversial nature of some of the material being taught and wrestled with the theological challenges that ensued. They were happy to contribute to my informal survey, and they were thoughtful in their responses. (For some of the highlights from this survey, see Appendix.)

Takeaways from the Survey

My students enjoyed the course, but it had minimal impact on their religious lives. While many students found it both jarring and intriguing to learn about the documentary hypothesis for example, the introduction to this approach was not substantial enough to nudge them to investigate it more thoroughly. I was relieved that I did not cause my students to leave an observant lifestyle, and a little surprised that my course did not have any ramifications on their religious growth, during their important years of religious identity forming.[1]

When speaking to alumni in college, one common reaction I repeatedly heard was that they had found the class interesting, thought-provoking and challenging, but that ultimately their religious affiliation was determined by their community and family. Many were proudly Orthoprax and didn't seem to care too much about the Orthodox part, for better or worse.

I was more surprised to hear from a large percentage of college students that when confronted with the problems of biblical scholarship in college, they were able to shrug it off "because we had already dealt with that in your class." This response surprised me since I felt that we hardly dealt with this issue, as I had avoided engaging in any real theological conversations and shied away from any neatly packaged "answers."

It seems that for many of them, just having a teacher speak openly about these issues neutralized the problems for them; they figured I must have a working theology that answered their concerns, even if I did not share it with them. Reviewing the results of my survey confirmed that while I was successful at showing the relevance of academic scholarship to Torah learning, the students did not come out with a theological framework allowing them to tie together academic and traditional study of Torah. This is no surprise, of course, since I could not offer them what I had not yet developed myself.

Emergence of Religious Identity in Adolescents

I imagine that, like myself, many adults come to this kind of open inquiry later on in life. My friends who have also embarked down this road are committed to continuing an Orthoprax lifestyle, whether for the sake of their marriage, strong communal connections, warm feelings towards tradition and history, or some combination thereof. But this is not the case for high school students.

Adolescents are in the developmental stage of forming their own religious identities, separating from the parents, challenging the status quo, and pushing the boundaries of self-autonomy and authority. This is natural and what they should be doing. Is it then sensible, at this point in their development, to introduce a new discipline of study that might further alienate them from a Torah-centered life? Do I not have a responsibility to educate them in religious thought that is consistent with their parents' decision to send them to an Orthodox institution?

(How) Should the Documentary Hypothesis be Taught in Modern Orthodox High Schools?

On the other hand, I felt obligated as an educator to teach truth and to expose my students to a variety of thought from within and outside our tradition. How am I preparing them for life of deep Jewish meaning if I am depriving them of the broadest points of entry into Judaism? And how could I responsibly send my students to college without ever discussing the academic treatment of Torah?

Moving Forward: Practical Suggestions

During my last year of teaching we decided to spend the year in Israel, and taking time off from teaching allowed me to reflect further upon these matters. After spending a year speaking to scholars and thoughtful individuals, reading books on the Bible and philosophy, I offer the following suggestions that could be helpful for those who want to deal honestly with the challenges of biblical criticism in the context of an Orthodox day school education.

I. View It as an Opportunity

Academic biblical scholarship issues do not need to be addressed in an explicit head-on manner. And it need not be a “crisis” to be addressed. Rather, this should be regarded as an opportunity for greater intellectual growth within our community and enrich the way Tanakh and Jewish philosophy is taught in our schools.

II. Subtle Shift in Pedagogic Language

Teaching a nuanced approach to Torah MiSinai from a young age will prepare the student for the more complex teachings of modern scholarship later on. Even subtle changes in the language we use can change the visual imagery children currently are instilled with (i.e. Moshe holding a Sefer Torah at Har Sinai) and instead stress the idea of viewing the Torah as emanating from God (Torah Min Hashamayim). We can focus more on metaphorical understandings of the text, and less on the Bible as history. By doing so, we move our children away from a fundamentalist understanding of religion and prepare them for a deeper, more sophisticated approach to Judaism.

III. Introduce Lower Criticism

We can include the study of lower criticism (variations in the text) at a young age to dispel the notion that the biblical text is perfect. This opens the door for respectful critique, a more careful and nuanced reading of the text. It is important for our students to understand the history of the biblical text, and to view such study as non-threatening and as helping us understand the Torah better.

IV. Instill Love and Respect of Torah

While emphasizing new approaches, it is crucial to stress the values of tradition and obligation, and instill awe and love of God. Students should be shown the deep emotional and spiritual aspects of learning Torah. We should not shy away from the profound religious experiences that Orthodox life offers.

V. Start Young

Many argue that biblical scholarship should be reserved for twelfth grade only. They argue that the more sophisticated thinkers will be able to handle the inherent schism created, and that the “non-thinkers” do not need to be challenged. I believe this is poor education, unrealistic, and does a disservice to our students and causes them to lose respect for their former Judaic Studies teachers.

Many students come to scholarship only after high school. Do we want to miss the chance to engage them in a religious school setting? More importantly, avoiding these modern perspectives perpetuates the myth that there must be a clash between Torah observance and modern scholarship, when such a schism could be avoided by introducing more open intellectual approaches at a younger age. Students should be exposed to the wide array of traditional and modern Jewish thought and see the plurality of ideas that make up our religious worldview. Young students should be encouraged to understand the text in a variety of non-literal ways; this is suitable for them since children use metaphor all the time.

VI. Be Honest

We must be honest with our students about the limits of belief: there are no answers or proofs when it comes to religious life, and it is okay to live with doubt. Living a life of uncertainty can provide a dose of humility and the space for exploration and growth.

{How} Should the Documentary Hypothesis be Taught in Modern Orthodox High Schools?

The Bind of Dogma

I recently hosted a few female students studying at a Modern Orthodox gap year program in Israel. One student said that she is not observant, but she values tradition and is looking for a way to return to Orthodox practice. The only problem is that she stopped believing that the Torah was given at Mount Sinai by God to Moshe. The only way she can imagine re-entering the Orthodox community is to believe that this dogma is true. She finds herself in a bind—trying hard to believe what she cannot believe. When I asked the other students what they thought was given at Sinai, they were dumbfounded. No one had ever asked them that question before. They sheepishly admitted that their high school education did not prepare them to think about such questions, or more broadly to ponder religion in a sophisticated manner.[2]

Many parents confided in me that they agree with my approach to the Bible and Judaism but believe that it is better for their children to live in ignorance rather than confronting the dangers of modern scholarship, especially since raising religiously committed kids today is hard enough. As a Modern Orthodox approach, I find this to be shortsighted and counterproductive. Introducing biblical scholarship and a rational Jewish theology at a younger age might offer a truly positive non-reductionist rationale for Torah observance.

I do not want to continue teaching my own children that events in the Torah are historically factual, or teaching the literal understanding of Torah MiSinai with the intention of reeducating them later—this is poor parenting, and poor pedagogy. I believe in open dialogue with my children. I believe that we owe it to our children to offer them a coherent theology that is intellectually compelling. I do not want to continue living a bifurcated life and hiding my true beliefs from my children. I do not want to live in fear of my children or students discovering what lies outside of our cloistered batei midrashot (study halls) or homes, but instead I want to welcome every academic insight as a means of furthering their understanding of Torah.

Even if only some of these ideas are implemented by a few teachers, over time we could slowly change the landscape of Jewish education. By changing Jewish education, we can change Orthodox discourse and allow biblical scholarship and a cogent theology to take a place within traditional Orthodoxy.

Time to Begin a Conversation

The time is ripe to have an open conversation about the tension that so many of us experience between reason and belief. What a shame that we want our schools to approach secular studies with an open mind but not make full use of our critical faculties when studying Torah.

Furthermore, in today's age of universal access to information and of boundary crossing, we cannot shield our children from a wide variety of perspectives and expect them to simply follow all our beliefs and practices. If we want them to cherish tradition and value halakhah, then we must offer them compelling options that respect their intellect and don't shy away from the pursuit of truth.

As teachers, educators and parents, we must consider how we teach our children Torah and impart a love of Judaism and tradition without closing ourselves off from rational inquiry. It is a difficult task, but the conversation must begin.

Appendix

The following are some highlights from the survey:

To Teach or Not To Teach? —

One student believed that this course was important for those like himself but questioned whether it was important for the rest of the grade. *There is a risk to expose yourself. At the same time, I am grateful that I learned this. It was a big step for me to be more informed, to be more educated about my religion... Some students are sensitive to these issues. Modern Orthodoxy is straddling between tradition and modernity. High school needs to be a place for those who don't care about these issues [modern scholarship] and those who seek out truth.*

In other words, he was happy he had the opportunity to attend my class but didn't feel it was something that needed to be taught to everyone. However, others thought that this course should become a required class for the entire high school. As one student wrote: *Kids after twelve years are disenchanted with Torah...they don't have classes like these. They aren't inspired. They don't know why they should be learning or religious. Those are the people who need this class. There are some kids who might freak out, but at least they're thinking about it. The kids who are already asking — need this. The kids who aren't asking — they would grow. So you need it for everyone.*[3]

{How} Should the Documentary Hypothesis be Taught in Modern Orthodox High Schools?

The Divinity and Transmission of the Torah —

Many students pondered the nature of a divine Torah and came up with some sort of working theory that allowed for the majority of the text to be humanly inspired but insisted that the core commandments (like the Decalogue which serve as the basis of many Rabbinic laws) had to have come from God in some shape or form.

Some stretched their imagination to reinterpret what Torah MiSinai could mean. One student suggested,

Moshe is the name for all the people who wrote the Torah. [A Torah with] many authors can still be divine.

Others rejected Torah MiSinai outright. *I think [the concept of] Torah MiSinai is made up, it wasn't originally in the system.... I do it [observe halacha] for tradition. There's something about keeping something that my great grandparents did. For me, I like my heritage.*

Crisis of Faith — Only one student had a religious crisis. During the class she became depressed, disenchanted with religion, resentful that her Jewish education didn't prepare her for this, and mourned the loss of her childhood conceptions of Torah. However, during her post-high school year of study in Israel, she found comfort in the Breuer methodology of multiple voices of God in the text (aspects theory),^[4] which helped her retain her faith in a divine Torah while also reading the text with a critical eye.

While she appreciated her newfound approach to religion, she was also looking forward to starting university and was insistent on avoiding any classes relating to Judaism or Bible in a secular setting, as she did not want her faith challenged again. She wrote to me:

Firstly, I want to thank you for opening my eyes to this world and introducing me to many important questions. I have recently come to realize that because of these questions, a lot of the way that I relate to Judaism has shifted, and I am now very skeptical of rabbinic doctrine... Thank God, I have amazing, intelligent, open-minded teachers here [in Israel], who are willing to sit down with me and open my mind to the many possible answers to my questions. However, if this wasn't the case, I'm pretty sure that I would still have a crisis of faith and that is not how someone should walk out of a yeshiva high school...

I am starting to appreciate the long journey of searching that you have put me on, but this would not be the case for everyone... I would be very cautious opening other students [to these questions] because they might not have the time, energy or support system to search for the answers, like I do.

[1] Teens are sometimes looking for an excuse to exit, but as far as I can tell, they did not use biblical criticism in this way. The students who did drop Orthodoxy left for social and moral reasons, such as feminism and homosexuality; theological problems did not play a role in their religious trajectory. As one student wrote, "No one is going to be non-religious from biblical criticism in this class. If someone isn't religious, they weren't' going to be, but now they have a better reason for not being. They just sound smarter. And if someone believes in it [Orthodox dogma], then this won't matter."

[2] These four students each attended well-known and highly regarded Modern Orthodox high schools in North America.

[3] 99% of my students were happy they took this course. One student echoed a common refrain,

I am proud of my school that they are willing to go beyond the standard and expose us to all that is there to learn. All in all, I feel like this course has had a real positive impact on me as a learner and as a Jew.

Another student studying in Israel wrote,

When I compared my education to the people around me [in seminary], I felt like they were not challenging anything they had learned...I saw I had a more rational and less emotional approach.

[How] Should the Documentary Hypothesis be Taught in Modern Orthodox High Schools?

Who Wrote the Torah?

An intellectual defense of unitary authorship for high school students

1. Introduction

Who wrote the Torah? Believing Jews (and Christians) generally gave a simple and straightforward answer to this question for at least a millennium – Moses wrote the Torah, at G-d’s dictation. The Jewish philosopher Benedict Spinoza, however, argued in the seventeenth century that the Torah includes editorial insertions that were not part of the original Mosaic text, and in the nineteenth century a group of German Protestant scholars developed the thesis that the Torah is actually a composite of documents written by four authors. You are probably aware that one or another version of their thesis, known as the Documentary Hypothesis, is currently the standard answer to “Who wrote the Torah?” in university Bible departments.

You may be asking yourself, then, whether you can be a reasonable and modern person and still believe that Moses wrote the Torah. I’m writing in the hope of persuading you that you can, that a reasonable person looking fairly at the evidence can reasonably conclude that the Torah is a unified document with a single author.

It is important at the outset to separate three issues:

- a. unified authorship (whether the Torah was written as one document, or rather is a combination of several different documents edited together into a single book),
- b. historicity (whether what the Torah tells us about the past is true)
- c. sanctity (whether the Torah was written, inspired, or ratified by G-d, or whatever term one uses to describe the source of value in this world).

What I mean by “separate” is that it is possible to believe

- a. in unified authorship, even in Mosaic authorship, and not believe that the Torah is sacred; one can, for example, believe that Moses was deluded, or
- b. that the Torah was written by four or more unknown people, but that each of them was a prophet inspired by G-d, and that the Torah is therefore sacred¹, and/or.
- c. that the Torah is sacred but has no interest in accurately conveying history, or that the Torah is not sacred but nonetheless a meticulously accurate historical account.

This article addresses only the issue of unified authorship – it does not discuss whether the Torah is historically accurate, or whether it is sacred.

It is also important to recognize that scholars may bring three different types of evidence when seeking to divide the Torah by author –

- a. historical/archaeological,
- b. linguistic, and
- c. literary.

In other words, they may argue that

- a. different sections of Torah reflect historical circumstances from different time periods;
- b. that the language of different sections of Torah show that they come from different regions and/or times; or
- c. that some sections of Torah simply cannot fit with other sections because of contradictions, redundancies, or other incompatibilities.

¹ Serious scholars have also argued that G-d deliberately dictated to Moses a Torah so that it would seem to be written by four different people, or that each of the four documents represents a different inspired reconstruction of a lost original Mosaic Torah.

(How) Should the Documentary Hypothesis be Taught in Modern Orthodox High Schools?

The body of this article addresses and makes only literary arguments. This is largely because I see myself as much more competent in the area of literary analysis than in either linguistics or history. You should understand, however, that the historical and linguistic arguments generally depend on the literary argument. For example, if we assume the unified authorship of the Torah, it would by itself be our largest and oldest repository of Ancient Hebrew, in light of which all other linguistic data would be dated. Similarly, those who claim that sections of Torah represent one or another political faction in First Temple Israel generally acknowledge that other sections represent the claims of conflicting factions; if one assumes unified Mosaic authorship, the Torah of course ends up presenting a nuanced and complex position on the issue that is debated later in Jewish history.²

Finally, it is necessary to clarify at the outset the rules of the game. What constitutes literary evidence for or against multiple or unified authorship? We cannot say that any single unsolved contradiction or redundancy demonstrates multiple authorship – if that were the case, no story or book would ever be seen as the product of one author, and I would have to cover every sentence of Torah with absolute thoroughness to usefully make my point. At the same time, showing that the parts of one section of Torah fit together better if we assume unified authorship doesn't prove that other parts aren't composite.

One tack that has been tried by proponents of unified authorship is to find cross-documentary thematic patterns for example, showing that aspects of a story or set of laws found only in "E" make sense only if they serve as rewards and punishments for actions taken in a story found only in "J". For example, the rule that one may not distinguish between sacrificial animals that are "tov" and those that are "ra" in Leviticus 37, generally assigned to "P" or "H", may indicate that the purpose of animal sacrifice is to undo the sin of eating the fruit in Eden which enabled human beings to distinguish "tov: and ra", a narrative assigned to "J".

This type of argument, though, even when done extremely well, does not necessarily accomplish its goal.

- a. Firstly, proponents of multiple authorship can always argue that R, the final editor, combined his materials so skillfully that the texts relate to each other now, when they did not relate to each other originally.
 - b. Secondly, they can argue that the alluded-to text originally existed in both documents, but that we only have fragments of each document.
 - c. Finally, they can argue that the argument simply shows that we have not previously divided the documents correctly, not that the principle of division is incorrect.
- These responses highlight two issues that make the task of this article highly challenging.
- a. First, the Documentary Hypothesis, like any living academic theory, exists in many forms and changes constantly; thus the reaction to any argument can be to adapt the theory, or adopt a different version of the theory, and present it anew as unchallenged. For example, the original Hypothesis found four sources, of which P (the hypothetical Priestly writer, of Vayikra and much else) was the latest, and which the final redactor had no license to change in any way. But one can find significant contemporary versions with anywhere from five to tens of sources, which see P as earlier than at least Devarim, and which give the redactor(s) the capacity to alter his/her/their sources at will.
 - b. Second, belief in multiple authorship goes together with belief in unified editing, or redaction, and it is always possible to dismiss evidence of unity as the product of redaction rather than authorship. Scholars call this "the vanishing redactor problem" – in other words, at what point does one have to make such strong claims about what the redactor did with/to her sources that one might as well say that s/he wrote the book her/himself?

² As Michael Pershan noted (private communication), the meaning of a text can be altered by knowledge of its historical circumstances in various ways. For example, one text cannot be a parody of another text unless the other text was written first. Nonetheless, it seems to me that in the absence of compelling evidence of a text's historical situation, one is entitled to adopt the most likely meaning on purely semantic grounds.

(How) Should the Documentary Hypothesis be Taught in Modern Orthodox High Schools?

My approach in this article will therefore be as follows: I will take several examples of narratives that I think historically have and still are seen as primary evidence for the Hypothesis, and seek to show that each of them is as well or better explained if we assume unified authorship. It seems to me reasonable that this should shift the burden of proof back to those who endorse multiple authorship. After all, many books, for example business advice books and Maimonides' Mishneh Torah³, contain numerous apparent contradictions⁴, and yet we do not presume that such books were written by committees!

Additionally, I will show you that the literary questions raised by expositors of the Hypothesis have often been addressed directly by traditional Jewish commentary, especially rabbinic midrash. It seems to me that if many, many brilliant people who studied the Torah intensely for many years were capable of believing it the work of a single author, the burden of proof is on those who see that position as unreasonable. Of course, one may find the propositions and arguments of multiple authorship more compelling than the older approach, but to my mind, if the questions are not new, the old answers remain at least plausible, unless something has happened to make the assumptions that they were based on untenable.

Finally, before we address the Documentary Hypothesis directly, I think it will be worthwhile to discuss the granddaddy of them all, the question that made Benedict Spinoza first argue that parts of the Torah were post-Mosaic. This is an example of Lower rather than of Higher Biblical criticism; it argues that the Torah contains a post-Mosaic editorial insertion, not that the Torah is fundamentally a composite work. But I want to address it because of its historical importance, and because it offers a useful window onto differences between classical and some contemporary modes of reading.

³ Here is an example of such contradictions.

Maimonides Laws of Character Traits 1:4

The straight path is the intermediate measure within each and every trait among all the traits that a human being possesses, meaning the trait that is equidistant from the two extremes and not closer to one than the other. Therefore the First Sages ordered that a person should constantly evaluate his traits and measure them and direct them to the middle path so as to be complete in his body. How should this be done? He should not be hot-tempered, easy to anger, nor like a corpse that has no feeling, but rather intermediate.

Maimonides Laws of Character Traits 2:3

There are traits which it is forbidden for a person to adopt regarding them an intermediate position, but rather he should distance himself from one extreme all the way toward the other extreme . . . so too anger is a most negative trait and it is fitting for a person to distance himself from it to the other extreme and to teach himself not to get angry, even about things that it is fitting to be angry about.

Yet to my knowledge no one has ever questioned that Maimonides wrote both passages!

⁴ perhaps because life is complex and can best be dealt with by navigating between coherent but extreme positions