

# Chapter 5

## Epistemology, Ethics, and Moral Education: A Methodological Justification for a Moral Curriculum Based on Jewish Social Values

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### Introduction

In the book *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (2011), Christian Smith, Kari Christoffersen, Hilary Davidson, and Patricia Snell Herzog discuss the results of interviews they conducted with 230 young adults, ages 18–23, to determine what issues were facing the youth of America. Based on their interviews, the team identified five major challenges: confused moral reasoning, routine intoxication, materialistic life goals, regrettable sexual experiences, and disengagement from civic and political life. One could argue, however, that these five challenges all stem from a common failure, namely, the inability to integrate moral cognition with moral action.

The interviewees were able to answer questions concerning extreme cases of right and wrong, implying that they were given a moral education from which they learned various ethical frameworks with which to make moral judgments. Yet, when asked about their own personal lives, the interviewees did not rely on any moral theory in considering even basic questions. Rather, they deferred to how they felt towards the moral situation. Their reliance on sentiment and their use of emotional language to justify moral choices (rather than using an ethical theory) demonstrates that the interviewees possessed an embodied moral knowledge which is different from the abstract moral frameworks that they learned. This embodied moral knowledge is acquired through habitual action rather than through the intellectual exercises taught in school. When one's actions are justified by being part of an accepted mode of behavior, despite one's awareness of contradicting moral norms that are derived from ethical theory, the result is confused moral reasoning, as well as the other challenges mentioned above. Though one may perceive this as a conflict between two forms of moral justification, it is more commonly referred to

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© Springer International Publishing Switzerland 2016  
M. Ben-Avie et al. (eds.), *Applied Jewish Values in Social Sciences and Psychology*,  
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-21933-2\_5

as a moral gap between what is considered morally correct by virtue of intellectual understanding and what is considered correct or normal in common practice.

Many Christian ethicists contend that this moral gap between what moral philosophy demands and what a person is able to do can only be closed by God's grace (see Hare 2002). Jewish ethical philosophy, on the other hand, is more prone to see the problem in the current mode of moral education and its underlying assumptions regarding moral reasoning rather than in people's capacity to be good. Both secular and Christian ethics accept the assumption held in many schools of contemporary epistemology (the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature and scope of knowledge) that knowledge can be defined as the correct representation of reality. Therefore, for these ethicists, moral knowledge, like any other form of knowledge, is the result of value-free, disengaged inquiry which allows one to gain an understanding of what is universally right in the abstract. Moral action would then be the implementation of what is universally right in a given situation. In the Jewish philosophical framework for moral education which I seek to present, knowledge is a consequence of interaction and relation and is grounded in value-laden premises. It is not an independent representation of the world which corresponds to objective reality. Therefore, moral knowledge, like other forms of knowledge, is the result of continual engagement and reflection based on underlying premises. The consequence for moral education is that there is a smaller moral gap between knowledge and action in the Jewish framework. Also, the process of moral education is integrative in that moral knowledge is taught through introducing students to theoretical principles as well as inculcating moral habits that reinforce those principles.

## Overview of Chapter

In this defense for an integrative approach to moral education based on Jewish social values, I will first provide a methodological account of how practical reasoning differs between the two frameworks. I will then show how a moral curriculum based on Jewish social values can serve to reduce the moral gap between moral knowledge and habits. The curriculum (whose target audience is high school freshmen and can be found at the following website: [https://www.academia.edu/5297880/Moral\\_Curriculum](https://www.academia.edu/5297880/Moral_Curriculum)) seeks to respond to the following challenge: how to create an educational program which not only provides an intellectual framework for ethical deliberation but at the same time imparts the necessary tools for moral training. In other words, how is it possible to instill in students both the knowledge and the will to live a morally motivated life of human flourishing rather than merely provide a summary of theories of moral action? The term "human flourishing" has a long history of use in theories of virtue ethics, though its meaning slightly changes within different theories. It is most commonly seen as a translation of *eudaimonia*, which is a central concept in Aristotelian ethics and political philosophy where it is conceived as the highest human good and the aim of ethics. In medieval Jewish philosophy, the term associated with human flourishing is *shlemut*, which means wholeness or completion.

The curriculum attempts to provide knowledge and the will to live a morally motivated life by establishing the “rules of the game” for ethical behavior using the standards of classroom behavior as the starting point for moral education.

In essence, the course seeks to draw out Lawrence Kohlberg’s “hidden curriculum” to become part of the discourse for moral reasoning (Kohlberg 1983). A hidden curriculum consists of the unintended lessons conveyed by the classroom and the social environment of norms, values, and beliefs. The aim is to try not only to diminish misinterpretation or conflicting lessons that result from the hidden curriculum but also to use small-scale cases of moral deliberation as a means to develop skills before confronting larger questions. Each lesson includes a classroom rule, a definitional term (such as obligation, relevance, sincerity, etc.), a related case found in the students’ general studies courses (with the hope to make what students study in other classes seem more relevant both to ethics and to their Jewish classes), questions that provoke reflection, cases from the Bible or Talmud (that try to open students towards religious sensitivity but not to teach religion per se), and exercises which are meant to reinforce the lesson when students are outside of the classroom. While the curriculum includes Jewish content, the readings are presented in such a way that the curriculum is not limited in its use solely to a Jewish school.

The great majority of the rules for classroom behavior (upon which the curriculum is based) come from the “Laws of Talmud Torah” from Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah*. The *Mishneh Torah*, or *Sefer Yad ha-Hazaka* (Book of the Strong Hand), is a code of Jewish law, compiled between 1170 and 1180 while Maimonides was living in Egypt. It consists of 14 books and details all of Jewish observance. Maimonides’ sources for his code are the entire Jewish canon of his time, which includes the Bible, the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds, the Tosefta, the Sifra, and the Sifre (the last three are exegetical works that expound Jewish law). He also included opinions of the Geonim and his teachers, Rabbi Isaac Alfasi and Rabbi Joseph ibn Migash.

## **Two Accounts of Practical Reasoning: The Scientific and the Experiential**

### ***Scientific Practical Reasoning***

The modern epistemological tradition, starting with Descartes, is grounded in foundationalism, whereby theories of knowledge focus on the justification of belief and on certainty of the believer. The goal of epistemology is to clarify knowledge claims and to determine the degree of validity that knowledge claims could possess. This is true for both the rationalist school and the empiricist school; their differences are only over method. Rationalism posits that we gain knowledge through reasoning, where empiricism contends that we gain knowledge through sensory experience. While the Aristotelian notion also assumes that there is a correspondence between knowledge and an external reality, it differs with the modern conception in that

knowledge is received by the mind through the active intellect. (The active intellect is a concept in classical and medieval philosophy which refers to the formal aspect of the material intellect. The relationship between the active intellect and the material intellect has been subject to great debate over the centuries; yet, all theories accord with the general concept of hylomorphism, where being (*ousia*) is a compound of matter and form.) There is an external mediator between the knower and what is known. The modern notion, on the other hand, conceives knowledge as actively acquired through internal reflection.

If knowledge is the inner depiction of an outer reality, then it is independent of its knower. It is not affected by cultural bias or context, though bias or context may affect the ability of a person to so acquire it. Moreover, knowledge does not lie in the details of a given situation; rather, only what is universal in the situation has value as knowledge per se. For the acquisition of knowledge, an inquiring person ideally should be disengaged so as to maintain objectivity and so as not to impact his or her investigation, just as a scientist avoids interfering with his or her experiments. In the ethical sphere, a moral person first determines what aligns with universal, objective reason, that is, what is morally true, and only then would apply universal moral rules to a particular case. Though this is primarily a Kantian conception of ethical deliberation, it could easily describe utilitarian or other consequentialist processes of ethical decision-making as well. For example, once one accepts a concrete utilitarian formula of what the greatest happiness for the greatest number is, moral deliberation is only the application of the abstract formula to the current circumstances.

In addition to creating an intrinsic gap between moral reasoning and moral action, this conception of moral knowledge vis-à-vis moral action creates the potential for ethics to be an alienating force. An example of how this notion can be a means for alienation is Kant's description of his notion of respect. He writes, "The object of respect is the law only, that is, the law which we impose on ourselves, and yet recognize as necessary in itself. As a law, we are subjected to it without consulting self-love; as imposed by us on ourselves, it is a result of our will...*Respect for a person is properly only respect for the law of which he [the person worthy of respect] gives us an example*" (my italics; Kant 1949, p. 19). Moreover, he writes,

Therefore, the law that we should further the happiness of others arises not from the presupposition that this law is an object of everyone's choice but from the fact that the form of universality, which reason requires as a condition for giving to the maxim of self-love the objective validity of law, is itself the determining ground of the will. Therefore not the object, i.e., the happiness of others, was the determining ground of the pure will but rather it was the lawful form alone. (Kant 1993, p. 35)

In other words, moral action is not motivated by a relationship of mutual concern but rather solely by an abstract, universal law. Without a visceral connection to others, people risk social isolation as well as having a potential moral gap between knowing one should respect another and actually doing so since all interaction is mediated by self-legislating law. Moreover, because the law is universal, it is external to the person despite its self-legislation; therefore, people also risk self-estrangement. Ethics becomes a matter of freedom and social atomism rather than interdependence and communal well-being.

Another consequence of this form of moral reasoning is that though each person is treated as an end, no one is treated as a human qua human. Because moral action is that which is in accord with universal principles, the particular recipient of a moral act is of no consequence per se. An extreme example of this can be seen by Kant's demand that one answer honestly a person regarding the whereabouts of someone who the person intends to murder. The person must tell the truth, even if doing so puts the other person in potential harm, because an act is only judged as moral based upon its motivation and fulfillment and not by its consequences (especially when those consequences are a result of another's actions). The determining factor is solely whether it was based on a rational adherence to the moral law or not. Morality cannot be judged by the consequences of actions since that would introduce other considerations besides the moral law as determining factors. Therefore, the reason why the person must tell the truth is as follows: If the person would lie, he or she will beyond a doubt have acted immorally since one cannot justify lying via a universal maxim. On the other hand, if the person tells the truth, it is not certain that the other person will be murdered. It is only a contingent possibility that should have no moral influence.

This extreme example also shows how this type of moral reasoning is antithetical to Jewish social values. According to Jewish law, the person inquiring after the whereabouts of the third person would be considered a *rodef*, which literally means someone who is "pursuing" another to murder him or her. According to Jewish law, the person who is asked the question is obligated to stop the person and would even be obligated to kill him if necessary, if he refuses to desist (BT *Sanhedrin* 73a). The moral concern is not whether an individual lives up to the abstract moral law, regardless of consequences; rather, moral deliberation concerns both the means and the ends of acting in a given situation, as well as the effects of one's actions on oneself and others.

In terms of moral education, conceiving moral knowledge in a foundationalist framework, where the content of ethics is distinct from its enactment, causes moral pedagogy to be limited to content that can be objectively known. Enactment, on the other hand, must be left to the individual alone to learn since it is based on a person's will. As we have seen with Christian Smith's study, no matter how many hypothetical situations a class discusses, by keeping ethics in the realm of the theoretical, students will be unable to close the moral gap and turn abstract moral knowledge into moral action.

### ***Experiential Practical Reasoning***

Though this conception of practical reason seems to be outside of the conventions of contemporary epistemology, it has a strong tradition within the pragmatist school of philosophy. Therefore, in order to accurately describe it and to give it philosophical justification, this analysis will strongly rely on the works of William James, Charles S. Peirce, and John Dewey.

According to William James, all philosophical systems are initiated by people who first have an experience and then inquire into its meaning (James 1992, p. 563). Judgment regarding whether the inquiry accurately conveys the meaning of the experience is based on how well the chosen philosophical ideas match the already-held feelings to which they are associated (James 1992, p. 841). If those ideas con-jure up the desired feelings, then they are deemed to convey accurately the desired message. James calls this alignment “the sentiment of rationality.” According to James, a person knows that he or she has achieved the goal of obtaining a rational conception of the world only when a feeling of ease, peace, and rest overcomes him or her. Rational comprehension is acknowledged by the transition from perplexity to relief (James 1992, p. 504). Reasoning, whether practical or theoretical, therefore, does not begin in abstracto; it presupposes a general picture of reality as determined by one’s experiences. Philosophy only puts into greater focus the picture the person already sees.

To demonstrate that truth serves the teleological purpose of creating consistency and stability in a person’s practical life, James uses the example of how children are generally more curious than adults. Children, who are still trying to understand their place in the world, typically possess a great amount of curiosity. Adults, on the other hand, who have already developed a routine in their daily lives, are not usually disposed towards discovering new truths (James 1992, p. 740). James calls this tendency to ignore new ideas, the acceptance of which would entail reinterpreting a person’s belief system, “old fogyism” (James 1992, p. 803). Certainty is bought at the expense of facts which detract from consistency. Abnormalities are discarded as statistically insignificant or as errors in observation rather than as challenges to his or her system.

Charles S. Peirce seconds James’ view that what a person deems as rational is a consequence of his or her sentiment; however, he is not as quick as James to accept that the person truly conflates what he or she deems as rational to what is real. Peirce admits that people generally do reason correctly, by which he means in agreement with reality, yet he maintains that it is only accidental that they do so. The veracity of a conclusion is independent of one’s inclination to accept it, and its falsity is unrelated to a person’s aversion to it. What does guide a person’s inferences, if not the truth, is, according to Peirce, a habit of mind, whether inborn or acquired (Peirce 1992, p. 112).

He also shares the idea that habits influence the process by which one inference is chosen over another as well as whether inquiry should be initiated at all. For inquiry is only necessary when a person is in a state of doubt; when something is believed to be true, inquiry will be considered superfluous. As Peirce explains,

Doubt is an uneasy and dissatisfied state from which we struggle to free ourselves and pass into a state of belief; while the latter is a calm and satisfactory state which we do not wish to avoid, or to change to a belief in anything else. On the contrary, we cling tenaciously, not merely to believing, but to believing just what we do believe. (Peirce 1992, p. 114)

As long as one’s beliefs accord to his or her general habits—whether they be habits of perceptions, desires, or actions—they will be maintained without reflection. If, however, there arises a disharmony between a person’s beliefs and his or her habits, then doubt will arise, which incurs the necessity for inquiry until it is resolved.

The recognition that habits influence how one integrates knowledge into daily life and opinion oftentimes leads a person to adopt a coherence theory of truth, which William James describes as follows: “True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those we cannot” (James 1992, p. 573). I would give a broader conception by saying that false ideas are those that we can neither assimilate, validate, corroborate nor verify; all else are potentially true ideas. In other words, those ideas that can be assimilated but not verified, for example, may still be considered true. Their veracity depends on how vital they are to one’s goals and how easily they can cohere with other ideas in a person’s schema.

Under a coherence theory of truth, one cannot make distinctions between truth, knowledge, and reality in the way the contemporary epistemology allows. When truth, knowledge, and reality are distinct, then knowledge as a representation of an external reality can be either true or false. Yet, to judge knowledge as true or not is to judge something from which one cannot remove himself or herself. Thus, it creates a contradiction since there is nothing in the knowledge one possesses that can determine the veracity of its correspondence to reality. Only something outside of the claim to correspondence can justify the claim. In other words, true knowledge cannot justify itself (Bradley 1999, p. 33).

In order to avoid this type of contradiction, a “coherence theory of truth” assumes that one accepts what one knows as a true understanding of what is real. It does not make separate steps between what one knows, “the truth,” and reality. Therefore, inquiry into truth is the examination of reality; it is a process of organizing experiences in such a way that they cohere and influence a person’s worldview and daily habits. However, because absolute truth is an ideal which encompasses more than all of human experience, let alone an individual’s experiences, human knowledge can never attain truth in the complete sense (Joachim 1999, p. 52).

Though the way beliefs are formed is dependent upon experience, the relationship between one’s ideas and one’s experiences includes an additional component which serves to make the acquisition of knowledge a circular process. (Given three points, it is always possible to draw a circle that passes through all three. I use the image of a circle because it has a more fluid and natural flow than a triangle.) Not only are beliefs consequent to experience, they are also intimately linked to subsequent practical activity. Practical activity, on the other hand, plays a role in providing experiences upon which one creates and reinforces beliefs. James describes the relational structure of the triad that exists between experiences, belief, and action as follows:

The sensory impression exists only for the sake of awakening the central process of reflection, and the central process of reflection exists only for the sake of calling forth the final act. All action is thus a *re*-action upon the outer world; and the middle stage of consideration or contemplation or thinking is only a place of transit, the bottom of a loop, both whose ends have their point of application in the outer world. (James 1992, p. 542)

The tri-faceted relationship, however, is not linear but rather circular since actions will ultimately determine which kinds of experiences a person will have. These experiences, in turn, reinforce the foundation upon which the person’s philosophy is built.

The notion that beliefs are rules for action is grounded in the idea that a belief is a way to conceive of reality with the highest possible certainty and conviction.



As such, it is closer to a feeling or an emotion than merely a recognition (James 1992, p. 1021). The intensity of a belief further strengthens the connection between an idea and its corresponding movement so that the movement will occur despite any number of intermediary steps between the belief and its ultimate act of conviction. For example, the most effective way to demonstrate a belief is to act in a way that conveys it, as opposed to verbalizing the fact that one believes something. If I were to say that I trust a particular person, yet refuse to confide in him in any way, it would be difficult to accept that I trust him. Similarly, if I say that I believe that a door is locked but then try to open it by turning its handle, an onlooker would more likely venture that I thought I could open the door than that I believed it was locked. Peirce similarly asserts that beliefs are rules for action and adds that beliefs, as rules for action, are in essence habits. By the continual acting on a belief through habituated actions, its interaction with other aspects of one's worldview leads it to be integrated into one's system of beliefs. Therefore, habits also give rise to developing a different thought pattern.

John Dewey is stronger than either Peirce or James in his contention that the triad primarily begins with actions and continues towards thoughts. According to Dewey, the formation of ideas, as well as their execution, depends on habit. Even those who admit that thought is dependent upon prior experience must recognize that sensations which compose a person's perceptions also depend upon the habits of discrimination that a person develops in order to have particular sensations. As Dewey asserts, "A moderate amount of observation of a child will suffice to reveal that even such gross discriminations as black, white, red, green, are the result of some years of active dealings with things in the course of which habits have been set up" (Dewey 2008, p. 14). The more habits a person has, the more adept he or she will be to observe and evaluate experiences since habits provide the tools for cognition (Dewey 2008, p. 115). However, just as the example of a child learning to discriminate between colors shows, habits are not solely the consequence of repetition. In fact, repetition is not even a necessary component for habit formation; a strongly influencing act or experience may result in the acquisition of a habit as well. Rather, when habits are formed through repetition, it is the gradual sensitizing to certain stimuli which creates a predisposition that generates the habit. As such, habituation itself is a process of action, experience, and reflection.

Not only are thoughts the result of habituated actions, their ability to produce a desired result rests in their ability to be put to action. Habits provide a means of execution as well as a test or criterion for a person's thoughts (Dewey 2008, p. 38). If a person cannot naturally act upon a thought, if his or her actions are forced and clumsy as a result of the thought not being fully integrated into habituated practice, then contrary habits will automatically overrule it. For example, if a person tries to perform daily activities with his or her weaker hand, he or she will inevitably begin to use the dominant hand without even thinking, unless he or she continually forces himself or herself to use the weaker hand. Similarly, upholding a notion of freedom that is impossible to carry out in a particular setting devalues the notion of freedom by rendering it irrelevant. For example, Article 36 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China is worded as follows: "No state organ, public organization



or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion. The state protects normal religious activities. No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the state. Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination.” “Normal religious activities” are understood as those that are state sanctioned. This is a very tenuous definition of freedom of religion for members of those faiths that are not recognized in China, such as all Protestant faiths other than the Three-Self Patriotic Movement.

## Jewish Assumptions of Knowledge and Belief

Knowledge (*da'at*) in Hebrew is a relational term. Primarily used in regard to abstract ideas (but can be used with people or events), it conveys that a person has a familiarity with the object known. In one respect it is a passive receipt since familiarity is something given through contact with an object or person. Yet, in another respect, it is active since familiarity demands that the person exert himself or herself to receive and increase such knowledge. In the Bible, understanding (*bina/tevhunah*) is also a relational word, yet in a different way than knowledge (*da'at*). Knowledge (according to the Bible) is a relationship between a person and something external to him or her; understanding is when a person sees a relationship between two things external to him or her. A person must know each thing before he or she can understand how they relate to each other. As such, understanding is an expansion of knowledge. Contrary to the notion of knowledge in contemporary epistemology, where the veracity of the belief proposition is independent of the person and the effort to possess knowledge is an effort of acquisition, in the Biblical view, the veracity of knowledge (*da'at*) and understanding (*bina/tevhunah*) is dependent on the relationship between the person and that which he or she knows—the effort to possess knowledge and understanding is the effort of deepening that relationship.

The Hebrew word for wisdom connotes a similar view of knowledge. As seen through how it is used in the Bible, wisdom (*hokhma*), a concept that is not typically found in contemporary epistemology, is an orientated perceptual schema which allows a person to take his or her knowledge and apply it correctly to a dynamic reality. This is similar to Linda Zagzebski's idea that “wisdom is an epistemic value qualitatively different from the piling up of beliefs that have the property of justification, warrant, or certainty. Wisdom is neither a matter of the properties of propositional beliefs, nor is it a matter of the relations among such beliefs; it is a matter of grasping the whole of reality” (Zagzebski 1996, p. 50). When the Hebrew word for wisdom is used as a verb, it is always expressed in the *kal* verbal form, which indicates that the acquisition and practice of wisdom is an active process. If one could draw meaning from syntactical constraints as derived from how the word “wise” is conjugated as a verb—to be wise—it is not enough to passively consider the possible relationship between cause and effect. The truth of the wise person is

internalized in his or her sentiment and actions as a result of engaging knowledge while making decisions and creating positive habits. Based on this, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch defines a wise person (*hakham*) as follows:

A *Hakham* is one who takes in all that is in front of him. He recognizes things for what they are and for what they should be. Both—the nature of things and their intended purpose—are given; man need not create them. The truest *Hakham* is one who learns the nature and the purpose from the One Who assigned things their nature and purpose. (Hirsch, *Bereshis* 2000, p. 76)

According to Rabbi Hirsch, where wisdom (*hokhma*) is using one's knowledge in a way that corresponds to one's goals, intelligence (*sekhel*) is the ability to grasp ideas and concepts (Hirsch, *Bereshis* 2000, pp. 99–100, 643). The increase of one's intelligence would be a result of one's faculties. Yet, one can be intelligent without being able to apply his or her knowledge to the world. How a person turns his or her intelligence into wisdom is a result of his or her virtues.

A Talmudic example can demonstrate the accuracy of this definition. The Talmud relates that Alexander of Macedon asked the sages ten questions, one of which was “Who is called wise?” To this question, the sages replied, “Who is wise? He who can perceive consequences” (BT *Tamid* 32a). The sages' answer regarding who is considered wise is also Rabbi Shimon's answer to Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai's question of which is the proper path that a person should walk (Mishna *Avot* 2:13). To have wisdom, the knowledge a person acquires must be organized so that it allows for a coherent focus towards a goal. One's worldview must also allow for the prioritization of information according to how effective it is in maintaining that focus. In terms of perceiving consequences, a wise person must not only have a refined sense of perception but he or she must also possess the proper tools to interpret what he or she sees in order to make correct inferences. It is not a knowledge that one can possess; it is a relation to the world that one has. Through wisdom, there is a direct relationship between epistemology and ethics.

Jewish notions of belief (*emunah*) and truth (*emet*) similarly demonstrate a connection between epistemology and ethics that fits the experiential model of reasoning. *Emunah* (belief) is a reliance on something permanent and effective, such as the promises that God made to one who follows His will and who observes the Torah that He gave which shows one how to do so. It is not purely a propositional belief that justifies later action but rather “the acceptance of the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven and the yoke of the commandments,” which binds the person in a relationship with God and His world (BT *Berakhot* 14b). Proclaiming the unity of God by reading the *Shema* is called “accepting upon oneself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven,” while accepting the fulfillment of the commandments as a whole while reading the second paragraph of the *Shema* is called “accepting the yoke of the commandments.”

The relationship between *emet* (truth) and *emunah* (belief) can be seen through the words in the Bible of the Queen of Sheba, who states, “True (*emet*) was the word that I had heard in my country about your words and your wisdom! I had not believed (*he'emanti l-*) the words until I came and my own eyes saw; and behold—even the half of it was not told to me” (I Kings 10:6–7). The word she heard was not true in the propositional sense since it was claimed that Solomon was only half as

wise as he actually was. Rather, the truth of the word she heard was in its reliability; she did not have to see for herself if she would have only believed, or relied on, the report in the first place. More demonstrably, there is a passage in the Bible where *emet* (truth) and *ne'eman* (faithful) are juxtaposed, which highlights the similarity and difference between the two. When the people come to Jeremiah the prophet and ask him to pray for them so that God will tell them what they should do, Jeremiah tells them that he will pray for them, and he will also tell them everything that God demands. To this, the people respond, "Let Hashem [God] be a true and faithful witness against us, if we do not act according to everything that Hashem your Elohim tells you concerning us..." (Jeremiah 42:5). That Hashem is a true witness (*l'ed emet*) is meant to affirm that the people will do everything that Jeremiah tells them that God demands of them. That Hashem is a reliable witness (*v'ne'eman*) is meant to affirm that the people accept that He will make sure that the people will receive the warned consequences if they do not fulfill everything that they must do. This explanation is consistent with the understanding of *ne'eman* in the verse, "Know therefore that Hashem your Elohim, He is God; the faithful (*ne'eman*) God, who keeps covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments to a thousand generations" (Deuteronomy 7:9; see also Isaiah 49:7). He is faithful because he keeps His covenant. In the case of Jeremiah's statement, truth is not a description of circumstances but an acceptance of an obligation. Similarly, the term "faithful" is not a reliance on facts but a reliance on the proper response to the fulfillment or not of a commitment. The difference between *emet* and *ne'eman*, at least as it is conveyed in this exchange, is more a function of time and tense, and less a matter of justifiability or veracity.

Given this relationship between *emunah* and *emet*, the distinction between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge, or propositional truth and normative truth, becomes less stark than usually considered. The use of terms such as "belief that" and "belief in" also says as much about how a particular belief fits with other beliefs as their use says about a person's stance towards a given piece of knowledge. For example, under this conception, it is not the case that a smoker believes the proposition "smoking kills" despite the fact that he or she does not stop smoking. Rather, what occurs is that the smoker's belief in the idea that smoking kills in general is overpowered by his or her belief in the idea that the next particular cigarette he or she will smoke will not do much damage. Both beliefs entail a certain action as a direct consequence, and, when they contradict, the idea with the greater weight will determine what the person will do. The person's behavior is based on how his or her beliefs are prioritized. This idea is demonstrated in a 2009 study, where researchers found that to the extent that smoking is a source of self-esteem, warnings on cigarette packages, such as "Smoking kills," ironically stimulates smoking. On the other hand, cigarette package warnings such as "Smoking brings you and the people around you severe damage" and "Smoking makes you unattractive" reduce smoking for those who based their self-esteem on the habit. The scientists of the study explained this finding by the fact that the latter warnings may be particularly threatening to those who believe the opposite, namely that smoking raises their positive self-image. Death warnings, on the other hand, cause those with a high

smoking self-esteem to use smoking as a strategy to buffer against existential fears provoked by the death warnings (Hansen 2010).

The relationship between *emunah* and *emet* also means that the strength of one's reliance on a propositional truth influences the connection between a truth and the one who communicates that truth. Thus, "believing that" (*he'amin l-*) is really only a subset of "believing in" (*he'emin b-*)—even though different beliefs at times may contradict each other. Similarly, belief, in general, should be seen in terms of how one acts on a truth rather than as a possession of it. Therefore, while it is the case that the righteous assert or assume (meta)physical truths, the meaning of those truths for him or her is in how he or she relates to them, as Habakkuk explains, "the righteous shall live by his faith" (*emunah*; Habakkuk 2:4).

## A Moral Curriculum Based on Jewish Social Values

Given that Jewish assumptions of knowledge and belief fit the experiential account, a successful program of moral education based on Jewish social values must provide tools for students to deepen their appreciation of experiences. Therefore, they must incorporate the following five components: *attention, perception, emotion, motivation, and habituation*. However, in order for there not to be a gap between theory and practice, every component must be grounded in action, whether it is the actual acts of the students or the vicarious actions stemming from various examples under discussion.

### *Attention*

By attention, I mean the active self-urging to sustain focus. Psychological theories typically divide attention into two sorts—namely, passive, spontaneous attention and voluntary, deliberate attention. Passive attention is the result of coming into contact with something one finds interesting. It is a product of prior association and attraction. Because it does not stem from a direct willingness to attend, one is able to maintain his or her passive attention as long as he or she is able to maintain interest.

Active attention, on the other hand, cannot be continuously sustained; it acts more like the spark plug of an internal combustion engine. Maintaining attention is meant to actively shape and/or strengthen a person's desires. The key to sustaining focus, where one's perspective is continually directed to underlying assumptions of the good, is to make the focus attractive or exciting. This does not mean that one forms a conception of the good around what he or she already wants, but rather that one actively shapes one's desires. Because attraction coincides with familiarity, it is important to make moral discussions personally relevant and associated with what people are already doing. It is also important continually to adapt moral ideas to new situations and discussions so that one does not lose focus through boredom.

Until the time that a person comes to feel a sense of attachment, however, it is important to utilize voluntary, deliberate attention as a means of training.

Of course, based upon an experiential view of rationality, morality cannot be a function of objective reasoning which discovers an accurate representation of the world and a subjective will which impels the person to act according to the judgments of his or her reasoning. Consequently, morality cannot be grounded on a neutral foundation. Rather, it must be founded on a proper orientation towards that on which attention is focused. That primary focus for moral knowledge is a conception of the good. Furthermore, the acquisition of moral knowledge is dependent on giving continual attention to that conception so that the contextual complexity of any given situation is ordered in a way that the person can act in a manner consistent with the good.

An example in Jewish practice of actively directing attention is the reciting of blessings before performing a ritual. When people recite blessings before performing ritual acts, they accomplish three things. They make themselves aware of what they are doing, they make themselves aware of why they are doing it, and they draw attention to the underlying focus which gives their actions meaning.

This notion of attention is the opposite of Simone Weil's. Simone Weil describes attention as a negative effort. Though deliberate and voluntary, it is not active in the sense that a person directly attends to something. As she describes it, "Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty, and ready to be penetrated by the object; it means holding in our minds, within reach of this thought, but on a lower level and not in contact with it, the diverse knowledge we have acquired which we are forced to make use of. Our thought should be in relation to all particular and already formulated thoughts, as a man on a mountain who, as he looks forward, sees also below him, without actually looking at them, a great many forests and plains. Above all our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object that is to penetrate it" (Weil 1951, p. 62). Weil's view of attention is based on her emphasis on passivity and self-sacrifice. Through removing any notion of self that a person may have, Weil argues, he or she allows for the other to become manifest in his or her mind.

In order to anchor moral education in a personally relevant and familiar context, the curriculum is based upon the rules of the classroom that students are already following. By making the rules explicit, the curriculum attempts to have them serve as stimuli for voluntary attention in a process that is similar to reciting blessings. Furthermore, the moral values that the classroom rules convey are presented in numerous and various ways in order to keep them interesting.

## *Perception*

By perception, I do not mean a recognition of what objectively occurs. Moral life is complex; therefore, it is not enough to direct one's attention to a certain goal and to have clear, yet general, rules for how to attain it. Any given situation may allow for multiple descriptions, which bear competing, or even conflicting, claims. Moreover,

emphasizing different details will highlight different considerations for how to relate to a particular scenario. Perception is the ability to understand different nuances between one situation and another and between the needs of one person and another. It is a skill of recognizing the particular while still having a hold on commonalities.

In his essay “Of the Standard of Taste,” David Hume uses the following story from *Don Quixote* (Chap. 13) to demonstrate both the complexity of perception and the necessity to refine one’s perception to compensate for the lacuna left by general principles:

Sancho relates that in his family were the two best wine tasters in La Mancha. They gave the two of them some wine out of a cask, and asked their opinion as to the condition and quality of the wine. One of them tried it with the tip of his tongue the other did no more than bring it to his nose. The first said the wine had a flavor of iron, the second said it had a stronger flavor of leather. The owner said the cask was clean, and that nothing had been added to the wine from which it could have gotten a flavor of either iron or leather. Nevertheless, these two great wine tasters held to what they had said. Time went by, the wine was sold, and when they came to clean out the cask, they found in it a small key hanging to a thong of leather.

The two wine tasters recognized the main qualities of the wine, just as everyone else had; however, they also perceived the faintest influences which went unnoticed by the general populace. Yet, even with their discriminatory senses of taste, they both perceived something different, both of which were present in the wine. Moreover, their contradictory descriptions of the wine in the end were both proven true, as was the taste of the wine that was determined by the general populace. The reason that more than one account can be true is because the account was of what the wine tasted like and not a scientific description of its composition. With respect to the two wine tasters, while their heightened sense of perception may be partly innate, their ability to refine their sense of taste to such a degree could also be a product of experience and training.

A great example of the importance of perception in the moral sphere is a statement by Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira who writes, “People encounter issues that appear to be contradictory, simply because they have only viewed the subject’s external manifestations, and failed to penetrate its inner reality. Had they delved into the heart of the issue, they would have seen that there is really no contradiction at all; there are no questions, no answers—rather, it is all one integrated issue that branches off in different directions” (2011, p. 209). Perception is a skill that is developed not only through direct experience where one learns how general principles are manifest in particular circumstances but also through vicarious experiences that one has while studying from different texts.

Reading and discussing literary accounts that include moral content should not be considered as being in addition to the learning of moral rules; rather, it should be considered as learning them in and of themselves. Martha Nussbaum contends that the literary form is not separable from the philosophical content that it conveys. Rather, the literary form constitutes part of the content itself. Therefore, in examining questions of how a person should live, literature can serve two purposes. It can provide a rich and inclusive conception of the moral good and of the complicated ways to pursue it. Also, the narratives in certain works of literature can provide the proper tools to develop the skills necessary for a developed ethical conception.

Through the personalities of different characters, each with his or her own priorities, literary works can demonstrate possible conflicts between different values. Literary accounts also emphasize the necessity to develop a keen sense of perception in order to make moral judgments (see Nussbaum 1990).

In order to develop moral perception, the curriculum employs narratives both from the students' general studies courses (with the hope to make what students study in other classes seem relevant both to ethics and to their Jewish classes) and cases from the Bible or Talmud (that try to open students towards religious sensitivity but not to teach religion per se), as well as practical exercises that stimulate moral consideration and discussion. Each narrative or exercise is followed by questions which seek to expand the students' imaginations through proposing various perspectives which they must consider. It also compels the students to consider the subjectivity of their own perspectives in order to promote empathy with others' points of view with the hope that it will refine their own perceptions when deliberating on moral questions in the future.

### *Emotion and Motivation*

Because, as we have seen above, actions, beliefs, and emotions play a cooperative role in the formation of a person's worldview, proper moral education cannot separate the cognition of moral principles from emotional responses to moral situations or from motivations to act morally. Rather, moral education must continually integrate the three facets of moral awareness into a unified instruction of relating to the world with a moral orientation. In the Jewish tradition, the necessity for a unified approach is best articulated by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch. He writes,

In Judaism, the highest moral perfection of conduct is the purpose of intellectual edification, and it is only such perfection that gives value to intellectual development. In the Jewish conception of the holiness of life, genius is not license for nonobservance of the laws of morality; on the contrary, supreme morality is the test of supreme intellect, and only in it and by it are the nobility and purity of the intellect demonstrated and proven. (Hirsch and Haberman 2000, p. 714)

According to Rabbi Hirsch, how a person acts reflects true moral knowledge. When a person says that he or she knows what the right thing to do is, but neither feels an emotional response to the situation nor is motivated to act accordingly, in truth this demonstrates his or her moral ignorance since the response conveys a closer affiliation with a conflicting belief than the one verbalized.

Given his view of the relationship between a person's intellect and his or her inclinations, Rabbi Hirsch calls for the unification of "spiritual" or "intellectual" education with "moral" education. Only the combination of the two types of knowledge can allow a person to possess both the means to live a good life and the will to do so.

Spiritual education—training of the spirit by and for the acquisition of knowledge—and moral education—training of the will for the requirements of the moral law (the former



accomplished through formal education, the latter by parental upbringing)—these two tasks sum up the total function of the education and raising of our young. (Hirsch 1984, p. 104)

Within this conception, the focus of education no longer emphasizes the material a student covers; rather, prominence is given to how the material covered is infused in the student's life choices.

In order to develop moral emotion and motivation, the curriculum continuously makes the examples and narratives that it employs engage the personal realm. Teachers ask students how they relate to the students' lives, what their responses were emotionally, and what they would do in those situations. Many of the exercises also ask students to act upon their emotions and beliefs in order to continually associate action with discussion and reflection.

### *Habituation*

Habituation is more than repetition. If it were simply repetition, then moral education would be unidirectional. The "receive and accept" form of education creates a tendency towards conformism. It also engenders the fossilization of perspective and loss of creativity since students are never able to actively engage with and manipulate information in new and different situations.

Habituation, rather, is an integrative moral training that grows out of, and supplements, the "receive and accept" form of education. When children are young, parents act as rulers of the household, where children simply do as they are told. Yet, a healthy familial bond is not based upon the service of children to monarchical parents but rather upon mutual affection and concern for each other's best interests. As a child matures, therefore, parental authority ceases to be considered in terms of simple obligation and begins to approach respect for the experience and advice of one who holds no hidden agenda. Similarly, when a person seeks advice from friends or family, he or she does so knowing the advice is a suggestion and not a prescription. The person himself or herself must ultimately decide after evaluating different opinions. The interaction between family members and friends as people develop portrays the process of habituation. By discussing with others what to do, by having conversations about what was done and its effects, and by implementing in the future what was learned, a person becomes habituated into moral living.

In this form of pedagogy, emphasis is on the recognition of problems instead of the transference of knowledge or answers. Teachers in this framework hold no authority by virtue of their position; everyone is mutually engaged and participates in a relationship based on dialogue which encourages cooperation yet also promotes confidence in the student to think for himself or herself. This is not to say that teachers have no authority whatsoever; rather, what it means is that the teacher's personal moral perspective must be recognized as authoritative by virtue of his or her experience and moral engagement in the world and not by virtue of his or her position.

Moreover, the primary component of this form of education is not substantive but procedural; moral training consists of teaching how to think about moral issues

rather than what to think the moral imperative is, given a particular situation. It allows for the potential of personal transformation through moral growth since there is no stock answer to repeat or stock actions to rehearse. Class discussions consist of continual questioning and the contrasting of situations with no predetermined “received” answer, except for the foundational rules of classroom behavior.

Of course, effective moral training begins at home. The first social relations, and thus the most formidable ones, are those of the immediate family. It is through the family dynamic that children first learn how to interact with others in an environment that does not readily allow for voluntary withdrawal. Family members are forced by proximity to deal with issues that arise in everyday life of the household. An integrative approach to moral education only seeks to model the dynamic of social and familial interactions in a way that allows for the development of moral character through habituation.

This form of dialogical pedagogy, however, cannot replace the dominant method of “receive and accept” pedagogy. The two forms of education must complement each other rather than compete. It is therefore imperative that room be made within the school system for moral education via habituation but that education does not become a “student knows best for himself or herself” endeavor.

Because the moral curriculum seeks to transform behavior so that a person focuses on positive acts as much as refrains from negative ones, the curriculum requests that teachers use the following technique to discipline students, when possible: Whenever a student misbehaves, in order to counter an improper action with a proper one, the student should perform an act of kindness to another person, write down what he or she did, and have the recipient of the act of kindness sign it. The intent of such an exercise is to push students to perform more proper acts than improper acts during the day, to change the perspective from discipline by punishment to that of training, and to make students aware of the consequences of both proper and improper actions.

## **An Example from the Curriculum**

In this section, I will explain the first lesson of the curriculum, which is provided at the end of the chapter. The lesson attempts to stimulate all aspects of the students’ attention through authoritative rules, literature with which he or she is already familiar, new content, and different genres. What is most important, however, for this curriculum is that the class actually implements the rules into standards of classroom behavior and continually refers to them as students abide or break them. Otherwise, students will not be gaining new habits nor integrating new knowledge into daily habits.

The beginning of each lesson provides the general heading and topic of the lesson so that students are immediately aware of the context of each rule and its practical consequences. For example, students will be made aware that all of the rules in Chap. 1 relate to the responsibilities of teachers to students and responsibilities of

students to teachers. They will ultimately know how the teacher–student relationship is modelled after other familial and social relationships that they may have.

Each lesson continues with a definition, where a moral term is defined in a way that is easy to understand and relevant to everyday language of the students. The lesson continues with a longer discussion about the meaning of the moral term. The discussion is based either on readings that the students will have had to do for summer reading or in another class.

Every discussion section will conclude with a rhyming couplet to facilitate remembering the concept, as well as a series of questions which are meant to promote further thought and discussion of the concept.

Each lesson ends with “A Case to Consider” which uses an example from the Jewish tradition as a source of discussion and reinforcement of the concepts and values taught in the lesson.

Depending on the structure and timing of the class, for the first 5 minutes each day, the previous day’s class rule and definitional term should be reviewed. Students should have the rule and definition memorized and should be able to provide a personal example of how to apply it. After the review, the new lesson should begin with an emphasis on the practical aspects of the ruling. For the remainder of the first half of class, the explanatory information should be read aloud in class, or at least summarized if the students are assigned the reading for homework, and discussed based on the questions or exercises given below. The second half of class should focus on the “Case to Consider” and its subsequent questions. If there is not enough time to discuss both the explanatory content and the “Case to Consider” in one class period, it is better to take two classes to discuss one rule than to skip either section. If a teacher has a different example that may be more fitting for the class, then he or she should note which example was used in the post-lesson teacher summary. If the examples covered in this curriculum coincide with material brought in other classes, effort should be made to integrate the lesson into the other classes as reinforcement.

There are no formal tests or quizzes in the curriculum. Instead, the examination of the students’ progress should be continual and incorporated into the class discussion via the questions and exercises, as well as by homework assignments. The reason for the lack of formal testing is to promote consistent learning and not the “stop and start” method popularly used by students who cram for tests.

The first day of class, students should be asked to write the answer to the following question to be handed in to the teacher:

***How would you describe your best friend and how would you describe your worst enemy?***

On the last day of class, students should be asked to write the answer to the following questions to be handed in to the teacher:

***What qualities in a person do you think makes a good friend? What do you think makes a bad friend? In which category would you put yourself?***

## Responsibilities of Students and Teachers

### *General Responsibilities of Students and Teachers*

**Parents are obligated to teach their children. Grandparents are obligated to teach their grandchildren. Children precede grandchildren in terms of priority.**

#### **Obligation—“You must”**

In the book *Civil Disobedience*, one of the great books of American political history, which influenced leaders such as Mahatma Ghandi and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Henry David Thoreau writes,

I was not born to be forced. I will breathe after my own fashion. Let us see who is the strongest. What force has a multitude? They only can force me who obey a higher law than I. They force me to become like themselves. I do not hear of *men* being *forced* to have this way or that by masses of men. What sort of life were that to live?

Thoreau is arguing against allowing the government to control a person’s conscience. Everyone has a duty—an obligation—to stop the government from forcing a person to commit what he or she believes is wrong. But if he so passionately argues that no one should be forced to do something against one’s own conscience, what does he mean when he writes the following?

They only can force me who obey a higher law than I. They force me to become like themselves.

How can he claim that a person can force another to do something, especially when what is being forced is to become like the other person?

Actually, we may not realize it, but we are forced to do things all the time. When we play a game, like basketball, we are forced to only play five players at a time. At lunch, we are forced to chew with our mouths closed so that people will sit with us. In all of these cases, being forced does not seem to be a problem either because we do not notice it or because we agree to the obligation. So, we do not feel that someone or something is interfering with our liberty or our conscience.

It seems to be different when our parents tell us to clean our room or when they ground us for doing something that we were not supposed to do. In those cases, it does feel like we are being forced. But, in this case, does it seem to interfere with our liberty or our conscience? Immediately, we might say, “Of course! I don’t want to clean my room or be grounded!”

Yet, if we think about it a bit longer, are not our parents just trying to help us? Is it not better to live in a clean room than a dirty room? Is it not easier to find things when the room is in order?

By forcing us to clean our room, our parents actually make it possible to have more freedom to do other things simply because we now need to spend less time looking around our room for the things we want. Similarly, when we are grounded,

we hopefully realize that what we did was wrong and that even if free to do it, we should not.

But is that not the same thing as saying that even if we could put six players on the court, we should not since it ruins the game for everyone involved? Maybe when Thoreau wrote that only those who obey a higher law than him can force him to be like them, he meant that it is not against his conscience nor his freedom to learn from others who can teach him to be better than he already is. It is just like when our parents force us to do things in order to teach us.

Obligations give us the ability to practice our liberty and obey our conscience by setting the proper ground rules. These ground rules may seem to interfere with our freedom in the short term, but in the long term they make us better players, both on and off the court. These types of obligations are usually called moral obligations.

What at first might be an obligation  
in the end will be an education.

### Questions

1. What type of obligation do parents and grandparents have?
2. Why do children take precedence over grandchildren?
3. Are parents also teachers?

### A Case to Consider

There is a story in the Jewish tradition that gives an account of what happened before the Jews received the Torah. Before giving the Torah to the Jewish people, God first offered it to every nation of the world, but no one wanted to accept it. They all asked, “What does it say in the Torah?” When they heard about its contents, each nation rejected the Torah for a different reason. When God finally offered it to the Jewish people, they responded, “We will do and we will listen,” meaning that they will accept the rules of the Torah as an obligation with the understanding that there will be valuable lessons to learn. (Adapted from the Talmud and the Yalkut Shimoni)

- Why do you think the various nations wanted to know what was in the Torah first before deciding whether to accept it or not? How was the attitude of the Jewish people different?
- What would be the difference if instead “We will do and we will listen,” the Jewish people said, “We will listen and we will do”?

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