Teaching Midrash Explicitly in the Primary School

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Abstract

Midrash (classic rabbinic interpretation of Hebrew Scripture) is taught alongside Scripture in Bible classes throughout the Jewish world in the primary school. Because Jewish tradition holds that rabbinic interpretation of Scripture should always be taught together with Scripture the teaching of midrash is viewed as part of the initiation of the student into Jewish sacred texts and into Jewish literacy. Traditionally children encounter midrash commentary when it is quoted or paraphrased by Rashi, Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac of the eleventh century, whose commentary on the Pentateuch is the most widely read. But since midrash is based on the theology of the ancient rabbis and was the rabbis' medium for conveying their understandings of Scripture, of God, of righteousness and man's place in this world to their followers, these texts are naturally complex and their content is often abstract. Current pedagogical practice does not address midrash as a discrete subject and does not, therefore, address these underlying characteristics of midrash. It has been my professional experience, as well as that of other Bible teachers, that a lack of explicit pedagogy for midrash can cause problems of understanding for the young student which may negatively influence her view of Scripture.

This paper describes an educational innovation (for year six students) that was developed and tested by the author in the format of a design experiment. The strategy for teaching midrash explicitly builds upon academic scholarship on midrash content; on scholarship on the way that children form religious understandings and on scholarship that relates to the way that children make sense of texts. The research was conducted on an international scale, in one school each in Israel, England and the U.S. The findings reflect the challenges faced and the successes that were achieved in teaching midrash explicitly in the primary school.

Acknowledgement

My sincere appreciation to my mentor in midrash, Prof. David Stern of the University of Pennsylvania, whose unofficial guidance throughout my research has proven invaluable to me. My thanks, too, for his most helpful comments on the midrash content of this dissertation.

Dedication

To my husband, Gary, and our children. Your unfailing support has enabled me to see my work through to completion.

Word Length

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

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Supporting Statement

I have found my participation in the international EdD programme at the Institute of Education to be an educational experience. The process, from attending the seminars through the research for – and the writing of – my dissertation has been one of personal and professional growth.

During the foundations of professionalism module I was given the chance to reflect on my view of the teacher as a professional. This was particularly meaningful for me as my field, Bible education in Jewish schools, is one that has been around for centuries but has not necessarily changed with advances in pedagogical approaches. Thus while it enjoys the esteem of a well established teaching subject, its practitioners in many cases rely on traditional folk pedagogies such as rote teaching. Thus during this module I began to reflect on notions of professionalism; and whether we as teachers should consider ourselves *professionals*, in the modern sense of the word, when we engage in traditional pedagogies. I began to realise that we should be considering notions of meaning making and textual understanding.

Indeed it was this kind of reflection that shed light for me on the problems that I had experienced (and the problems that my colleagues had shared with me) relating to the teaching of classical rabbinic interpretation of Hebrew Scripture known as *midrash*. These ancient Hebrew texts are taught in Jewish primary schools alongside Scripture. They are difficult to understand for several reasons including, their ancient Hebrew language; their abstract content; their basis in an ancient rabbinic mindset that is unfamiliar to the uninitiated student; their complex interpretive nature and their use of symbolism. Thus it occurred to me that the traditional rote pedagogy that has been used in Bible classes does not enable the young student to make meaning of these difficult interpretive texts. This led to my decision to explore the possibility of designing a new pedagogy for midrash.

During the first methods of enquiry module I thought about what might be an appropriate research methodology for me to use in designing and testing a new pedagogy for midrash. The module included discussions surrounding the theoretical underpinnings for different ways of doing research. We were introduced to

conceptions of qualitative and quantitative research together with their respective benefits and drawbacks. I reasoned that if I were to be able to make a contribution to the teaching of Bible through the introduction of a modern pedagogy for midrash, I would need to find out whether this pedagogy could provide quantifiable results. I would also need to set up my research in such a way that other Bible teachers would be able to replicate what I'd done. Therefore the concept of generalisability was important. This seemed to fit with the objectives of quantitative research, and led me to consider the pre-test, post-test experimental paradigm.

On the other hand later, as I prepared for the IFS (Institution Focused Study), I realised that my need to explore the understandings of the children called for qualitative data gathering as well. This was especially important since this would be a first attempt to explore the way in which children make meaning of midrash texts. This 'first time' notion was borne of the fact that traditional (rote) Bible pedagogy does not explore the way in which Jewish children make sense – or create meaning- of Hebrew Scripture. Accordingly I reasoned that I would need to gather data in the form of the children's own words describing how they were making meaning of midrash. These considerations led me to think about including open-ended student responses through student pre-test and post-test interviews and through daily pop-quizzes (on the teaching days) into the research format for my IFS.

The research that I conducted as part of the second methods unit became the preliminary work for my IFS. It made use of the focus group paradigm for gathering preliminary data: children's base line knowledge of midrash. It aimed to find out what the major difficulties were that children faced when encountering midrash texts. It also aimed to gather qualitative data, from the descriptions of the children, relating to children's conceptions of midrash and their understandings of this genre. Accordingly transcripts were made of the meetings of the three focus groups that participated in this research. The data that was gathered was used in the design of the main measuring element of the IFS, the questionnaire. This questionnaire was, in turn, piloted on primary school children to determine whether children would understand what was being of asked of them.

The module on international education was particularly fascinating for me. Having been educated on two continents, spending my primary school years in the -post-Independence but still- British colonial system of South Africa and my secondary school and initial university years in the United States, I had experienced first-hand applications of different educational philosophies. Moreover, since my husband and I have lived in the United States, in England and in Israel, I have experienced these educational systems as a parent of school-age children. To add to this I had taught Bible in the United States in England and in Israel so I had some experience of these systems as a teacher. Of course my participation in an international doctoral programme added to my excitement about this module. Indeed since I was least familiar with the Israeli system I researched the educational underpinnings of this system for my module paper. This proved valuable for the data analysis portion of the practical work of my IFS, and later, of my doctoral thesis.

The research framework that I used for the IFS and thesis was a development from the initial thinking of using an experimental model. It used the format of the *design experiment*. The design experiment paradigm was well suited to my research in the sense that it is used for the design and improvement of educational innovations. It modifies the experimental paradigm so that it can be used in a classroom which is a dynamic research setting. Additionally it makes use of qualitative data gathering methods, as was mentioned above. It does not make use of a control group which made it a good fit for me as I was working with one class only and introducing explicit pedagogy for midrash. Since no other pedagogy for midrash was in place, it did not make sense to look for a control group. This lack of midrash pedagogy was because midrash is of ancillary interest in the Bible class, taking a back seat to the Scriptural text that is taught.

The IFS consisted of a midrash innovation, conducted in a school in Israel, that became the pilot study for the rest of the project. The thesis consisted of similar midrash interventions that were undertaken in another school in Israel, a school in the UK and one in the U.S. In addition to boosting my confidence as a beginning researcher the entire IFS and thesis processes were educational. The process of gaining access and interviewing the headteacher and the class teacher were very useful for me. Additionally I learned about being a teacher-researcher; about the need to gather

accurate data while keeping young students engaged in the lesson and about discussing abstract ideas with children. I also learned more about the difficulties that the children had with writing about midrash in the questionnaires, and saw the benefits of student interviews. In the thesis study I saw the benefits of assigning homework in addition to the pop-quizzes and of introducing a formal midrash worksheet. I found from my data analysis that the children had provided me with very useful insights into the ways that young people try to engage with ancient religious texts, specifically with midrash.

I believe that it is fair say at the conclusion of this process, with guarded optimism, that it would be educationally beneficial to teach midrash explicitly in the primary school. I hope that other teacher-researchers will consider expanding on my work with primary school students in the area of midrash pedagogy. I also hope that other Bible teachers will consider the benefits of teaching midrash explicitly.

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Glossary

Aggadah	Non-legal rabbinic commentary
Akeidah	The Binding of Isaac
Chumash	Pentateuch
Derash	Midrashic interpretation
Hashem	God
Midrashim	Plural of *midrash*
Peshat	Plain meaning; contextual meaning; or straightforward interpretation

Chapter One: Rationale

1.0 Background: Midrash

Midrash refers, both, to rabbinic interpretation of Scripture and to the texts, themselves, in which this exegesis has been redacted. Strack (1969) explains that in the view of the ancient rabbis,

Scripture [was] the sum and substance of all that is good ... and worth knowing. Hence it ought to be possible to apply it to all conditions of life, it should comfort, it should exhort and edify...It was through midrash that Holy Writ was made to do this service...The midrash, in part, followed closely the Biblical text; frequently, however, the latter served as a peg upon which to hang expositions (p. 202).

Midrash texts, redacted into anthologies, constitute a large genre of traditional rabbinic literature. These are the earliest rabbinic commentaries extant. Some of the anthologies contain expositions on Jewish law whereas others contain Biblical exegesis and sermons. The exegesis and sermons are known, together, as *midrash aggadah*. This non-legal commentary is the type of midrash text that is studied in Jewish primary and secondary schools. It is this type of midrash text that forms the basis of this study. From a point of view of the periods of their arrangement and collection, *midreshei aggadah* (plural of *midrash aggadah*) can be divided into three groups (Herr, 1971): classical (early); middle and late. The classical period spanned the years 400-640 C.E. and saw the redaction of Genesis Rabbah, Leviticus Rabbah, Lamentations Rabbah and Esther Rabbah among others. The middle period coincided with the Muslim Conquest of Palestine and spanned 640 -1000. This period was the time of the redaction of Exodus Rabbah, Numbers Rabbah and Midrash Tehillim (on Psalms) among others. The late period coincided with the Crusades and spanned 1000-1100. During this period additional expositions on the books of Esther and Psalms were redacted, among others. Rabbis from later historical periods have drawn on classical midrash commentaries in forming their interpretation of Scripture. This is evident in the medieval commentary of Rashi that will be discussed below.

An understanding of midrash rests upon meaning: the meaning of Scripture and the meaning of its interpretation. Leibowitz (1993) describes rabbinic exegesis as "[the lamp which] lights up Scripture" (introduction). Such Scriptural illumination ranges from elaboration of the text to the resolution of textual and philosophical difficulties.

Additionally the legends and rabbinic parables found in midrash offer a unique pedagogic framework for understanding Scripture. These literary constructs are underpinned by complex interpretations and exegetical elaborations. It is through these and other strategies that the rabbis add new dimensions to Scriptural meaning, such as the formation of emotional, philosophical or theological glosses for the Scriptural text.

Perhaps the presentation of midrash in its own terms could open up the world of classical Biblical interpretation to the student. In the case of the *mashal* (rabbinic parable) for example, could students learn to uncover rabbinic ideology in the *mashal's* rhetorical message? This message may be one of praise or blame; appreciation or disappointment; pleasure or pain (Stern, 1991, p. 52). Similarly in the case of midrashic legend, perhaps the student could learn of its underlying seriousness (rabbinic intent), despite its folksy appearance. This seriousness stems from the fact that, in addition to elucidating Scripture, these legends contain spiritual messages which might ordinarily be missed by a superficial reading of the Biblical and interpretive texts (Fraenkel, 2001).

But midrash texts are not straightforward. The language used by the rabbis is sometimes symbolic or figurative thus rendering superficial readings inadvisable. Another difficulty inherent in midrash derives from its "situatedness." The rabbis' gloss on Scripture is a product of their theological conceptions (Bloch, 1978, p.39). This theological element of midrash needs to be taken into account in order to comprehend the intent of its authors. Moreover, midrashic comments are often multi - layered. This is partly a reflection of the "essential heterogeneity" of Scripture, which is a polyphonous text (Boyarin, 1986, p. 582); and partly due to the rabbinic conception of Scriptural polysemy (Stern, 1996, pp. 17 -22). If the Bible teacher were to draw out the various layers of midrashic interpretation for her students, she could give them a glimpse of the depths of rabbinic interpretation. Additionally, she could share with

them the, "basic delight [that] midrash always takes in offering still another interpretation (Stern, 1986, p.112)."

2.0 Bible and Biblical Interpretation in Jewish Primary Schools

Since the ancient rabbinic period, Jewish children have been taught the Pentateuch as their introduction to Jewish identity, literature and religious practice. The centrality of Bible education in Jewish primary schools is a reflection of the role of the Bible as the Jewish community's religious and cultural legacy (Chazan, 2005). Bible education is therefore important for the formation of the child's Jewish literacy and identity. Scholars have offered various views of the importance of Bible literacy in Jewish educational practice.

Stern (2003b) points out that Jewish literacy is linked to a deep familiarity with Jewish primary sources. The primacy of the Bible in this endeavour is clear. Indeed, Plaut (in Lipetz, 2004) suggests the following about the Jewish Bible: "Jews cannot know their past or themselves without this book, for in it they will discover the framework of their own existence." (p. 187)

Similarly, due to the primacy of the Bible in Jewish life, Rosenak (1987) views Bible study as an activity that defines community. He further explains that the religious literature of a community provides an existential link to that which is sacred and to the assumptions and valuative norms of religious tradition. He refers to Glock and Stark's definition of a corpus of religious knowledge that forms the 'core dimension' of religiosity (p. 98). He concludes that the acquisition of this sacred knowledge is a requirement for participation in the religious community and is, therefore, the most important subject for religious education. Rosenak's thoughts are echoed by Etzion (1990) in his assertion that the importance of education for Bible literacy in the primary school relates to the development of sacred understandings. It also relates, in his view, to developing understandings of the normative message of Scripture that relates to the quality of the conduct of its adherents.

Indeed the Jewish tradition of Bible education for children originates in the Bible itself, firstly in Scripture,

And you shall teach them [the words of the Torah] to your children, speaking of them when thou dost sit in thy house, and when thou dost walk by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. (Deuteronomy 11: 19)

Similarly this is codified in the Mishnah (oral code of Jewish law),

At five years of age [one is ready for the study of] the Scripture, at ten [years of age] for [the study of] the Mishnah at the age of thirteen for [the fulfilment of] the commandments, at the age of fifteen for [the study of] the Talmud .. (Avoth 5:21)

In fact the Israeli National Curriculum for Bible includes Bible study (the Pentateuch and the early prophets) with Biblical interpretation in the primary school years (Israel Ministry of Education, 1993). It states,

The written Torah, that was given to Israel from the Almighty, and its interpretation in the oral Torah: the word of God through his prophets .. – all these are the source for the education, [in knowledge and in the realm of] behaviour for the individual and the society in Israel; and they are the foundation for the culture of the nation. (p.7, translation mine)

In recent centuries, the principal commentary used for Bible classes has been that of Rashi, Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac. Rashi lived in northern France in the 11th century. His commentary on the Pentateuch was printed in 1475 and is the first known Hebrew work to have been printed. Since that printing the vast majority of Hebrew Bible editions for Jewish use have included his commentary (Fischel, 1971). But even before the printing press was invented Rashi's commentary was used in Jewish primary schools across Northern France and Germany (Bortniker, 1971). This centuries old tradition of teaching Pentateuch with Rashi's commentary is still widespread in Jewish communities today throughout Israel and the Jewish Diaspora. In fact the practice of

teaching the Pentateuch with Rashi is so common in the Jewish educational world that a vernacular expression, *Chumash-Rashi* (the Pentateuch with Rashi's commentary), has become common for describing this element of the curriculum.

In Bible class the Pentateuch is generally introduced around year two, with each book being taught in a subsequent year. Thus Genesis is taught first, followed each year by an additional book. The books of the Pentateuch are taught again in secondary school in further depth; with further medieval commentaries. But, Rashi's commentary is always the first commentary taught.

The Jewish educational tradition of teaching interpretation alongside Scripture stems from the belief that an oral tradition of interpretation was received at Sinai together with the Pentateuch, and that this tradition was taught by Moses to the sages (Babylonian Talmud, tractate Berachot, folio 5a). This gave rise to the traditional understanding that the written Torah must be taught together with its traditional interpretation. Accordingly from the inception of Jewish Bible literacy, Jews have understood that one cannot learn Scripture without its traditional interpretation. Indeed Gershom Scholem, a scholar of Jewish tradition and Jewish mysticism, suggested that traditional interpretation is the legitimate means for approaching truth as it is understood by the Bible (see Holtz in Lipetz, 2004).

The oral tradition of Biblical interpretation was recorded in the rabbinic period (Strack, 1969). It was during this period that the rabbis exhorted their followers to review Scripture regularly by reading each Scriptural verse twice in the original Hebrew and to follow this reading with the study of an interpretive commentary or translation (Babylonian Talmud, tractate Berachot, folio 5a). Cohen (1993) points out that interpretation has always been taught alongside Scripture since the rabbinic period when the *targum* (Aramaic translation of the Bible) was read aloud, weekly, in the synagogue together with the Hebrew recitation of the Pentateuch. The classical interpretive commentaries of the rabbis were gathered in *midrash* collections. These midrash texts have become central to Jewish tradition and to Jewish identity.

Stern (2003b) notes that "the function of the Jewish canon [Scripture and rabbinic texts] has been to guide the Jew to acquire the maximum amount of knowledge so as to

be able to achieve the fullest possible identity as a Jew" (p.20). Similarly the following rabbinic source (as cited in Stern, 2003b, p.26) illustrates the importance that the rabbis placed on midrash for religious identity and practice,

Cleave to Him (Deuteronomy 11:22). How can a human being "cleave" to God?

"If you wish to recognize [come to understand] Him who spoke and the world came to be, study Haggadah, [midrash] for thus you will recognize Him who spoke and the world came to be and cleave to His ways." (Sifre Deuteronomy 49, Finkelstein ed., p.114).

It can be seen, then, that a familiarity with the combination of written and oral traditions of the Bible is critical to Jewish identity. Therefore reducing the role of midrash texts in Bible education would be a serious distortion of this tradition. This type of reduction could lead to, "an illiteracy of understanding, of not being able to hear the texts, to connect with them .." (Stern, 2003b, p.20). Indeed support for the role of midrash in understanding Scripture is clear in Rashi's commentary which draws heavily on midrash texts.

3.0   The Problem

Rashi's commentary is generally still taught in the same manner as was done in medieval Europe: superficially, in rote fashion. The practice of teaching Rashi's commentary when introducing children to the Pentateuch exposes children at a young age to complex midrash texts. Indeed Cohen (1993) observes that most Bible teachers introduce their students to Scriptural interpretation, through teaching Rashi's commentary. But, he notes, they do not pay due attention to Rashi's sources in midrash. In my view the problem is that due to the complex nature of this commentary children do not have the tools to make sense of it. From my vantage point as a Bible teacher I have been reflecting on this issue. During my adult life I have lived in three countries, England, the U.S. and Israel, and have taught Bible in the primary school in all of them. I've noticed a disparity, in children's education, between the simplistic pedagogical methods that are used for the teaching of complex Jewish texts and the critical or analytical pedagogies that these same students encounter for complex

secular texts – such as those texts encountered in literature, history and science. Correspondingly, I've noticed that the teachers' expectations were similarly different. The Jewish studies teachers expected their students to accept face-value readings of their sacred texts whereas the secular studies teachers expected that children would problematise their set texts.

This is not only problematic from a point of view of method. The problem extends to the view of Scripture that is formed through rote pedagogy. Indeed it is my view as a teacher that children in primary school are at an impressionable stage of development; and therefore the impressions that they form about Scripture begin to take shape when they are in primary school. In addition to my primary school students, I have spoken with secondary school students and with adults who describe their primary school religious education as formative of their attitude to Scripture. These formative religious impressions are not always positive.

Some of these students whom I have encountered have studied with teachers who place an emphasis on venerating the ancient rabbinic authors of midrash. Unfortunately this well-intentioned pietistic practice sometimes produces the opposite outcome when it is not coupled with an analytical pedagogy. It sometimes confuses young students further. The more pious individuals regard midrash as something that is valuable yet incomprehensible. The less pious, and more analytical among them, dismiss midrash as simplistic, unhelpful and to be ignored. But the more troubling outcome, from a religious point of view, is the case of the student who views Scripture through the eyes of a superficial reading of midrash and dismisses Scripture altogether as irrelevant to his/ her life. Indeed as a Bible teacher who is committed to teaching Jewish Scripture in a way that strengthens children's faith, I worry that literalist readings of midrash - which may occur when these texts are encountered in Rashi's commentary – will be detrimental to children's Biblical understandings.

This problem is not a new one. Jewish scholars have been aware of the inadequacy of Biblical interpretation teaching for decades. Indeed, Copperman (1969) warned that "our children" are missing out on the '"educational and deeply spiritual experience that learning the Bible and its interpretation [aught to] provide" (p. 9).

Similarly Schwell (1998) articulates two problems associated with the traditional method and its use in midrash teaching. One relates to the confusion that arises, in the mind of the student, between the text of Scripture and that of the midrash. She asserts that this is the result of midrash being taught hand in hand with the Bible text in a traditional framework. Accordingly, she notes that the children cannot differentiate where Scripture stops and midrash starts. Schwell (ibid.) describes the other issue as a,

crisis .. [that may] affect the young child who is sceptical about the veracity of the midrash .. The child is often reluctant to question his teacher, or the words of the rabbis .. yet is uncomfortable with what he is being taught. (p. 1)

The crisis described here refers to a crisis of faith. She is describing the student who may eventually dismiss Scripture as irrelevant, as I suggested earlier. Peters (2004) raises a similar issue for readers of midrash, namely, that they may find these texts implausible when viewed at face value (p.9).

There are many students enrolled in Jewish Day Schools where the Jewish Bible is the central religious text. This framework for religious studies encompasses more than one million students globally. A few illustrations from the Jewish Diaspora: In South Africa, more than 7,400 children are enrolled in the Jewish day school system (Weiner, 2006b; South African Jewish Board of Deputies); in Argentina, 17,000 Jewish children study in the Jewish educational system in Buenos Aires alone (Weiner, 2006a). For France the figure is 30,000; In the U.K. it is 25,000 and in the U.S. it is 205,000 (Weil, 2006). The largest Jewish school population is in Israel: 1,304,000 students (State of Israel, Ministry of Education Culture and Sport, 2004). Thus, in pure numeric terms, Jewish Bible education has a significant impact on students globally.

It follows that careful consideration is needed for the employ of meaningful, updated pedagogies for Bible education – including strategies for teaching classical interpretation - of this large student population. This is true because of the significant educational obligation that is carried for so many students; and it is also important because the way that Bible is taught impacts each student's view of the Bible and, by extension, their view of their religion.

The practical educational need to improve the current practice in Biblical interpretation teaching, just outlined, also constitutes an opportunity for improving students' understanding of Bible which is the key text for Jewish literacy.

4.0   Possible Ways Forward and their Drawbacks

In the past there were some suggestions made about views of midrash or approaches to midrash teaching, but these did not amount to complete pedagogic strategies for midrash. For example Ben-Natan (1994), Cohen (1993), Okashi (1993) and Frankel's (2004) approaches to midrash saw midrash as an elaboration of the plain meaning of Scripture that could either uncover deeper meanings and religious values, or resolve difficulties, in the text. Okashi (1993) suggested, therefore, that the Bible teacher should challenge her students to analyse the contents of the midrash with a view toward understanding the relationship of the commentary to the plain meaning of Scripture. Indeed all of these suggestions can profitably be built upon in the design of a robust strategy for the explicit instruction of midrash in the primary school.

Contrary to these views of midrash that emphasised the textual relationship between midrash and Scripture, Kaunfer's (1990, 1992) interest in midrash, for primary school pedagogy, lay in the imaginative qualities of rabbinic interpretation and in its moral content. In his earlier work he outlined Gardner's theories of children's metaphorical understandings and Bettleheim's theory of children's understanding of symbolism in fairy tales. These form the basis for Kaunfer's argument that children can understand the narrative, metaphors and symbols in midrash texts. This argument is important for the formation of a strategy for the explicit teaching of midrash as it engages with the abstract nature of midrash. This particular characteristic of midrash can lead educators to the conclusion that midrash is inappropriate for the primary school classroom. Deitcher (1990) in a similar vein to Kaunfer (1990) focused on children's imaginative capacities and emotional understandings. But he highlighted another element of midrashic elaboration of Scripture, that of the moral dilemmas faced by Biblical heroes. He explained that children could profitably be taught this element of midrash because children can understand human nature and can empathise with others.

Accordingly both Kaunfer and Deitcher's suggestions can be built upon in the formation of systematic pedagogy for the teaching of midrash texts.

More recently, a small number of teachers and scholars have suggested ways to change current practice for midrash teaching in primary school. The Barkai strategy stands at one extreme of the spectrum of approaches. This strategy prescribes rote, musical recitation of the Bible text and advocates against the formal presentation of Biblical interpretation in primary school (Esses, 2000). Thus officially the students in the 30 or so Barkai primary schools in Israel do not encounter midrash. This curriculum has been criticised for its rote pedagogy and its lack of reflective discussion and its lack of interpretation of Scripture (Wohl, in Esses, 2000). The difficulty with this approach becomes obvious when one considers the myriad informal encounters that all Jewish children have with midrash. Midrash is so closely linked with Jewish culture and Bible literacy that its narratives are discussed in pre-schools throughout the Jewish world. This phenomenon is exemplified by the children's book series, written in Hebrew, *Our Sages Showed the Way* by Segel (reviewed in Chovav, 2000). This five volume series, for preschool through primary school students, is completely midrashic in content. It is a retelling of more than two hundred stories from midrashic texts. These are primarily stories from the lives of the rabbis. Segel's view is that these stories can positively influence the moral and religious development of the child.

Midrash is also associated with informal Jewish education. Rabbis, youth group leaders and group Sabbath seminar counsellors tap into this genre of Jewish interpretation for material for religious discussions with young people. Thus students are exposed to midrash whether they encounter it in their formal education or not. Therefore, the Barkai method is unhelpful for initiating children thoughtfully into classical Jewish interpretation.

Midrash teaching practice is also affected by changes in curriculum guidelines for teachers. Some of the informal Bible curricula (oral guidance by head teachers to Bible teachers) that I have encountered in my professional practice lean toward a selective approach to the midrash texts that are used in the Bible classes of a particular school. Thus they may advise Bible teachers to present a midrash to their students when a particular interpretation fulfils what they consider to be a pedagogical need. Thus, a

teacher may feel that it is worthwhile to present a midrash that provides meaning to a particular word that is unclear in Scripture; or that explains why one verse follows another; or that provides a religious message that the students can understand. This approach is problematic for two reasons. Firstly the lack of a coherent strategy from one teacher to the next misses an opportunity to improve practice, overall, and may confuse students about midrash in the long run. This is because the underpinnings of midrash are not taught. The children are not introduced to the mindset of the rabbis and to the midrashic process. Thus they only engage with midrashim that are straightforward and they lack the reasoning tools and background for understanding the more difficult midrash texts. Additionally, as in the case of the Barkai strategy these piece-meal approaches to midrash texts leave many kinds of midrash texts – including some that are in Rashi's commentary- 'unattended' and unexplained. And since they are in Rashi's commentary it is likely that students will read them on their own without the tools to make sense of them. This leaves the problem unresolved.

Gillis (2008) aligns his pedagogic suggestion for midrash to the different stages of development described by Egan. Egan (1997) theorises that there are developmental stages of understanding. These are mythic understanding (until 7 years old); romantic understanding (8-15 years old); philosophic understanding (upper secondary school and early adulthood); and ironic understanding (full adulthood, post university age). Accordingly Gillis (2008) suggests that the narratives in midrash are appropriate for children at the romantic stage of development which would include primary school children. His theory is that at this stage children would like to test the limits of interpretation as they enjoy testing the limits of fictional narrative (p.24). I believe that he is making reference, here, to the midrash texts that seem more fantastical than rational. One example might be the midrash text discussed in chapter 2, section 4.2.2, that suggests that Abraham and Sarah were so modest that they did not look at each other. These kinds of texts suggest alternate views of Bible heroes and events from the view that is suggested by the plain meaning of Scripture. They lean toward a less rational and more magical or mythical view of Scriptural heroes and their exploits. I am a bit wary of this approach. This is because in my view, if midrash were taught with an emphasis on testing the limits of rabbinic narrative, the child may be led toward a magical, enchanted view of Scripture – rather than one that has relevance for her life. This view may later be dismissed by the student as childish. This is in

accordance with the comment, above, that students form lasting impressions of Scripture in their primary school years. Gillis does not seem to prescribe a strategy for teaching other elements of midrash for this age group. Rather it seems that he would suggest that the other elements of midrash should be taught to older children only. This could be problematic because the excerpts of midrash that children will encounter in Rashi's commentary (when they study the Pentateuch in primary school) include other areas of midrash. I think that a midrash pedagogy could be developed that draws on children's imaginative capacities for understanding midrashic narrative – more along the lines of Deitcher's view and not necessarily to test limits (as Gillis suggests) - as well as drawing on children's capacities for analytical understanding of the various interpretive strategies that underpin midrash.

5.0   A New Programme for the Explicit Teaching of Midrash in Primary School

My motivation for developing a strategy for teaching midrash on its own terms are the following: This genre of ancient, classical religious literature has not been taught explicitly before, unlike its sister genres of Hebrew Scripture, Mishnah and Talmud. Rather, it plays an ancillary role in Bible study. This means that its pedagogy has not been studied. Similarly (to my knowledge) no empirical research has been done on midrash pedagogy in the primary school. Additionally my colleagues' (in Jewish education) interest in this area has been expressed to me in response to papers on this subject that I have delivered at international conferences (Sigel, 2006; Sigel, 2007). Thus there seems to be interest in this area on the part of educators in Israel and in the Jewish Diaspora.

The closest empirical work (to mine) that I could find in the area of children's Biblical understandings was that of Goldman (1964). But Goldman's interest lay in Christian interpretations of Biblical texts. Also his study did not include interpretive texts. Moreover it was heavily reliant on Piaget's developmental theory for its conclusions about children's religious understandings.

Accordingly in my study in addition to reviewing literature on the core subject matter, midrash, – as well as literature on children's religious understandings –I will explore

learning theories and theories about how children make sense of texts. This will be done in order to develop and test a strategy for teaching midrash texts to children. I hope that this study will contribute to knowledge in midrash pedagogy, specifically, and to our understanding of children's capacity to engage with religious texts; as well as to our understanding of children's conceptions of religious knowledge.

This study builds on my Institution Focused Study, IFS from now on, (Sigel, 2004) that explored the possibility of teaching midrash as a discrete subject in the primary school. That study was undertaken in a co-educational year six class in Israel. As part of that study I designed a strategy for teaching midrash to young students. The focus of the current study continues to be my approach to teaching midrash. And following the international framework of my EdD programme, the participants for this study have been three co-educational year six classes; one in England, one in Israel and one in the United States. The approach to midrash is a departure from current teaching practice. The strategy teaches midrash explicitly with the aim of furnishing students with theoretical knowledge of midrash and an understanding of the connection of midrash to Scripture. It is based on the idea that midrash should be taught on its own terms, just as Alter (1981) suggested, with reference to understanding Scripture, that the reader should be able to approach meaning by understanding the way that the ancient text is written.

It is my view that midrash teaching must focus on pedagogical content knowledge that is suited to the modern student. Thus the essence of the explicit teaching strategy for midrash is the inclusion of academic scholarship in midrash to help the student analyse these complex, ancient texts. The strategy thus aims to raise students' awareness of the motivations and characteristics of midrash so that they can begin to problematise, to understand, and to explore the rabbis' approach to Scripture. It draws on midrash theology as formulated by the rabbis and is presented to students through a hermeneutic of affirmation and exploration (Wright, 2004, p.176). Additionally the strategy makes use of educational theories of learning and understanding and is based on a foundation of reflective teaching and analytical thinking. It is my contention that this kind of analysis will provide skills for understanding the mindset of the rabbis as these young students begin to uncover some of the breadth and depth of meaning of these interpretive texts. This should, in turn, enhance their understanding of the

Scriptural verses upon which the midrash comments and should furnish them with skills for learning further midrash texts.

6.0   The Research Question

The research question of this study was designed to help me to build on my IFS and to continue to explore the possibility of teaching midrash explicitly. While it might seem obvious, at first glance, that children will learn whatever we set out to teach them, this cannot be assumed in this case. Since midrash texts are ancient, complex and draw on abstract notions of faith, tradition and exegesis, one could assume that they are *unsuitable* for the primary school class. Indeed, Goldman (1964) suggested that Scriptural texts were not appropriate for the primary school. Additionally since no empirical work has been done on Jewish children's religious understandings – and their capacities for engaging with sacred interpretive texts - it behooves the researcher to enter this endeavour without preconceived notions of what is obvious in primary school pedagogy.

Accordingly the research question was formulated as a hierarchy, wherein the overarching question was, **Can we teach midrash explicitly in the primary school?** The subsidiary questions were then formulated as follows:

- **Can primary school students understand the motivations for midrash and the textual and religious underpinnings of its commentary?**
- **Can they separate *peshat* (plain, contextual meaning) from *derash (rabbinic interpretation)*?**
- **Can they understand the literary strategies employed by the rabbis for the purpose of Biblical elucidation?**
- **Are some aspects of midrash easier to understand than others?**
- **Do differences in national curricula affect the possibility of teaching midrash explicitly?**

The ultimate goal of this exploration would be to implement changes in midrash pedagogy should it prove to be possible to teach midrash explicitly. The aim in so

doing would be to improve my professional practice and the practice of my colleagues as well.

This dissertation is composed of seven chapters including this introductory chapter. The following chapters are: chapter two which is a literature review of midrash; chapter three which is a literature review of children's religious and textual understandings; chapter four which is devoted to the methodology of the dissertation; chapter five which presents the findings; chapter six which discusses the findings and chapter seven which is the conclusion.

Chapter Two: Literature Review of Midrash

This chapter presents a brief survey of midrash. It begins with the derivation of the word midrash in Jewish sources and continues with explanations of the theological underpinnings of midrash. It also outlines the various strategies of interpretation that can be found in midrash texts.

1.0   Introduction

The plain meaning, or contextual meaning, of Scripture is known in Hebrew as *peshat*. Midrashic interpretation is quite different from *peshat*. But before we explore midrash we will take a look at its origin in Scripture. Indeed the notion of Scriptural interpretation is as old as the Bible itself. This can be seen from the interpretive tradition of the oral Torah (discussed in chapter one section 1.0) and from various verses in Scripture. In order to understand, textually, the existence of the notion of interpretation in Scripture itself let us consider the etymology of the Hebrew term, *midrash*. Now Hebrew is composed of clusters of word families that share root letters. It is through these word clusters that we can understand the origins of a Hebrew term such as *midrash* (root letters d-r-sh).

In the Pentateuch this word root is found in the context of inquiry and investigation, "Then shalt thou **inquire**, and make search, and ask diligently" (Deuteronomy 13:15). In later Scripture, the verb *darash* bears theological implication. We read that "Ezra has set his heart *lidrosh* the Torah *of God*." (Ezra 7:10). The correct translation for *lidrosh* in this context is inquiry in the context of interpretation (Lieberman, 1962). The book of Nehemiah explains that Ezra was both translator and interpreter, "And they read in the book, in the Torah of God, *with interpretation*; and they gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading [of Scripture]" (8:8). Thus we witness the birth of midrash as Scriptural interpretation inside Scripture itself.

Although the concept of interpretation originated in Scripture, the scope of interpretation was expanded during the rabbinic period. The plain meaning of Scripture (*peshat*) became too narrow a view for a living Torah. Midrash needed to do more for

those faithful to the Bible. Accordingly in rabbinic parlance, *midrash* became used for all kinds of Torah study. "..It is not the *midrash*, [study of Torah], that is of fundamental import but the practice [thereof]". (Mishnah Avoth 1: 17)   Accordingly rabbinic *midrash*, as it is studied in Jewish schools today, can be seen as the rabbis' study and interpretation of Torah.

2.0   Theological Motivations for Midrash

In Biblical times, the prophets, along with the priests, were the spiritual leaders of the Jewish people. According to Jewish tradition, Moses was the first prophet who received the Torah through divine revelation. (It has already been mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation that Moses' revelation included two Torah codes, one written and the second, oral.) He, in turn, taught the Torah to Joshua, his disciple. Joshua passed it on to the elders, while the latter transmitted it to the prophets (Mishnah Avoth 1:1).

Rabbinic scholarship arose after the era of prophecy. Although the rabbis were not (and did not claim to be) prophets, they considered themselves the religious elders of their communities. In their view, they were the descendants of the Biblical elders. However, in contrast to religious leadership in Biblical times, rabbinic leadership would, out of necessity, be based upon the rabbis' interpretation of Torah, in the absence of continued divinely revealed interpretation. Indeed it was through their expositions that they linked themselves to the elders of ancient times, thus allowing themselves the claim of inherited authority to transmit and teach Torah (Fraade, 1991).

But this authority carried a heavy responsibility. As religious leaders of the Jewish community, the rabbis' primary role was to maintain the spirituality and religious commitment of their followers. To this end, they used the Torah as their guide, and Scriptural exposition (midrash) as their means (Heinemann, 1949).

Torah was their guide, as well, in their search for truth - a search based on the rabbinic belief that Torah is truth (Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 5b). This religious - philosophical quest was also an impetus for *derash* (rabbinic investigation of

Scripture) that would uncover (and explicate to their followers) the eternal truth which, they believed, lay hidden in Scripture (Heinemann, 1949).

Personal religious theology motivated the development of midrash as well. The rabbis saw their midrash as a fulfilment of the Biblical requirement to learn, and to teach, Torah. This personal, religious and intellectual piety also carried with it national and eschatological implications. After the destruction of the second Temple (c. 70 C.E.) and the concomitant cessation of sacrificial service, the rabbis believed that through their sustaining the unbroken chain of Torah learning, (which began, according to Jewish tradition, with Moses at Mt. Sinai) they would eventually redeem Israel as a holy nation - a difficult task, in light of the devastation wrought by the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem. Thus midrash was also a form of religious service on behalf of the nation (Fraade, 1991).

Midrash was not only motivated by the spiritual, philosophical and religious needs of the rabbis and the community. Rather, some of its motivation was pastoral. As leaders, the rabbis needed to tend to the emotional well being of their flock. This was a vital task during this bitter period in Jewish History. Their midrash became a psychological tool to raise the spirits of the people:

The sadder the life of the Jewish people, the more it felt the need of taking refuge in its past. .. The Torah was its only remnant of its former national independence, .. the magic means of making a sordid actuality recede before a glorious memory (Ginzberg, 1967, volume I, pp. ix – x).

The reality of destruction and subjugation by the enemy was more than sad, it was also dangerous: It posed a threat to the cultural and religious independence of the conquered Jews. The rabbis faced this threat by using midrash and its hermeneutics to undermine the hegemony of the coloniser (Boyarin, 1993).

In summary the rabbis' theological motivations for midrash were manifold. This chapter has outlined some of them only. They range from the personal and religious to the political. The rabbis' assumption of Jewish leadership entailed the need to prove their right to this role. Their expositions on this subject outline the rabbis' view of

themselves as the link in Jewish tradition begun with Moses. In this context, they engaged in their own expression of Torah learning. Their expositions of Scripture had many aims including maintaining the religious commitment of their followers; finding the eternal truth hidden in Scripture; striving for religious redemption on behalf of the Jewish community; maintaining Jewish cultural independence and providing emotional comfort to their public, in trying political times.

All of these tasks were accomplished on the basis of the rabbinic premise that states, "Turn it [the Torah] and turn it over again, for everything is in it." (Mishnah Avoth 5:22). The rabbis believed that, through the words of Torah, they would be able to tackle any challenge posed by their times. More importantly their constant focus on Scripture demonstrated to their followers the eternal relevance of the Torah (Heinemann, 1970).

3.0   The Rabbinic Perception of Scripture and Interpretation

The centrality of Scripture, in the ethos of the rabbis, is the foundation of midrash. Therefore an analysis of the way the rabbis viewed Scripture (and their role as its interpreters) is crucial to an understanding of midrash.

Scripture is conceptualised as a sacred text which constitutes the basis of Jewish beliefs and morals. Accordingly, the rabbis assumed that events therein reflect these beliefs. Similarly, they believed that every aspect of Scripture is significant; Moreover, that every word and event in the Pentateuch, in particular, has a purpose. Accordingly the rabbis took upon themselves the search for Scripture's overarching purpose. This entailed inquiry into various aspects of Scriptural verse.

But despite the fact that rabbinic interpretation often dwelled on the minutiae of the text, the rabbis were always focused on Scripture's overall purpose, and on their belief in the significance of Biblical events. For example, they maintained that the stories of the forefathers in Genesis were recorded in Scripture to teach the reader appropriate behaviour and manners (Heinemann, 1949). Likewise, rabbinic theology, gleaned from Scripture, is reflected in their interpretation of Biblical events.

The interpretive act is, first and foremost, Torah learning. Thus the rabbis maintained that their own interpretations were already foreshadowed at the time of the giving of the Torah at Sinai (see Heinemann, 1949, p. 11; Boyarin, 1990, pp. 34-35). Their view of their role as faithful Scriptural interpreters carried with it practical, religious implications - both personal and communal. Firstly, they may have felt that if they did not delve below and beyond the plain meaning of the text in order to find its deeper meaning, they might stumble in their religious belief and observance of Torah (Heinemann, 1949). This burden would be carried over to their followers. Additionally, the rabbis felt theologically bound to draw their audience closer to Scripture (or to draw Scripture closer to the people) by means of their exegesis. This motivation engendered, in turn, an improvement in the rabbis' relationship with the text as well.

Thus, together with theological motivations for interpretation, the rabbinic credence in Scripture as the foundation of Jewish belief and ethics was a guiding force behind rabbinic interpretation. It challenged the rabbis to dwell on every Scriptural word and event with an eye to theological and moral education. Similarly, it drove their commitment to uncovering its underlying meaning for practical, religious and theological reasons.

4.0   Strategies of Interpretation

The rabbis applied various interpretive strategies in formulating their Scriptural exegesis. These strategies are all predicated on the presumption that all of Scripture constitutes a single unit (despite its subdivisions, books, chapters etc.) "[The reader] .. encounters the Bible as an integral whole, which accordingly carries a uniform divine message (Sternberger, 1996, p. 237)." Despite the unity of Scripture, however, the rabbis emphasise their view of the Pentateuch as the most sacred section of the canon, the revealed word of God (Fraenkel, 1996).

It has already been mentioned (chapter 1, section 1.0) that the main dual categorisation of midrash texts are legal and non-legal and that this study deals with non-legal midrash only. Non-legal midrash texts are studied in primary and secondary Jewish

schools. The scholarly consensus regarding non-legal midrash (midrash from now on) is that these texts should be categorised in a manner that reflects the literary character of the midrash collections. In the broadest terms this means that midrash collections are broken down into two categories: expositional and homiletical. The expositional category includes collections whose expositions relate to each verse of a Biblical *parasha* (lectionary portion read out loud in the Synagogue on the Sabbath). The homiletical category includes collections whose commentaries relate to selected verses of a *parasha* only (usually the introductory verses) (Strack, 1969, p.204).

4.1 Didactic, Homiletic Strategies

The didactic aspect of midrash was crucial, for the rabbis, both in maintaining the relevance of Jewish tradition, and for guaranteeing the continuity of its transmission. Thus the rabbis' didactic strategies were developed with the utmost care.

One of the fundamental didactic goals evidenced in midrash is the attempt to bring Scripture closer to the daily life of the reader. One approach developed for this purpose introduces three-dimensional, familiar images as a means for the interpretation of abstract theological concepts. For example Abraham, in the rabbinic view, personifies the concept of wisdom as it is described by Ecclesiastes (Jacobs, 1995). The intention is to enable the student to assimilate lofty ideas with either the aid of familiar, Biblical characters or through the reader's own experience. Similarly, the rabbis make use of metaphors. Some rabbinic metaphors are taken from Scripture. For example, Heinemann (1949) points to the use of 'woman' as a metaphor for wisdom (p. 151).

Another strategy under the theologically based 'familiar image' umbrella is the use of the parable. Rabbinic parables fill in a gap in the Biblical narrative with a plausibly analogous situation (Boyarin, 1993). The theological message is carried in the connection between the Scriptural text and the interpretive parable. This is usually done through the repetition of the section of the Scriptural verse about which the parable is expounding. An illustration of this is the parable whose context is the aftermath of the killing of Abel by Cain. The repetition just mentioned – in bold face in the midrash text below – drives home the message of Cain's guilt.

And the Lord said to Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not am I my brother's keeper? And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood cries to me from the ground. (Genesis 4: 9-10)

Where is Abel? [What can this be likened to?] To a man who walked into a garden, picked strawberries and ate them. And the owner of the garden ran after him. He said to him, "What is in your hand?" He said to him, "Nothing." - "But your hands are dirty."
So, **the voice of thy brother's blood cries to me from the ground**. (Bereshit Rabba 22: 4)

Another didactic strategy which recurs in midrash is the blurring of the line between reality and imagination; Or, the literary alteration of Scriptural reality in order to enhance religious-theological meanings. One example is the use of anachronism, such as the attribution to Biblical characters of knowledge of future events and of familiarity with Biblical characters not yet born. Heinemann (1949, p.40) illustrates this point with several examples. One of which is the rabbinic suggestion regarding the daughter of Yiftah (whose story is told in Judges, chapter 11) that she took inspiration from the life of Hanna, Samuel's mother, who lived in a later time period. When these tactics were part of oral presentations, in the format of Bible lessons or sermons, one can understand how they might have added drama (or the element of surprise) to Scriptural study in ancient times. This is because the listener would have to stay alert to follow the unusual Scriptural connection being made by the rabbi who was delivering this Bible lesson. The unusual or strange nature of the commentary could also make it memorable for the audience. In this way the rabbis would deliver their religious message while maintaining the interest of the student.

Additionally to maintain the interest of the student rhetorical/ homiletical strategies are employed. These include the use of exaggeration, (illustrated in the text about Abraham and Sarah in section 4.2.2 below) confusion and surprise. Some of these surprises are philological, such as the use of word associations, and words with similar sounds (Heinemann, 1949: Heinemann, 1970). The latter point is illustrated below (section 4.2.2) with the first text on the story of the sacrifice of Isaac where the rabbis reinterpret the word *devarim* (things) as *dibburim* (words). The confusion or the surprise that is created by this wordplay leads the way to an understanding of the new meanings that are being gleaned, by the rabbis, from the Scriptural text.

4.2 Exegetical Strategies

4.2.1 Uniting Scripture

Apart from didactic strategies, the rabbis employed exegetical strategies in formulating their midrashic commentaries. One group of these strives to unite Scripture.

Because the rabbis saw Scripture as a seamless whole, they believed that any of its verses could be related to any other. Thus they made strenuous efforts to relate Biblical events to one another and to resolve internal contradictions (such as differing accounts of a Biblical event), in order to support their view of the 'whole Bible.' Moreover, they often used their resolutions of contradictions as occasions for interpretation and for ethical instruction (Heinemann, 1949).

A corollary to the view of the 'whole Bible' is the rabbinic premise that words of Scripture are poor [in meaning] in some places and rich in others (Jerusalem Talmud, Rosh Hashanah, 3: 5). This implies that one can find meaning for a particular segment of Scripture by comparing it with a similar segment elsewhere in the canon. Consequently the rabbis employ a cross-referencing strategy. This method is employed for the interpretation of words, as well as the interpretation of Biblical events and characters.

For example, in their effort to find the meaning of a word which is unclear in the context of their discussion, the rabbis at times look for the same word elsewhere in Scripture (whose meaning is clear in its own context). However, one needs to understand that the context from which the new interpretation is drawn, may not have any connection to the context in question. An example of this is the association in Bereshit Rabba of this verse,

And Sarah saw the son of Hagar .. whom she had born to Abraham, mocking [mezahek]
(Genesis 21: 9)

with the following verse that pits the army – and the war games – of Saul's son against the army of David:

And Abner said to Yo'av, Let the young men now arise, and play [yisahaku] before us. (Samuel 2 2:14)

The words *yisahaku* and *mezahek* come from the same word family, sharing the root letters *s/z-h-k*. This shared root is the basis for a lexically derived interpretation: Rabbi Elazar suggests, through this lexical association, that the mocking on the part of Hagar's son was tantamount to the murder that is implied in the war games of Samuel 2 (in Fraenkel, 1996, p.90). One can understand, then, that the result of this type of 're-contexting' for interpretation may prove surprising to the reader (Boyarin, 1986). Moreover, it may also be philosophical or theological. In the Bereshit Rabba illustration above the rabbis are looking for a strong rationale for the banishing of Ishmael, Abraham and Hagar's son, to the wilderness.

Another interpretive strategy for Scriptural unity relates to the rabbis' use of lists, paradigms, comparisons and analogies in order to collect similar ideas from different parts of the canon. An example of this is the rabbinic association of the Divine destruction of the wicked in different Biblical generations: the generation of the flood and the generation of Lot (Abraham's nephew). Following are the two Biblical verses upon which this analogy is drawn,

And the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was **great** in the earth.. (Genesis 6:5);

And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sedom and 'Amora is **great** ..(Genesis 18:20).

Once the ideas are assembled together, the rabbis use them in their new associations for didactic purposes (Fraenkel, 1996; Boyarin, 1990). In the example above, the theological lesson is based on the punishment of evil and the implication of reward for good behaviour.

Moreover, in addition to collecting ideas, the rabbis collect, as it were, Biblical events. For example midrashic connections are formed between remote events in the Biblical canon in order to validate the rabbinic, didactic view that a parent's actions foreshadow the future actions of his/her descendants (Fraenkel, 1996; Heinemann,

1949). Similarly they suggest that events in the Torah foreshadow future events in Jewish history. An example of the latter point is the rabbinic commentary that relates to the four kings whom Abraham fought in order to save his nephew, Lot. The rabbis suggest that these kings are a foreshadowing of the future enemies of the Jewish people (Heinemann, 1949, p. 149).

Similarly, another characteristic of the exegetical strategy of uniting Scripture, is the rabbis' attribution of timelessness to Biblical events, characters and objects. The rabbis relate every event in the Bible to every other event regardless of Scriptural chronology. Hence these atemporal events remain eternally relevant. Rashi, in his commentary on Numbers 22:21, paraphrases a midrash that associates Abraham's diligence to perform God's commandment with Bil'am's diligent effort to curse the Jewish people. The rabbis suggest that perhaps God thwarted Bilam's plan as a reward for Abraham's diligence (see Rashi ad loc. for his paraphrase of the midrash Tanhuma). The verse regarding Abraham is taken from the story of the sacrifice of Isaac, **And Abraham rose up early in the morning,** and saddled his ass .. (Genesis 22: 3). This is paired by the rabbis with, **And Bil'am rose up in the morning,** and saddled his ass .. (Numbers 22:21). Accordingly this exegetical technique adds an external, unifying layer to Scripture.

Besides the connections that they create exegetically between disparate sections of Scripture, the rabbis devote their attention, equally, to the simpler connections - those existing between events that are contiguously placed in the canon. Their investigation of these connections often gives rise to religious or moral lessons. Sometimes the rabbis link the contiguous events in a cause - effect relationship (Fraenkel, 1996; Heinemann, 1949). Similarly they link contiguous words in the same verse for deeper exegetical purposes. An illustration of this can be found in Rashi's commentary on Leviticus 25: 1-2 where he paraphrases a midrash from the Sifra (a midrash collection) on Leviticus which deliberates on the wording of the verses,

And the Lord spoke to Moses in **Mt. Sinai** saying .. When you come to the land which I give you, then **shall the land keep a Sabbath** to the Lord. (Leviticus 25: 1-2)

The rabbis seek a connection between Mt. Sinai and the Sabbatical year. Accordingly they suggest that the reference to Mt. Sinai implies that just as all the laws of the

Sabbatical year and their minute details were ordained at Mt. Sinai, so too were all the commandments of the Torah ordained at Sinai.

4.2.2 Other Exegetical Strategies and Provocations for Exegesis

Rabbinic scholars refer to occasions for midrashic inquiry as exegetical openings or gaps (Jacobs, 1995). A gap can be broadly defined as any challenge presented by the text to the reader.

Thus the rabbis inquired into seemingly superfluous details found in the Scriptural text.   Conversely, the rabbis believed that an absence of detail required interpretation as well. They also inquired into the sentence order and the word order in Scriptural verse. They even inquired into the significance of the letters, themselves, in each word. The following midrash text deals with the story of the sacrifice of Isaac. Specifically, the context for this midrash is the introduction to the story. In the underlying Biblical story the gap that attracts the rabbis' attention is an absence of detail. Thus their focus is on what may be missing. The midrash text can be found in the Talmud, and is used by Rashi in his Bible commentary.

And it came to pass *after these things* (*devarim*) that the Lord tested Abraham ... (Genesis 22:1).

There is an opinion of our rabbis that states, *after the* words of Satan who was castigating and saying, Out of all of the festive meals that Abraham made, he did not sacrifice to You, neither one ox nor one ram. He [God] replied to him, Everything that he did, he did for the sake of his son. If I were to command him to sacrifice him to me, he would not object. There are others who say, *after the* words of Ishmael who was boasting to Isaac in that he [Ishmael] was circumcised at 13 years old. Isaac said to him, Are you trying to put me in awe on account of one membrane? If God were to say to me, Sacrifice yourself to Me, I would not object.

(Babylonian Talmud tractate Sanhedrin, folio 89a; Rashi's commentary, s.v. *after these devarim.*)

This text falls into the category of midrashic narrative. This interpretive strategy aims to fill in gaps in the Biblical narrative and to enable the reader to better understand Biblical characters and events. Sometimes the rabbis invent fictional narratives to explain the plot and the motives of the heroes of the Biblical story. Stern (2003a) explains, "Fictional invention was an intrinsic part of the way in which the Bible was read by its earliest audience to fill out the many lacunae and gaps in the Biblical narrative." (p. 12.) Similarly Fraenkel (1996) notes that that the rabbis were naturally inclined to use narrative as a didactic tool (vol. I, p. 295). It is also possible that there was an oral tradition of stories relating to Bible heroes.

Other gaps addressed by the rabbis' include those created by a Biblical story that does not seem logical; or by a Biblical character who does something illogical. The midrash text above is also an illustration of the rabbis contending with the difficulties in the story of the sacrifice of Isaac, such as the fact that murder is prohibited and that Abraham does not object to this seemingly irrational request by God.

Midrash is also triggered by Biblical language that seems to not make sense. Following is an illustration of the case of Biblical language that seems a poor fit for a Biblical verse. The Biblical event upon which this text is based takes place when Avram and Saray (soon to be renamed, Abraham and Sarah) move to Egypt from Canaan to escape famine. When they arrive in Egypt Avram asks Saray to pretend to be his sister so that he will not be killed [so that an Egyptian would be able to marry Saray]. Quoted here are the Biblical verses followed by the midrash.

.. he said to Saray his wife **Behold** now, [please], I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon: therefore it shall come to pass, when the Mizrim shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me .. (Genesis 12: 11 – 12)

Midrash aggadah: Until now, he was not aware of her [beauty] because of the modesty of the two of them. And now, due to this event taking place, he was aware [of it] ...(Rashi ad loc., quoting from Babylonian Talmud tractate Babba Batra folio 16a)

The rabbis are bothered by the Scriptural use of *behold,* here, which usually implies discovery. It is upon this word that they base their somewhat exaggerated suggestion

that Avram and Saray had never actually looked at each other before. This would 'explain' why Avram was discovering Saray's beauty at this late stage in their lives. The midrash teacher for this text would explore the exegetical provocation as well as the strategy of exaggeration that is used by the rabbis.

Exegetical occasions also arise from Biblical language that lacks grammatical soundness. An example of this is the language that describes the onset of the plague of frogs upon the Egyptians, where Scripture says, **And Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt. And the frog(s) came up, and covered the land of Egypt. (Exodus 8:2)** Rashi seizes the drama by quoting the midrashic statement that suggests - due to the singular nature of the word *frog* in the verse - that it was one frog that came up; and that the people then hit it and it streamed forth swarms of frogs. (ad loc.)

Additionally gaps are identified when a sentence seems out of place in its context. An example of this is when God asks Cain where his brother is, after Cain has killed Abel. Clearly according to the rabbinic assumption of God's omniscience He would not need to ask such a question. (See Genesis 4:9)

Similarly midrashic interpretation engages with difficulties in the ancient Hebrew language of Scripture. These include difficulties with word usage; misspellings of words; and irregular figures of speech. Accordingly interpretations, even of minutiae, give rise to rabbinic commentary. For example the exaggerated notion of the great single frog, above, may have been aimed to be inspirational to the Jewish audience; to add drama and divine glory to the story of the plagues.

Similarly, the text about Avram and Saray was clearly intended to be a lesson in modesty. Accordingly the rabbis exaggerate the modesty of the patriarchs, suggesting that they never looked at each other, in order to inspire their followers to be modest. But this does not mean that the midrash teacher should lose sight of the plain meaning of Scripture. Indeed Rashi's alternate explanation for Avram's concern about Saray's beauty can also be included in teaching this Biblical story as follows:

And the plain meaning of Scripture: *Behold, now, please,* the time has come wherein we need to be concerned about your beauty. I have known for many years that you are beautiful, but

now we are approaching people who are unattractive and are not accustomed to a beautiful woman. (Rashi on Genesis 12: 11 – 12)

As a final illustration of seeming minutiae that give rise to rabbinic commentary, an additional midrash text on the sacrifice of Isaac story is instructive. The following excerpt, based on the same verse discussed earlier, teaches about the greatness to which Abraham soars through his participation in this event. This greatness is interpreted from a single word. Following are the verse and the midrashic comment.

And it came to pass after these things that the Lord tested (*nissah*)
Abraham ... (Genesis 22: 1).

Rabbi Jose of Galilee said, he made him great like the standard on the mast of a ship. Rabbi Akiva said he tested him for real, so that no-one would say He shocked him; He confused him and he (Abraham) did not know what he was doing. (Bereshit Rabba 22:1)

Rabbi Jose's commentary is based on a re-interpretation of the word *nissah* from its plain meaning of [God] tested (from the Hebrew word *nissayon*), to mean a standard (*ness* in Hebrew). This lexical strategy is the departure point for a lesson on the heights of Abraham's faith that are demonstrated in this Bible story. The metaphor of the standard on the masthead implies elevation in spiritual status. Conversely Rabbi Akiva stays with the plain meaning of Scripture when he suggests that this was a personal trial for Abraham more than it was a demonstration to others.

5.0   Looking Forward: Midrash as a Discrete Subject

Accordingly the basis for learning midrash as a discrete subject is the understanding that the study of midrashic interpretation (*derash*) is not the same thing as learning the plain sense of Scripture (*peshat*). But when *derash* and *peshat* are viewed in parallel, and when the midrashic process is discussed, the student can begin to gain an understanding of the Rabbinic view of Scripture; and of the messages that the ancient rabbis strove to impart to their followers. For a more detailed discussion on the theoretical underpinnings of midrash, the historical development of midrash and scholarly approaches to its understanding, see Appendix A.

Chapter Three: Literature Review of Children's Religious and Textual Understandings

1.0   Introduction

Bible teachers in Jewish primary schools are expected to engage their young students with complex, ancient, religious texts. The question that has yet to be answered is, given that children's understandings are different from those of adults, can it be assumed that children can understand ancient, religious texts and traditions? Specifically can they understand midrash? And if so, what are the pedagogical approaches that would help children to make sense of these texts?

As far as I'm aware no significant empirical work (besides my own) has been done on Jewish Bible pedagogy - or more to my interest - on pedagogy for midrash. Therefore this literature review will not limit itself to discussions of *Jewish* textual understandings. Rather it will explore the literature on children's capacities for understanding religious texts and concepts in general. It will also broaden its focus in order to explore literature in the larger context of the ways in which children think; including the ways that they make sense of texts. The intention for this dual focus - on religious understandings and on textual understandings - is to establish what might be attainable in the area of explicit midrash pedagogy in the primary school.

2.0   Children's understandings of religious texts and traditions

While we can observe that children's thinking is different from adult thinking, it is not obvious how, or to what degree, this difference manifests itself in the realm of religious understanding. Thus there cannot be a foregone conclusion regarding what might be attainable in Biblical understanding, or in the understanding of ancient, religious texts such as midrash. Accordingly in order to evaluate whether – and how -

children form religious understandings, a survey of literature in this area will follow. This literature relates to children's capacities for comprehending religious texts, traditions and concepts. Since my line of enquiry is empirical the current discussion will start with a review of empirical studies and the issues that they raise vis a vis children's religious understandings. It will then review some of the issues that are raised by scholars in works that are of a more theoretical nature.

2.1 Empirical Research in Children's Religious Understandings

2.1.1 Goldman

Goldman's (1964) landmark, empirical study set out to gain an understanding of children's religious thinking - their formation of religious concepts - and to ascertain whether there are developmental stages of religious thinking from childhood through adolescence. His theoretical focus was on, "the child's intellectual struggle to comprehend the central ideas expressed and implied in religious thinking." (p. 2) This focus was based on his practical interest in understanding how religion should be taught; with his premise being that, "the teacher's major task is to communicate truths on an intellectual plane." (p.3) Central to his interest was his aim to test children's understanding of,

.. a variety of religious concepts which are central to any understanding of religious stories .. [and to] evaluate the logical processes used by children and adolescents at varying stages of development, taking Piaget's schema of the development of operational thinking as a comparative guide.(p.34)

2.1.1.1 Goldman's Methodology

Goldman devised an empirical study of six to seventeen year olds. There were 200 participants in the study. Fifty percent of the participants were primary school students. Participants were all Christian. The research involved one-on-one student interviews

with standardised questions that were based on three pictures with religious significance; and based on three Bible stories retold in simple English for the purpose of the participants.

The pictures consisted of one wherein a child is about to enter a church while he/ she (there were specific pictures for each gender) is accompanied by adults; one of a child praying alone; and one of a child looking at a mutilated Bible. These pictures were designed to form a foundation for discussions of religious (Christian) concepts,

.. concepts of the church, its nature and the motivation of attenders; concepts of prayer, involving prayer content, the purpose of prayer .. and God's presence in prayer; concepts of the Bible, its uniqueness, its nature and its origins. (ibid., p. 37)

The interview questions surrounding the 'Family entering church' picture included questions such as, "Does the son/ daughter like going?" (ibid, p. 251). The interview questions surrounding the 'Child praying alone' picture included questions such as, "Is God/Jesus/Spirit there in the room with the boy/ girl?" (ibid, p. 252). The interview questions surrounding the 'Child and mutilated Bible' picture included questions such as, "What do you think the boy/girl is thinking? (anger, shock, disgust, regret, it's naughty, it's wicked); and "You can see from the picture it's called 'Holy Bible,' what is holy about it?" (ibid)

The three Bible stories chosen were Moses and the burning bush; Crossing the Red Sea; and The temptations of Jesus. These stories were shown in Goldman's preliminary research to provide the widest range of responses involving the largest number of religious concepts (ibid, p. 38). The interview questions surrounding the story of Moses and the burning bush included questions such as, "Why do you think Moses was afraid to look at God?" and "Is God everywhere? Yes/No/ don't know/unsure" (ibid, pp. 254-5). The interview questions surrounding the Crossing of the Red Sea story included questions such as, "Does God love everyone in the world? Yes/No/don't know/unsure" and "Was it fair that all the men in the Egyptian army should be drowned? Yes/No/ don't know/unsure" (ibid, p. 255-6). Lastly, the interview questions

surrounding the Temptations of Jesus story included questions such as, "If he was hungry, why didn't Jesus turn the stone into bread?" (ibid, p. 257)

2.1.1.2 Goldman's Conclusions

In accordance with his aim to uncover the logical processes used by children and adolescents in their formation of religious concepts, Goldman concluded that children pass through a sequence of stages in their religious development that closely corresponds to Piaget's developmental stages (p. 62). We remind ourselves that Piaget ascribed critical periods to the physiological growth of human intelligence. According to his view children grow through the concrete operational stage in their primary school years. This stage (from seven to eleven years old) involves the development of logical thinking but does not include the ability to think abstractly or to understand the implications of lines of reasoning (Wood, 1998). Goldman (1964) elaborated on this idea suggesting that at this stage children's thinking relates to visual experience and sensory data which concretise ideas for them. Accordingly he suggested that where the data demonstrate the primary school student's view of God as anthropomorphic and their readings of Bible stories as literalistic, they reflect concrete thinking in use in the development of religious understanding. This constitutes, therefore, a limited type of religious thinking (pp. 56-7). Indeed, in Goldman's view, because of this limitation Biblical narratives cannot be understood by children in a spiritual way (ibid., p. 221). Moreover he suggested that children arrive at grossly distorted understandings of Bible stories (ibid., p. 222) Further, he attributed the tendency, on the part of young students, to confuse selective holiness with God's omnipresence to the Old Testament's reinforcement of crude ideas (ibid, p.127). This seems to amount to an advocacy against Old Testament study altogether. His final conclusion was that a great deal of biblical material is, "beyond the limitations of experience and thinking powers of all Infant and most Junior children." (p. 227).

2.1.1.3 Merits and Weaknesses of Goldman's Study and Links to My Line of Enquiry

My work is similar to Goldman's in that it is empirical and it is based on children's understandings of sacred texts. Likewise Goldman's inclusion of primary school children provides a link in age group to my primary school participants.

Goldman's study was important for the field of religious education in its exploration of children's religious understandings in an empirical way. Likewise it was serious in its aim to address the cognitive capabilities of children so that their religious education would be meaningful. Additionally its empirical format is impressive. Likewise for its scope: including a large number of participants reflecting a broad student population. This is especially meaningful in the area of research in religious understandings of primary school students as there were 100 primary school students in this study. The methodology was thorough and applied well to the different age groups. Moreover, as Hughes (2003) writes, it was influential in shaping curriculum for religious education in England.

One weakness in this study is that it is centred on Christian understandings and interpretations of the Bible. Since the conclusions rely on children's readings of the Bible, one cannot extrapolate to Jewish children's Biblical understandings since Jewish views of the Bible differ from Christian understandings. Another shortcoming of the study is that it does not address adult-assisted Biblical learning. The fact that children could not arrive at religious understandings of Scripture without adult assistance does not necessarily mean that they cannot be helped to understand religious traditions and concepts by experienced others. Indeed the midrash pedagogy that is the subject of my research presupposes explicit instruction. Therefore it does not rely on children's unassisted readings of sacred texts.

Kay (1996), in his summary of a decade or so of research in religious education in Britain, suggests that Goldman tested only one area of the religious experience, namely Biblical readings, or the encounter with the religious texts. Therefore the scope for his enquiry into religious thinking was limited. However, I think that he might be overlooking something in this first objection. That is that Goldman's methodology

included pictures, of a Bible, a child praying and so on, that were meant to evoke discussions on holiness and ritual that might not otherwise emerge from the other discussions. Kay also argues that the story of the Exodus as understood by Goldman's young participants can function as a story of liberation without the, "encumbrance of notions of divine justice .." (p. 38). I agree that the exodus story can be understood as a story of liberation. This is, indeed, the Jewish interpretation of the story. This returns the current discussion to the issue of children's readings of sacred texts without the help of an adult. Indeed this is where my pedagogy departs from Goldman's work; meaning that my assumption, in my research with children and sacred texts, is that interpretation should be guided by adults and will vary from one religious tradition to the next. Goldman's reliance on Piaget's stage theory has also come into question. This will be discussed in section 2.2 below.

2.1.2 Fowler's Stages of Faith

In addition to Goldman's work on children's religious understanding, this area has also been empirically researched by the American theologian, James Fowler. But Fowler's focus is specifically on faith, rather than on particular religious concepts. Fowler (1981) conceptualises faith as the alignment of one's will and one's heart in accordance with, "a vision of transcendent value and power, one's ultimate concern." In this way faith is a universal characteristic of life, despite the many forms and contents of religious practice and belief. (p. 14) He believes that these tendencies toward faith are universal. His goal was to outline an epistemology for faith development through an empirical study of people's religious understandings and experiences. His faith development theory is similar to Goldman's theory. It is based on children's cognitive development as outlined by Piaget, for an understanding of children's religious thinking. But he also draws on the theories of personality development and of moral development of Erikson, and Kohlberg respectively (in Fowler, ibid., p. 52). Thus on the basis of these theories and the basis of his own background in theology Fowler set out to describe an epistemology for faith. His objective was to outline a theory of faith development that would include all age groups from childhood into late adulthood.

In his perception religious understanding is based on the development of a perspective of the relationship of the individual to the world based on his/ her sense of

transcendence. This is, in turn, built upon the foundation of the individual's subjective experiences (ibid., p. 297). This understanding of faith, he suggested, is the result of cognitive systems of operation. This developmental theory for faith was based on his assertion that, "Manifestly and demonstrably the systems of operations underlying most adults' .. knowing in faith are qualitatively different than the systems of operations underlying children's .. knowing in faith." (ibid., p. 297) Accordingly he conceived of a faith development theory that involves six stages. In this schema the following underpinnings of faith were taken into consideration: cognitive/ logical stage (Piaget); capability for forming perspective; capability for moral judgement; awareness of social boundaries; view of authority; world view and symbolic understanding (ibid., p.244).

He describes the primary school and middle school child (seven through twelve years old) as being in a mythic-literal stage of faith (p. 135). In this stage the child can narrate his/ her experiences and finds master stories and their beliefs and symbols appealing. But this child is hampered by literalism and does not reflect on meanings (p. 150).

2.1.2.1 Fowler's Methodology

Fowler (1981) and his colleagues set up a study to develop and test his stage constructs of faith development (p. 315). Indeed, elsewhere (1991) he asserts that his theory has undergone, "a fair amount of empirical establishment." (p. 33) His study used neither sacred texts nor pictures in its methodology. In the one-on-one interview format, concepts of faith were not framed in Christian terms. Additionally the interview questions did not directly refer to prayer, to Jesus or to the Holy Spirit. Thus the only specifically religious concept raised by the interviewer was that of God.

The interviews were designed to enable participants from different religious domains to reflect on their experiences and world views within a framework of personal narrative. Like Goldman (1964) Fowler's research methodology involved one-on-one interviews. But unlike the former, Fowler's (1981) research included adults and involved only a small proportion of primary school children. Out of 359 participants 8% were in the 7-12 range. This was one of Fowler's age groupings; this grouping

includes children at the beginning of secondary school (p. 316). Eleven percent of his participants were Jewish and seventy-five percent were Christian.

The goal of the research interview was to enable participants to describe their experiences – and the challenges in their lives - and to shape meanings from them (ibid., p.308). The interview schedule for adult participants consisted of three parts. The first part contained questions regarding personal history, important influences, and turning points in the participant's life. The second part dealt with personal relationships and experiences. One example is the question that refers to, "moments of joy, ecstasy, .. break-through that have shaped the participant's life (ibid., p. 311)". The third section dealt with values, beliefs and commitments; with questions such as, "Are there symbols or images or rituals that are important to you?" (ibid.) The final section dealt with religion. It is characterised by questions such as, "Do you have or have you had important religious experiences?" and, "What feelings do you have when you think about God?" (ibid., p. 312)

The children's interview schedules differed from that of the adults. But they are not included in Fowler's (ibid.) discussion. One can presume that since 89% of his participants were adults, the delineation of the children's interview schedule was not a priority. In extrapolating from the illustrative transcripts it seems that there were different questions posed for stage one and stage two children. One can extrapolate that stage two children, those mostly corresponding with primary school age students, were asked about the following: The purpose of people in the world; What God looks like; Whether God knows when someone does something wrong; Whether God cares whether someone does something wrong; Why people die; and whether some people seem to be luckier than others. (ibid. p. 137-142)

2.1.2.2 Fowler's Findings and Conclusions

Fowler found that the responses from his sample of participants confirmed the pattern that he had predicted for faith development. (ibid., p.323) Accordingly for the age group that is relevant to my research, the primary school, findings showed that 75% were at the mythic-literal stage of development (ibid., p.317). Thus, in his view, the

fact that the majority placed at this stage confirmed Fowler's theory for this age group. Similarly based on data from all age group categories, he concluded that the stage theory is a valid model for understanding development in faith. But there is an important point to be made from what Fowler wrote: While Fowler concluded that children had literalistic views of the world, he did not see this as reason enough to argue against Bible education for children as Goldman had done. Rather he suggested that adults should shepherd the children's religious understandings when they present Bible stories to children (ibid., p. 133). It is this latter point that links to my work as the explicit teaching of midrash involves adult intercession in meaning making for sacred texts. Additionally Fowler's reference, there, to master stories ties in to the storying nature of children that is one of the assumptions used in my line of enquiry. This will be discussed below. (See references to Egan's work in section 3.2.)

2.1.2.3 Evaluating Fowler's Study

Slee (1991) notes that the empirical standards of Fowler's work have come under question. She points out that critics have raised questions regarding the criteria employed for scoring stages, as they have raised questions regarding the reliability of scoring procedures (p.145). Additionally she objects to Fowler's reliance on Piaget's stages of cognitive development as a basis for his faith development theory. She also notes that other studies of religious thinking have also relied on the Piagetian paradigm with very little justification for doing so, despite the limitations that this paradigm imposes on religious developmental research. These limitations, she explains, are those that the paradigm imposes on the capacity for religious understanding at any stage of development. (p. 144)

Similarly Daloz Parks (1991) suggests that Fowler should adopt Kegan's (in Daloz Parks, 1991) view that stages should be considered secondary to the conception of life as a manifestation of, "both cognition and affect." (p.111) Thus Daloz Parks considers Fowler's theory inadequate in its lack of consideration of the role of affective understandings in the formation of faith. She suggests that affect intersects with the process of imagination, which is manifest in children's thinking, and should thus be linked to explorations of faith development.

In my view Fowler's stage theory for faith is a reflection of very serious work in its aim to understand the nature of faith development in a universal framework. It is based on theology and psychology which gives it broad theoretical underpinnings. His methodology is non-denominational. Therefore, because it does not rely on specifically Christian conceptions of faith, it is more inclusive of other religious frameworks for its theory and for its study participants. It is also broad in its inclusion of participants from all age groups, from childhood to late adulthood. Additionally despite the fact that he relies on Piaget's stage constructs for understanding children's cognitive development, he does not allow the limitations of this framework to exclude children from Bible studies. (See previous section.)

Although Fowler does not make reference to Vygotsky's work, his suggestion (regarding teaching Bible stories to children) regarding adult intercession in the meaning-making of children reminded me of Vygotsky and the school of thought that has developed around his work. Vygotsky (in Wood, 1998; Kozulin, 1986) viewed a child's capacity to learn through the instruction of others as a feature of human intelligence. He argued that rather than testing a child in independent problem solving, "the progress in concept formation by a child [that is] achieved in cooperation with an adult would be a more sensitive gauge of the child's intellectual abilities" (in Kozulin, 1986, p. xx). Thus he asserted that co-operatively achieved success is a foundation of learning and of intellectual development. His educational directive was that instruction precedes development and he held that meaning is continuously being developed and refined as the child continues to interact with her instructors and her learning environment (in Hedley and Hedley, 1995, p.9). Similarly Feuerstein's (in Debray, 1991) pioneering method of mediated learning for children with disabilities, stresses the role that can be played by a stimulating adult in the child's development.
Thus according to Vygotsky intellectual development is mediated and stimulated by social processes that enhance the child's thinking (also in Bruner, 1987; and in Egan, 1999). This co-operative learning model has been described variously as guided participation (Rogoff in Wood, 1998) and as scaffolding for learning (Wood, 1998, p. 99).

Another factor that Vygotsky added to achievement in learning is the cultural transmission of knowledge (Wood, 1998; Child, 1973). This stems from the co-operative learning model and the cultural context in which it occurs. In this model tools such as language are seen as a means by which a culture would conceptualise and transmit thinking (Child, 1973, p. 80). This is significant for teaching children the language and meanings of religious concepts which would not develop spontaneously with their day to day language. Likewise religious culture and traditions vary from one religion to the next. My line of enquiry has a strong tie to Vygotsky's co-operative learning model in that the explicit instruction for midrash is interactive and is refined according to the children's feedback.

Returning to Fowler, the study is somewhat weak in its sampling of primary school children, as there were only 29 participants in this age group. Similarly the proportion of Jewish participants was small, eleven percent. It is worth noting that Fowler's critics raised similar issues about his reliance on Piaget's stage constructs as those that were raised by Goldman's critics. Accordingly the scholarly debate over the use of the cognitive development model for children's religious understandings will be outlined in the next section.

2.2   Should a Cognitive Developmental Model Be Used for Gauging Children's Capacity for Religious Understanding?

Ashton (1993a) advocates against reliance on Piaget's stages for understanding religious conceptual growth in children. She points out that Piaget neglected children's creative and imaginative capacities which might have led him to misinterpret their responses. She maintains that these creative capacities enable reflective thought in children which can be harnessed for religious education.

Indeed Wood (1998) notes that there is a significant body of scholarly opinion that holds that Piaget's methods led him to underestimate children's thinking. For example the language used in Piaget's experiments might have been an issue that factored into the children's responses. Wood suggests that perhaps there was a breakdown in mutual understanding between the experimenter and the child-subject (p. 61). Moreover, he

suggests that the children might not have been able to make sense of the tasks upon
which the experimental questions were based (pp. 65-68).

Similarly Goswami's work (1992 and 1998) shows that analogical reasoning –
presumed by Piaget to develop only after the concrete operational stage - is present in
children as young as two years old. This means that young children can understand
metaphors. Goswami (1998) also notes that Piaget practically neglected several areas
of cognition in children. These include the development of conceptual knowledge, the
development of learning and the transfer of learning (p. xx). The implication is that
had Piaget examined children's development of conceptual knowledge he might have
come to different conclusions about their capacity for non-literal thinking. The latter
two categories delineated by Goswami (ibid.) will be taken up later in our discussion
on children's textual understandings.

Similarly Minney (1985) discusses the influence of Piaget on the rationale for religious
education. Specifically his focus is on Piaget's view that the objectivity of the
individual is a prerequisite for academic understandings. Indeed Minney objects to
Piaget's premise that there are physiological stages of intellectual growth. He points
out that, "it seems obvious that there is potentially a big difference between the growth
and the development of the body and the growth and development of understanding"
(p.251). Included in growth of understanding are conceptions of values, behaviour,
emotions and expectations. These, he asserts, must be seen in relation to the
environment with which the individual interacts. But in seeking to define educational
goals in terms of gaining objective knowledge, Minney suggests that religious
education has become bereft of these other 'emotional' (Piaget's term for non-rationally
based knowledge) areas of understanding, with the result that students have lost
interest in religious education. Indeed Hughes' (2003) assessment is that research such
as Goldman's, through its recommendation against teaching Bible in primary school,
"helped to erode the prevalence of Christian RE " (religious education teaching). (p. 7)

Likewise Hay, Nye and Murphy (1996) suggest that childhood understanding of
religion should be framed in terms of children's spirituality rather than in terms of
religious knowledge. They take issue with Goldman, and to a certain degree with

Fowler for their, "heavy emphasis on cognitive growth .. [that has led] to an impoverishment of the meaning of religious knowledge." (p.48) They prefer Donaldson's (1992, in Hay, Nye and Murphy, 1996) account of alternative, value sensing forms of thinking and feeling to the logical or rational. They follow Farmer's (1992, in Hay, Nye and Murphy) contention that developmentalists do not realise that religious thinking is akin to sensory knowledge in that religious experience- in which children participate- is a process of knowledge. Further, they cite their own research (Nye and Hay, 1995) on children's experiences of spirituality which they measure in terms of value sensing, among other indicators. These, in their view, point to children's capacity for religious understanding.

My work with children's religious understandings does not align itself to a developmentalists approach. Given the scholarship that has grown that suggests that there are flaws in the Piagetian system, I have linked my line of enquiry to children's imaginative, affective and values understanding for approaching sacred texts.

2.3   More 'Non-Developmentalist' Work in Children's Religious Understandings

Jackson and Nesbitt (1993) undertook an ethnographic study of eight to thirteen year old Christian children with diverse denominational and ethnic backgrounds. They interviewed these children to give the participants an opportunity to describe their perceptions of their religious traditions and practices as well as those of others. They found that across the denominations children held a common belief in "God and Jesus." They noted that children regularly made reference to God and Jesus in their interview responses. They also found that some of the children spoke strikingly of the Holy Spirit. Finally they found that all fifty participants demonstrated some knowledge of Bible stories. Whereas their conclusions constitute a recommendation that religious education for this age group should include the diversity of Christian traditions of today's Britain; I would like to point out that this study also shows that children are capable of understanding religious concepts and traditions which dovetails with the underpinnings of my work.

Worsley's (2004) article centres on the Bible Story Project. This project aimed to examine year six children's understandings of Bible stories. This study did not present any written texts to the children; rather the researchers followed the pedagogy of Godly Play designed by Berryman (ibid., p. 207). This interactive strategy for recounting Bible stories to children involves verbal storytelling that is supplemented by various puppets and props. Worsley found that placing an emphasis on the imaginative aspect of understanding, or cognition, enabled the children to apply their affective understandings to make meaning of the Bible stories. He therefore suggests that this stance provides a personal hermeneutic for children with which they relate to – and find meaning in - Bible stories. The significance of this study to the discussion on religious understandings lies in its affirmation that children do find meaning in Bible stories. Additionally the pedagogy used in this study highlights the idea that children can make meanings when they are aided by a competent 'other.' Although textual understandings are not spoken to here, as the mode of knowledge transmission is verbal, the interactive nature of the pedagogy speaks to the notion of assisted learning.

Nipkow (1991) makes a similar contribution to the discourse on children's religious understandings. He points out that the mere transmission of knowledge is insufficient for imparting religious understanding. Rather, he suggests that the child must be included as an active partner in internalising and constructing this knowledge so that learning can take place (p. 86). This is similar to the interactive approach, just mentioned, but without the use of props. It is also aligned to pedagogical theories on the way that children make sense of texts. These will be discussed in section 3.4 below.

2.4   The Issue of Religious Literalism and its Effect on Children's Religious Understanding

Ashton (1993b) addresses what she describes as the problem of literalism in religious thinking. She writes that it is not religious development that happens in stages, but rather it is the rejection of popularised ideas of religious understanding that takes place as children grow (p. 382). The grounds for rejection are that these ideas, such as the view of God as male and living in the sky, are unscientific. Ashton notes that these

popularised ideas are taught. They do not develop spontaneously (Petrovich, 1988, in Ashton, 1993b). Central to the misunderstanding that arises is the inability to handle the metaphorical language that is part of religious education. This takes place, in her view, because the child's capacity for metaphorical understanding is not harnessed for religious understandings. She stresses that this oversight neglects children's creative capacities that can be guided toward reflection which could, in turn, lead to deeper (non-literalistic) insights into religious meanings.

In a similar vein Gooderham (1994) has suggested that prima-facie, literalist readings of Scripture leave children with clumsy or incomplete understandings of the Bible. He suggests further that these incorrect understandings sometimes lead to children feeling alienated from the Bible. (p.167)

Similarly Radford (1999) suggests that pupils must be taught to recognise the predominance of metaphor in religious texts and its relationship to the spiritual experience - before they reach adolescence. His rationale is that religious understanding should also involve spiritual development; and that this aspect of development relates to feelings and attitudes as much as to cognition. Moreover it is specifically through relating to religious metaphors that the student can develop spiritual feelings, and therefore, understanding. He cautions, however, that if this education does not take place the images themselves can become an impediment to students' development of religious understandings. One can see in this suggestion of Radford that his emphasis is on metaphorical understanding that is brought about in the child through the intercession of an adult. Indeed Jewish sacred texts employ metaphorical language. This fact is brought into play in the midrash pedagogy that is the subject of this paper.

2.5 What Have We Learned about Children's Religious Understandings?

It must be noted that none of the empirical work that was done had Jewish children as its focus. While Goldman studied exclusively Christian children, Fowler had a small number of primary school student participants, and only a fraction of that population was Jewish. Therefore while some conclusions will be drawn from this literature, it should be borne in mind that *Jewish* children's religious understandings have not been

substantially studied either from a theoretical or an empirical point of view. Accordingly my study is an attempt to begin to bridge this gap in the literature on children's religious understandings.

It can be said from the literature reviewed thus far that children's religious understandings - though different qualitatively from those of adults - can be nurtured by adults. It can also be said that in order for this growth to take place the religious educator needs to address the affective as well as the cognitive understandings of the child. The question still remaining is what would be the pedagogies needed for the development of religious understanding in the child? Specifically what type of pedagogy would be needed to enable children to make sense of religious texts? In order to answer this question it is necessary to expand the focus in order to explore the literature that centres on how children make sense of texts.

3.0   The Ways in which Children Think and the Ways in which Children Make Sense of Texts

It has already been noted that children's thinking is qualitatively different from adult thinking. Thus in order to determine what effective ways there are for enabling children to learn including learning from texts – religious or secular -one must first look at the theories of how children think. Accordingly this section will first look at the work of Dewey, Egan and Bruner in the area of children's thinking in order to appreciate how children make sense of the world around themselves, and of the knowledge that they acquire. These discussions will include a look at other learning theorists who draw on the work of these writers in order to understand how children construct meanings. This will be followed by a discussion on the making of meaning in reading comprehension, in particular, in order to understand how children make sense of written texts and to draw lessons to teaching religious texts.

3.1 Dewey and Children's Understandings: Inquiry and Reflection

Dewey (in Archambault, 1964; 1974) suggested that children understand concepts that are explained and developed within the range and scope of their own life or

experience. In this view the teacher's role is to develop the child's understandings through relating knowledge to the child's experience. Similarly he suggested (1916; 1944) that learning takes place when the child is in a mode of inquiry. He suggests that this is because inquiry leads to thinking which in turn leads to reflection. Accordingly for reading, the child seeks clarity by reflecting on her own experience and thus gains an understanding of the text which she is learning (p.154). Thus Dewey points to inquiry and reflection as key components of children's sense making.

Kornhaber and Gardner (1991) build on Dewey's theory. They add that thinking is fostered culturally as the learning context helps the child to shape his questions. These in turn lead to his making sense of the world around himself. Thus adults foster children's development according to the knowledge and skills that the surrounding culture values. They suggest further that different forms of intelligence are prized by different cultures. For example, children in certain African tribes are taught to sing and dance because every member of the tribe is expected to sing well and to be able to dance (p. 159).

Similarly Elder and Paul (2003) echo Dewey's (1916: 1944) emphasis on inquiry as the cornerstone of learning. They assert that learning is triggered by questioning. Moreover, they assert that thinking, itself, is driven by questions. This is because it is through the process of asking questions that one can, "define tasks, express problems, and delineate issues." (p. 36) Therefore, in their view, deeper questions promote deeper understandings that are beyond superficial meanings. Similarly Davidson (1976) explains that people engage in metaphorical thinking when they reflect on information that is given and aim for a deeper understanding. "The goal of such processes is to transform complex .. information into forms that make the information ..easier to learn." (p. 135) This is usually done through some kind of concretising imagery. In his view young children do this as well. (It was noted above that children engage in metaphorical thinking.)

Likewise Knodt's (1997) Think Tank project for primary school children takes the fact that children think analytically- and that this thinking is stimulated by questioning- as its premises. Thus this project was designed to encourage children to think analytically and creatively in various informally set-up learning contexts. The aim was for students

to gain deeper understandings of subject matter. For example one of the learning centres included questions for the children to ponder such as, "How are worms and spaghetti alike?" (p. 37)

Davis-Seaver (2000) takes the idea of children's reflection within their experience a step further. She suggests, based on her primary school teaching experience, that when they engage in reflection, children think analytically about matters that concern themselves. Accordingly she notes that children think analytically about their friendships, their decision making and other activities outside the classroom; and that these thoughts turn to empathy for the other and an understanding of points of view and motivations. She notes that children's analytical thinking capacities include the ability to form reasoned judgments; to draw inferences; to make predictions based on evidence; to find logical cause and effect and to think creatively (p. 48). She therefore asserts that deep understandings can be formed when the child thinks in a particular context. Additionally she echoes Vygotsky's idea of mediated learning with her suggestion that in an educational context the child develops her own strategies for understanding based on feedback loops that are formed with her instructor. These enable her to make sense of subject matter (p. 61).

Indeed the genre of midrash ties into conceptions of inquiry and reflection. It was precisely these activities in which the ancient rabbis engaged in order to make sense of – and to interpret- the Bible. It would stand to reason, therefore, that midrash pedagogy should guide the young student to inquire and reflect on the Bible story as the rabbis did.

3.2 Egan and Children's Affective Understandings

In contrast to Dewey's learning theory that holds that children reach understanding through a process of inquiry together with reflection on their experiences, Egan (1991) suggests that people make sense of the world around themselves through story telling. In his view the story form is culturally embedded in society. Accordingly this format orients affective responses to events. Thus, "one may say that we think with our feelings .." (p. 103)

In particular Egan (1990) suggests that children who are between the ages of eight and fifteen years old are at a developmental stage of romantic understanding. In his words,

> During the romantic layer [stage] the students still inhabit a significantly story-shaped world. That is, experience and knowledge make sense more readily in story-forms .. It is within the story-form that one can clearly establish the affective meaning of a topic. The story-shaped world .. is a world in which feelings are prominent. The story-form can provide a human context .. (p. 217)

Thus human thinking and understanding involve cognitive and affective components. But it is the affective component that is dominant in this age group that enables children to form affective or romantic (Egan's term) associations. His pedagogical suggestion is that emphasis should be placed on the affective components of knowledge. (ibid.)

In an earlier work (1979) he described the student's affective thinking in this way,

> One reflection of students' desire to explore limits and to form personal associations with whatever is to be learned leads students to want to know "What was it like then, or there, or doing that?" .. Their concern is to feel different forms of life, to try them on, as it were. (p. 33)

This, he explains, is why children tend to identify powerfully with the heroes of a story. Accordingly in Egan's view it is by their affective understanding that children make sense of the knowledge with which they come into contact. Therefore their strongest textual understandings would come from texts that are in story form.

Egan's thinking links to the previous discussion on children's religious understandings; in particular to those whose work touches on children's affective capacities. But more to the current point - of forging links to my work and the way in which children make sense of things – children's storying nature (as described by Egan) is a natural basis for addressing narrative which is one of the main components of midrash.

3.3 Bruner and Children's Understandings: Making Sense and Constructing Meaning

While Egan's learning theory focuses on affective understandings, Bruner (1987) argues that children's understandings are developed through the child's interaction with others. He refers to Vygotsky's work wherein Vygotsky describes the child's development - his acquisition of knowledge, his ability to focus, and concept formation – as socially mediated (p. 8). Bruner adds that this means that the development of concepts will be connected to the culture in which the child lives (see also, Bruner, 1996, p. 3). It also implies that the child is dependent on stimulation and interaction with others to promote understanding. Thus because learning is co-operative Bruner suggests that meaning is co-constructed. This means that the child takes an active role in reformulating meaning – making sense - so that the new concept is learned or internalised by the child (p. 22).

In addition to his suggestion of mediated learning Bruner had pointed out earlier (1966a) that children possess significant "intuitive" capacity for thought. In his view, his year three students played games that were, "governed by the principles of topology and set theory, even discovering new 'moves' or theorems." And that their thinking included affective understanding: of, "tragedy and the basic human plights represented in myth." But he suggested that children are incapable of conceptualising these understandings in formal language (p. 13). Elsewhere (1966b) he made a similar argument in pointing out that there is a difference between children's, "stream of language" and their, "stream of thought (p. 53)."

But because of their intellectual capacity to understand a wide array of basic ideas he suggested that, "any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development (1966a, p.33)." The key to accomplishing this is Bruner's spiral curriculum which emphasises basic themes and meanings that are taught iteratively where each iteration involves a deepening of understanding (ibid.). He also refers to the main ideas of subject matter as its structures (in Sprinthall, 1990). The spiral curriculum also emphasises meaning making through

a process of analytical thinking about subject matter in its context (in Speaker). This strategy relies on the concept of mediated learning that was discussed above.

The challenge of teaching midrash to children lies in the ancient and complex nature of these texts. Bruner's co-operative learning model offers a way to address this difficulty. His assertion that meanings are culturally mediated emphasises the role of the adult in meaning making. The child is not expected to possess ancient cultural knowledge. Rather the co-operative learning model draws on the considerable mental capacities of the child to make meaning of challenging subject matter when it is explicitly taught 'spirally' in its proper context.

Likewise Raths, Jonas et al (1967) make suggestions for encouraging young students to think about subject matter. They suggest that teachers should foster a "climate for thinking." (p. 110) This can be done, in their view, by gently asking questions without putting pressure on the students. These questions should be of the kind that causes the children to reflect on the material. In fact their suggestions echo the learning spiral idea when they suggest that questions, encouragement, as well as repeated exposures to the same concept lead to an improvement in understanding in primary school children.

Similarly Bruner's idea of the co-construction of meaning is taken on board by Watkins (2001), when he suggests that children *should* be collaborators in the construction of meaning in order to promote understanding. He suggests that children make meaning of subject matter when they are "engaged learners." (p. 4) He suggests further that understanding is enhanced when children are asked questions that relate directly to the meaning of the subject matter. These questions orient the student toward the ways of thinking about the subject matter. Then this process, in turn, enhances knowledge or performance.

In my view Raths and his colleagues as well as Watkins, in addition to drawing on Bruner's ideas, are also drawing on Dewey's learning foundations: those of inquiry and reflection. They all put the idea of questioning at the centre of learning. Thus Raths and his colleagues refer to questions as well as repeated exposure to the material for a way toward understanding. Similarly for Watkins an integral part of the student's co-construction of meaning is the process of questioning and reflecting on the subject

matter. Putting questions at the centre of a learning unit can also be a good way to focus students' attention on difficult subject matter such as that of midrash.

Fisher (1995) also draws on Vygotsky's model of co-operative learning. Since learning is a collaborative process he suggests that children form understandings when they are coached in thinking by an adult. He suggests that this type of cognitive coaching works best particularly when the material is hard to understand. The link to complex midrashic material is clear.

In summary, we have seen three basic models of the way that children think. Dewey and his school of thought maintain that children's thinking is the product of reflection on their experience in their search for understanding. Egan refers particularly to the affective meanings that are, in his view, at the forefront of the thinking of primary school students. In this model the master story is most aptly understood and appreciated. In my view this could be applied to the Bible which is the master story of the religious community. Bruner's model of the way that children make sense of things is built on Vygotsky's theory that children's knowledge is socially constructed. Similarly his spiral curriculum contains the suggestion for a model of mediated classroom learning. I have suggested that the theoretical underpinnings of each of these schools of thought can possibly be used to suggest a way forward for some aspects of a new midrash pedagogy. Thus a Dewey type of attention to reflection can possibly help the student enter the mindset of the ancient rabbis as they reflected on the Bible. In particular attention to rabbinic narrative could be profitable given Egan's suggestion of children's storying nature. Probably most important for the complex and archaic nature of midrash is Bruner's co-operative learning model which enables the child to grow in knowledge through the intercession of a knowledgeable adult. Thus far the discussion has centred on theories of children's thinking. What we still need to explore, however, is how this can be applied specifically to teaching children *texts*, especially to religious texts.

3.4 How Children Make Sense of Written Texts

One of the issues that my research addresses is the question of whether primary school children can understand religious texts, particularly midrash. The question is motivated

by the clearly difficult nature of these texts. For in addition to containing complex religious messages, their language and symbol derive from antiquity.

Hull (1985) suggests, even of modern educational texts, that there is a qualitative gap between the language in which adult texts are written and the language that young students use in their lives outside of school. This gap constitutes one of the barriers to understanding that children encounter when they learn from academic texts. Pupils have difficulty with "voice-less text" (p. 210). Voiceless texts are texts that are formulated in different language and from different contexts from the experiences of the student. In my view this becomes more apparent when texts are complex and when they are ancient. Both of these criteria apply to religious texts. Thus the encounter with religious texts poses extra challenges, both to the teacher and to the student. Accordingly replication, particularly for complex texts and especially for the young student, of that which is presented cannot constitute meaning, or textual understanding.

Textual understanding comes from analysing (or reflection on the text) and making sense of it. This means that the reader of a written text must be able to think creatively and flexibly. In this way reflection on the text allows the reader to interpret the words in order to come to an understanding of what the text means. Further it enables the reader to avoid reading only for literal meanings. Moreover it allows the reader to extrapolate or infer meanings that are not directly stated by the text. This kind of reflection then enables the student to understand something about people or about the ways of the world (Walker and Soltis, 1997; Grant, 1988; Esteve, 2000).

Hillocks and Ludlow (1984) argue that there are different levels of reading comprehension. They further suggest that basic comprehension skills provide the building blocks for the formation of more complex – or deeper- comprehension skills. For example reading comprehension begins with gleaning literal meanings from the text. From there one can draw inferences from it. Similarly an ability to locate the key details of a story is based on an ability to determine the important aspects of a story. These would be the ones that are emphasised through repetition or those that are placed at key junctures of the plot. It is only with these identified that the reader can identify key relationships in the story and the meanings that the author has imbued in them.

It is significant, then, that Tredt, Carlson and their colleagues (1989) refer to the deeper comprehension capacities of children. Contrary to what one might have thought about children's limited capacities for comprehension, they remark that primary school children do make use of complex comprehension skills. These include analytical skills such as inference and appreciation as well as application. One application of reading, in their view, is the integration of ideas from a story with the experiences of the student. They argue that these kinds of comprehension skills can be directly and productively taught to young students

Similarly the idea of mediated comprehension is taken up by Wolf (1997) in her programme for the study of fairy tales. She encourages children to analyse and explore the stories. She helps them to achieve these understandings, she argues, through tapping into their thinking skills. These include the ability to empathise, which means that they can understand the feelings of fictional characters. She also encourages their use of creative thought. And for deeper understandings she draws out their capability to view texts from different perspectives.

Similarly Fisher (2001) explains that proper reading comprehension based on an analysis of the text can - and should - be mediated by adults because textual meanings are not self evident. Mediation for comprehension, in his view, would include assisting children in reasoning between the lines of the text. He asserts that with mediation children can make inferences; evaluate the ideas in the text; judge whether the text makes sense; and make predictions about the text (p. 195). Correspondingly Marzano (1995) suggests that reading is a meaning-driven exercise, and because of this it should be the subject of mediated instruction. In his view, reading should include specific goals. The teacher can help the student to comprehend the text that is being read by identifying the reading goal for the student. This parallels the discussion earlier on enquiry as the basis for making meaning. It is also in alignment with Marzano's (1995) theoretical description of the function of mediated learning. He suggests that the ultimate goal of mediated instruction is to enhance the child's emerging metacognitive and cognitive processes. This is because he feels that these processes *are* naturally emerging in the young student. Thus with mediated learning the child is enabled to develop particular conceptual understandings of texts.

The discussion on adult mediated reading comprehension ties into my work on two levels. Firstly on the theoretical level of mediated learning that was raised in the previous section by the Vygotskian school of thought. Here scholars apply the social construction of meaning to reading comprehension. Secondly the significance in particular to my research is the suggestion raised here that children can be assisted to reflect upon and to understand – not just to 'parrot' – difficult texts. This idea could be expanded, in my view, to religious texts.

Indeed in the United States[1] reading comprehension that is based on reflection and analysis of the text has been assessed nationally in primary schools for decades – and has been referred to as 'critical reading':

.. [Reading] is a series of progressively complex activities .. At each step, the reader becomes

ever more deeply involved in a reader-author relationship.. a good reader must be able to use

his own thoughts and experiences to analyse, .. evaluate, accept, modify or reject what the

author has said..

(NAEP[2], 1973, Theme 8: Critical Reading Assessment, p. 1)

In addition to the above criteria children beginning at nine years of age are expected to understand literary devices, recognise the tone of the narrative and differentiate between fact and opinion in the text (ibid.) (This standard was relaxed in later years in that the critical reading criteria are now expected from 'advanced' rather than simply 'proficient' nine year olds (NAEP, 2006)). Likewise individual states assess reading comprehension state-wide, in primary schools, based on 'critical reading' comprehension. One of these is Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (White and

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[1] In the U.K. students are not expected to respond critically to texts until age fourteen. See attainment targets in National Curriculum, U.k.

[2] NAEP is shorthand for National Assessment of Educational Progress which is done under the auspices of the American Department of Education.

Hargrove, 96). Students from eight years old and upward are expected to demonstrate critical thinking skills. These are applied to major areas of achievement including reading, maths and science.

The concept of reading for meaning through an analytical approach to the text has become one of the benchmarks for reading achievement in educational studies in the United States and elsewhere. For example Wenglinsky (2004) studied the effectiveness of teaching for meaning through analysing students' NAEP reading comprehension results. He found that primary school students need to be given opportunities, during reading class, to make sense of a text. This, he suggests, should be done by interpreting and reflecting on it in order to achieve textual understandings. He seems to be implying that these class opportunities would include teacher mediation. Similarly Reidel and her colleagues (2003) conducted research for the improvement of reading achievement in year six. For the area of reading comprehension they included analytical thinking skills in their benchmark. They called this their diagnostic reading test. Accordingly they measured children's comprehension according to their ability to make inferences, draw conclusions, compare and contrast as well as to identify cause and effect.

Another example is Persiani (2003) who studied year two children's (of various ethnic backgrounds) understandings of multicultural children's literature. In that study reading comprehension was accomplished through "critical reflection" and dialogue (p. 43). The discussions were teacher-mediated and focused on asking questions surrounding perspectives, both, of the reader and of the characters in the stories.

In contrast to teacher-mediated reading discussions, Bond (2001) studied peer-led discussions. Her focus was on meaning that is made collaboratively among peers, with the idea that students' different interpretations would deepen one another's understandings. She guided her year six students before the discussions to take different reading roles during the discussion. The roles replaced adult mediation as they modelled the stances necessary for analytical reading comprehension. An example is the role of "Discussion Director" who asks "fat questions" (analytical questions) about the story (p. 584).This kind of cognitive coaching enabled the students to take on analytical reading tasks without the direct mediation of the teacher.

Similarly in an Australian case study McDonald (2004) evaluated her year six students' (with a wide range of reading abilities) ability to approach texts analytically rather than adopting the Australian reader response stance. She explains that the reader response method focuses on the relationship between students' life experiences and the text that they are studying. She found that in her mediated class discussions, the students were able to analyse the characterisation of the story and to adopt different gender perspectives on it.

The assertion that primary school children can be taught to read texts in a way that they can infer meaning – whether one calls it reflective reading, critical reading or critical reflection – bears promise for teaching midrash texts. This will be discussed further in the next section. The complex nature of midrash texts and their foundation in ancient Jewish culture constitute a challenge for midrash pedagogy. This is because the comprehension of these texts requires analytical thinking on the part of the student, as well as mediation of meanings on the part of the teacher. The foregoing literature suggests that a pedagogy of mediated instruction that encourages reflective and analytical thinking could enable the children to gain an understanding of the language of the rabbis as well as enabling them to find meaning in the rabbis' way of reading the Bible.

3.5 Summary: Analytical Thinking and Textual Comprehension in Children

The reading comprehension literature surveyed suggests that in order to make sense of written texts one would need skills such as the capacity for reflection, analysis, inference, and even the ability to interact with the author. It might seem surprising, then, that the literature also suggests that children, whose quality of thinking differs from that of adults, are capable of achieving deep levels of textual comprehension- of texts written by adults. The key to understanding this is the notion of mediated learning. The common educational assumption – and the explanation for the suggestion just mentioned – is that reading comprehension in the primary school is mediated by an adult. The adult guides the student to reflect on the text, to read between the lines and to analyse the way that it is written. Thus just as reading is a search for meaning, it is also a collaborative learning process. And as the student

constructs meanings he internalises the analytical processes in which he engaged in order to make that meaning. This enables the student to understand the way that the author constructed his/ her message. Such a pedagogy could be used as one of the keys to entering the mindset of the rabbis in order to make sense of midrash texts.

3.6 Making Meaning of Religious Texts: Implications for Teaching Midrash in the Primary School

Because children's thinking is qualitatively different from adult thinking we, as primary school teachers, need to explore the ways that children gain understandings in order to devise strategies that promote understanding of religious texts. Accordingly this chapter has reviewed literature on children's understandings of religious texts and traditions; on children's ways of thinking that enable them to construct meaning; as well as on children's engagement with written texts in general. This has been done with a view to understand how children can make sense of the Bible and of Biblical interpretation.

Although Goldman felt that children's religious understandings are primitive and he, therefore, advocated against teaching Bible in the primary school, other religious education scholars disagree with his position. Their main objection to Goldman's position relates to his view of children's concept formation. Namely they object to his assumption that the fact that children seem unable to interpret Bible stories unassisted means that they cannot be helped to understand them by more experienced others. They suggest, moreover, that children's creativity, reflective capacity, affective understandings and valuative (value sensing) understandings enable children to form spiritual and religious understandings. Indeed *Bible Education* presupposes the notion of assisted learning. Likewise it has been my professional experience as a Bible teacher of primary school students that these students are capable of religious and spiritual understanding. But a specific pedagogy for midrash has not been incorporated into Jewish Bible studies. Therefore I have looked at learning theories and pedagogical suggestions for teaching textual comprehension. The aim has been to draw on this literature in designing an explicit pedagogy for teaching midrash texts.

Accordingly the literature on the way that children reflect, inquire, think analytically and make sense of texts has some lessons in it for helping students to engage with Bible and Biblical interpretation. Specifically it provides a foundation for approaching the teaching of midrash explicitly in the primary school. For example Bruner's approach to teaching children is most useful for midrash education. Firstly his assertion about teaching anything to children is a strong support for teaching midrash despite the fact that midrash texts are not straightforward. His model of the learning spiral, of breaking down the learning process into manageable parts and iteratively building on each level of understanding, is pertinent to teaching complex midrash texts. Likewise Dewey's theory on the child's search for clarity and her propensity for inquiry is useful for uncovering the motivation and the Biblical textual trigger for a particular midrash; as it is for exploring the nature of the interpretation itself. Similarly Dewey's focus on reflection and Bruner's focus on analytical thinking provide a theoretical basis for encouraging the children to analyse the meanings and the construction of midrash commentary. Additionally, as was said in section 3.5, mediated learning as a foundation stone for the pedagogy of coaching textual understandings could be used profitably for midrash texts with their complex culturally-embedded linguistics. Finally Egan's theory of affective understandings provides support for teaching midrash as a way to deepen children's understandings of the Bible story, the motivations of its heroes and of the religious lessons that are carried through them.

Chapter Four: Methodology

This chapter, methodology, discusses the methodological underpinnings of the study. It reviews the research question in order to describe the purpose and aims of the study. It then describes the central element of the study: the design and the application of the midrash teaching programme. This is followed by a discussion surrounding the evaluation of the programme and of the data collected through its application. The chapter conclude with a discussion of the ethical considerations that were taken into account in the design of the research.

1.0   The Research Question

The reader may recall that the research question was articulated in the following hierarchy:

Can we teach midrash explicitly in the primary school?
- **Can primary school students understand the motivations for midrash and the textual and religious underpinnings of its commentary?**
- **Can they separate *peshat* (plain, contextual meaning) from *derash (rabbinic interpretation)*?**
- **Can they understand the literary strategies employed by the rabbis for the purpose of Biblical elucidation?**
- **Are some aspects of midrash easier to understand than others?**
- **Do differences in national curricula affect the possibility of teaching midrash explicitly?**

2.0 Research Design

Auguste Comte suggested that positivism be used for social science research. In this view, the researcher is a disinterested observer of social reality whose findings are assumed to be value neutral (Giddens, 1974, 1 - 5). The backbone of this method is hypothesis-driven experimentation with controls and variables that can be replicated and with results that can, therefore, be validated (Robson, 1993; Cohen and Manion,

1980). But because true experimentation is not possible in research that is undertaken outside the laboratory - in real world settings - the needs of social research have led to changes in the experimental paradigm. There has been movement toward hybrid research designs that use a combination of qualitative and experimental (or other methods of quantitative) inquiry where the results are integrated at the interpretation phase of data analysis (Creswell, 2003). They embrace moderate empiricism for methodological rigour together with an emphasis on hermeneutic skills for data interpretation (Nash, 2002).

One of these hybrid models is the design experiment. This paradigm was pioneered for educational research by Ann Brown, in 1992. Design experimentation has been used in many contexts including kindergartens, primary school and secondary schools (Porter DeCusati, 2004; Oshima, Oshima et al, 2003; Saye and Brush, 2002). It is an experimental model that is used to design, refine and evaluate theories or innovations for learning in complex educational settings (Cobb, Confrey et al, 2003; Kelly and Lesh , 2002). That is, to carry out studies of educational interventions for the improvement of student learning (Collins, Joseph and Bielaczyc, 2004; Zaritsky, Kelly et al, 2003). Since this intervention research is designed to inform practice, the design paradigm provides a real world working space in which teaching innovations can grow (Kelly and Lesh , 2002). Brown (1992) explains that in this paradigm classroom life is viewed as a complex synergy of many variables. Each variable cannot be assessed individually, since any change introduced in a classroom is responsible for a multiple of simultaneous responses in the variable aspects of the learning environment. Therefore in this paradigm variables are assessed as components of the working whole. This phenomenon encapsulates the "trade-off between experimental control and richness and reality" (p. 152). The designs are empirically based on recognisable research standards and their data assessments include theoretical descriptions that delineate why an intervention was (or was not) successful. These components lead to reliability and to the potential for replication of the intervention. Brown (1992) asserts that the Hawthorne effect – that the mere presence of a researcher will improve performance- is ruled out by the specific nature of the improvement in learning that is achieved by each intervention.

Thus design experiments are based on the understanding that learning, cognition and context are co-constituted and must, therefore, be studied as one entity. Similarly since one of the objectives of design research is to gain an understanding of how people think, know and learn, the design framework involves the observation of social interaction in the learning setting which is considered a constituent of the learning process (Barab and Squire, 2004; Edelson, 2002). Design experiments are process focused in that they seek to trace learning by understanding the thinking and reasoning that is demonstrated as a response to the intervention (Shavelson and Phillips et al, 2003). Accordingly indicators of improved learning are sought such as student engagement in complex reasoning (Hawkins and Collins, 1992).

The educational innovation that is the focus of a design experiment must be flexible so that it can be applied to new local contexts (Barab and Squire, 2004). Additionally design-study data are drawn from small samples of educational settings and are likely to be aggregated over time and over different sites (Sloane and Gorard, 2003). The recognisable research standards, or scientific rigour involved, relates to the educational attainment measures included in the design and to the inclusion of corroborative data (Kolodner, 2003). The interpretive aspect of this model stems from the participation of the teacher who is implementing her own innovation.

To return to the research question of this study, **Can we teach midrash explicitly in the primary school?** This question – and its subordinate questions regarding the understanding of midrash characteristics- relate to pedagogical strategy as much as they relate to children's understandings. Now if the research questions had focused solely on children's religious and textual understandings, the study could have been designed around student interviews, sample texts and questionnaires. It could have had a format similar to that of Goldman's (1964) research on children's religious understandings. But since the purpose of the research related to midrash *pedagogy*, namely the explicit *teaching* of midrash in the primary school classroom, the research needed to include midrash teaching. Likewise, it needed to include a programme for this purpose. But the option of evaluating an existing teaching programme was ruled out because there is no such existing programme for teaching midrash explicitly.

Therefore, in order to explore my research question, I needed a research paradigm that would allow me to both design and evaluate a new midrash teaching programme in a classroom context. A true experimental paradigm was ruled out because controlling extraneous variables to the required degree would be difficult, impractical and highly artificial. Additionally there would be no possible control group as midrash is not currently being taught explicitly. Moreover, in order to properly answer the research question, I needed a paradigm that would allow the focus of the research to be on the way that children engage with midrash, not only on the pedagogy of it. For example, in order to explore whether some aspects of midrash are easier to understand than others, I would need the design to include parameters for this kind of inquiry.

Now it has just been mentioned that design studies involve the design *and* evaluation of educational interventions. It has also been mentioned that the interventions that are the centre-piece of design experiments aim to improve student learning through a focus on understanding how students learn and acquire knowledge. Similarly since the data from design experiments are aggregated over several interventions there is flexibility for improving the innovation as it is applied in a particular context. This is essentially the life cycle of design experiments. Accordingly it was based on all of these aspects of the design research paradigm that I chose the model of a design experiment for this research. In particular I chose the One-on-one (teacher-experimenter and student) design experiment paradigm which was to include a series of teaching sessions over three interventions (Cobb, Confrey et al, 2003).

3.0 Designing the Midrash Teaching Programme

3.1 Aims of the Programme: Teaching Some Aspects of Midrash

The experimental treatment consisted of a mini-course of ten Bible lessons taught with midrashic commentaries. It was thought that ten lessons would provide enough time for students to learn the approach to midrash, and to benefit from it, in terms of midrash understanding. The Biblical stories chosen for the foundation texts of the mini-course were familiar to the participants. This was done to optimise midrash teaching time by saving time that might have been needed to review the Biblical verses

upon which the midrashic commentaries were based, had the students been unfamiliar with them.

The midrash texts chosen illustrate aspects of midrash that I feel are important for students to learn in order to understand the purpose of midrash; and to begin to understand the midrashic process. This is an application of Bruner's view (1966c) that it is those ideas that lie at the heart of subject matter that should be taught. Thus the interpretive strategies that are the focus of the mini-course include those that are frequently seen in classical midrash texts (exegetical, narrative expansions, ethical and rabbinic parables). They also include strategies that I have found to be confusing to children (complex meanings and non-literal intentions). Additionally these texts were chosen from a practical, educational standpoint; since all of the strategies illustrated in the mini-course can be found in paraphrased midrash texts that are featured in Rashi's commentary - on the books of the Pentateuch - that is included in the primary school Bible curriculum. Thus they are likely to be encountered by students in their Bible readings. The following is a brief sketch of the concepts taught in the mini-course.[3]

- The relationship of *derash* to *peshat*. Since midrash is Scriptural commentary, the relationship between midrash and Scripture is the first topic covered by the mini-course. It is then reviewed for each midrash text. The positioning of an interpretation with relation to the Biblical text is an application of this concept. It is described variously by scholars as the 'opening' for the interpretation; the provocation; or the exegetical occasion. Through reading the four midrash texts, the children encounter various exegetical occasions including philological and religious-philosophical ones.

  The issue of the relevance of the Scriptural provocation to the midrashic solution is discussed in depth for each midrash. Solutions which relate to the *peshat* (plain, contextual meaning) are offered- in addition to midrashic ones. This is done in

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[3] The midrash texts that are used in the mini-course can be found in chapter two in the following sections: On Cain and Abel, section 4.1; on Avram and Saray and on the sacrifice of Isaac, section 4.2.2.

order to explore the way in which the rabbis have departed from the plain-sense of Scripture, and delved beneath it, in search of further meanings.

- Moral messages. Rosenak (1987) points out that religious texts convey normative messages to their adherents (p. 256). Midrash texts exemplify this principle. The values taught through midrash are explored, in the mini-course, through an interpretation that conveys a moral, or ethical, message. This is illustrated through the text on Avram and Saray that extols the modesty of the pair. This midrash text was chosen for several reasons. Firstly because the value of modesty is familiar to the students and, as viewed through this midrash, it is modelled by the 'first couple' of Jewish forefathers. The fact of its modelling in this way places the message of the midrash into the story of the forefathers. (More on religious master stories below.) Moreover the fact that this midrash is cited by Rashi situates it in the purview of the primary school Bible class.

- Exegetical interpretations. These explore philological, theological or narrative difficulties in the underlying Biblical narrative. The theological foundations of these interpretations underscore the seriousness of midrash; that it is not childish. Thus the exegetical basis, or provocation, of each midrash is explored with the class. This extends to the value-laden or moralistic midrash just mentioned. Its exegetical foundation rests on an element of discovery that seems to be implied by the language of the story, but does not fit the model of a couple who should know each other well. Similarly exegetical foundations are explored in the midrash texts that surround the story of the Sacrifice of Isaac. These interpretations are at once philological and exegetical – in their explanation of particular Scriptural language, or lacunae in the Scriptural narrative – and theological in their message to their reader. Likewise the parable of Cain's guilt rests exegetically on the language of Scripture that suggests that Abel's blood is crying out to heaven.

- Midrashic narrative. Stories, or elements of stories, that do not exist in the Biblical text, but elaborate upon it. Kugel (1990) explains, "Most of the narrative expansions found in rabbinic midrash .. have as their point of departure some

peculiarity in the Biblical text itself. .. these expansions .. are formally a kind of biblical exegesis." (p. 247)

Since these stories are rather easy to understand, children tend to think that a midrash is like a fairy tale. In the mini-course the narrative element of midrash is illustrated through a commentary on the story of the Sacrifice of Isaac. This midrash explores the impetus for this trial of Abraham. To demonstrate the seriousness of midrash, the text is problematised together with the students. The first aim is to uncover the peculiarity in the text that motivated the narrative expansion. The aim is then to explore the exegetical or philosophical ends that are achieved through this deceivingly simple interpretive strategy. The midrashic narratives in this text describe this Biblical event as a story of faith that is exemplified by Abraham and Isaac.

This Bible story is taught on two occasions in the primary school. It is first taught during Bible classes that teach the book of Genesis. But it is also taught in the context of lessons that centre on Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. On this High Holyday the story of the Sacrifice of Isaac is read aloud from the Torah in synagogue. Thus this story is considered one of the most important stories in the Bible. It is the underlying message of faith that makes this story so important, to adults as well as to children. In terms of the midrash text itself, it can be found in Rashi's commentary and is therefore likely to be encountered by primary school students. Accordingly the importance of this story as well as the inclusion of this midrash in Rashi's commentary are the reasons for the inclusion of this midrash text in the mini-course.

Bruner (1966c) points out that narratives and metaphors can be instructional for the student in shaping his/ her sense of humanity, and of organising a sense of what is persistent in history. In my view this is also true in the case of religious master stories in the Bible. In these one can see the, "human predicament .. the good that beckons .. Here we can see religious convictions in the making .." (Dale, 1972, p. 5)

- The use of non-literal language in midrash texts. These types of texts exemplify to the children that midrash should not necessarily be understood at face value. The midrash about Avram and Saray's extraordinary level of modesty – that they did not look at each other – is an illustration of this kind of language. Similarly the midrash that likens Abraham to a flag on a masthead is clearly figurative. The latter example was chosen for its topic, an exposition on faith that is tied into the Sacrifice of Isaac story, as well as for its clear illustration of figurative language in midrash. This aspect of the mini-course puts into practice the suggestion about the teaching of ancient religious texts, mentioned earlier, that religious education can make productive use of children's capacity for creative thought in order to develop their symbolic and metaphorical understandings (Ashton, 1993a; Ashton, 1993b; Radford, 1999).

- The multi-layering, or complexity, of midrashic texts. This is exemplified by texts that make use of more than one interpretive strategy, thus presenting multiple commentaries at once. In the mini-course this is illustrated most clearly with the narratives. The students learn that these stories explore the meanings of the Bible story while they uncover and grapple with underlying theological questions. For example there is the issue of child sacrifice that is implied in the Sacrifice of Isaac story. The complex nature of the midrash text underscores the seriousness of midrash for the young students.

- The midrashic parable. The example used is the Cain and Abel story. The parable used in the midrashic set text carries with it an elaboration of the message of the Bible story. Bruner (1966c) talks about the educational impact of, "history rendered with epic aids" (p. 162). The rabbis used parables in order to deliver their message with impact. Their message in this story involves as Bruner (1966c) describes, "the causes and consequences of choice" (ibid.). Levinson (2005) describes it as the rabbis' rendition of sin and responsibility. This parable was chosen for the clarity of its message as well as the clarity of its imagery: the dripping strawberry juice on the strawberry thief's hands. Where the Bible story only implies guilt, the parable makes a clear presentation of the evidence of the crime.

The presentation of these strategies enables the teacher to paint a picture of rabbinic interpretive activity. This picture gives the students a backdrop upon which to place the midrashic texts that they will encounter in the future. Accordingly this strategy engages the student in an exploration of the rabbinic text as it relates to Scripture. The main concern of the approach is to problematise the material with the students, and to guide them to make sense of midrash and Scripture. The idea is that understanding is brought about by intelligent absorption of subject matter (Quinn, 1997). Accordingly a sufficient theoretical foundation of midrash knowledge must be put in place. The midrashic process is taught through a pedagogy that is based on Vygotsky's (in Bruner, 1987) idea of developing ideas in a child via the intercession of adults (p. 9). The aim is to include the students in the process of acquiring this knowledge (Bruner 1966c). The reasoning is that this should, in turn, enable them to begin to study midrash and Scripture on their own.

3.2 Teaching Method
3.2.1 Theoretical Underpinnings of the Teaching Method

The teaching strategy is an iterative one that applies Vygotsky's (in Young, 2003) view that human agency plays a role in the creation of knowledge (p. 113). Clearly the agent, in this case, is the teacher. Accordingly, in the midrash teaching programme, the teacher provides the students with repeated encounters with each midrash text as well as with the characteristics and motivations associated with midrash. As Bruner (1966c) suggested in relation to other subject matter, midrash teaching is based on a succession of stages of instruction that leads to a deepening of understanding. This concept is similar to Bruner's spirals of learning (in Speaker, 2004). The level of complexity of midrashic material is one to which the students are not accustomed therefore scaffolding (Wood, 1988; 1998), or the intercession of an adult in assisting the understanding of the child is used. This is accomplished through repeated iterations of midrash questions, answers and concepts. The main tool for assessing levels of understanding on an ongoing basis is the daily quiz that takes place at the opening of each midrash lesson. Quiz responses are used to gauge what was understood by most students and what was not. That which was not understood would therefore need to be reviewed in the following lesson in an iterative fashion. These written quizzes are

composed according to the themes of the previous midrash lesson, and in relation to the difficulties that the students had articulated on that topic. This is part of the iterative nature of the teaching strategy, as the answers are reviewed orally at the beginning of each lesson. The final class-wide quiz contest is the final stage of the iterative strategy. It utilises some of the quiz questions as well as other mini-course questions, and brings the midrash characteristics together in one lesson.

The theoretical aim of the strategy is to integrate the child's existing cognitive capacities (van Gelder, 2005) with an ability to understand midrash knowledge that is furnished by the teacher. The student is encouraged to articulate and share his/her questions about either the Scriptural text or its rabbinic interpretation. The questions shared by the students encourage further class discussion and exploration of the meaning of midrash. This kind of collaborative reflection encourages sense-making (Watkins, Carnell et al, 2002).[4] In the case of the Biblical text the sense-making is significant in that it has an impact on the faith of the student (Griggs, 1990). Thus understanding grows with each interpretation that is presented. Once the students become aware of these rabbinic strategies, they will be able to start to identify them and to understand their interpretive purpose.

3.2.2 Applying the Method

The teaching style is one of whole class teaching. Each lesson is built around the reading together of the midrash text and the Scriptural passage upon which it comments. Class discussion is guided primarily by leading questions that are posed by the teacher. The classes also incorporate questions that are posed by the students during class and questions that are triggered by the students' quiz and homework responses. Similarly class discussion is a focal point of the teaching programme. Visual aids are brought in to demonstrate some of the aspects of midrash in a concrete way. For example a clothes peg or hanger together with an item of clothes is brought in to demonstrate the connectedness of commentary to Scripture.

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[4] This also encourages the teacher to reflect on the Biblical material that she is sharing with her students (Griggs, 1990).

The lessons of the interventions were taped by audio recorder or video recorder depending on the permissions of the school. There was agreement between the researcher and the school that the tapes would be used for data collection only. I promised that they would not to be shown or played to others, and that I would personally undertake all transcriptions from these visual or audio records. The transcripts were to be used for the composition of student logs of midrash knowledge. (See section 4.5 below.) In this way a student's comments in class would be incorporated into her individual data log. It was also thought that interesting body language – that might illustrate students' midrash understandings - might be captured on video that could, in turn, enhance class transcripts. These were to be noted in the transcripts themselves. The intervention also included daily quizzes, homework assignments, and a worksheet. These will be discussed in section 4.4.2 below.

4.0 Evaluating the Midrash Teaching Programme

4.1 Selection of Schools

When choosing sites for the interventions I took into account the disparate Jewish populations spread over numerous countries. Whilst it is reasonable to expect similarity in educational contexts when studying schools in a single country, my interest lay in exploring whether I could design a midrash teaching programme that would be effective in schools with *different* national educational curricula; with different educational emphases and frameworks. My aim was to test my midrash innovation through small samples of a broad swath of Jewish primary school students to see whether it would work in different international contexts. Since I was doing something new in Jewish Bible education in the primary school it was important to find out whether it would be applicable for Bible education in a range of Jewish educational contexts. All the participating schools were of Orthodox denomination in order to ensure that the Bible curriculum would include traditional Biblical interpretation. Large metropolitan areas were selected in order to have access to strong but mixed student populations. The study was carried out over three schools: one in Israel; one in England and a third in the United States.

Access to schools was sought through personal contacts or recommendations. (See Appendix B for a sample letter to a school.) In addition to the schools that gave me access, there were two schools that denied access. Both of these schools were in Jerusalem. One school's reason for refusal was that the head of Bible studies did not want a researcher to interact with her students in the role of teacher. The other school's head teacher reasoned that his students would not complete their Bible curriculum if ten lessons were set aside for midrash classes. The participating Israeli school was a state, religious, primary school with a mixed student demographic. The age range of the student population of the school was rising six through rising twelve year olds. This was a medium size school with two classes (approximately thirty students per class) per form. The British school was a voluntary aided, Jewish school with an upper middle class demographic. The school included three year olds through year six students; with one class per form. Class size was around 25 students. The American school was a private Jewish school with a mostly upper middle class to wealthy student demographic that also included lower income students who were provided with financial scholarships. This school had a relatively large student population with up to four classes per form. Class size was similar to the British school. The school also had a pre-school wing with three through five year olds. The main school started with rising six year olds and continued until the equivalent of British year nine. The inclusion of years seven through nine is common in the United States for Jewish primary schools.

4.2 Selection of Pupils

I chose to work with children in the older grades of primary school (English equivalent of key stage 2). During this 'romantic stage' of development (Egan, 1990) children are keen to identify with the human qualities of Biblical characters portrayed by the rabbis. Thus, they are well suited to learning midrashic literature. Additionally, I reasoned that this age group should provide me with subjects who are capable of analytical and abstract thought (Goswami, 1998, p. 276, see discussion on ability to reason) and would, therefore, be open to scholarly approaches to midrash. When I approached the schools I asked for a class of co-educational 10-11 year old students with mixed Jewish studies achievement levels. I explained that I would need to have access to the

students for ten lessons. Permission for individual participants was negotiated through the schools. An example of an informed consent form for participation can be found in Appendix C.

The class compositions that were assigned to me were as follows: The Israeli class had 14 students, one third girls; The British class had 22 students, half were girls; and the American class had 16 students, half were girls. The Israeli class had two students with learning difficulties; whereas the British class had one student with a muscular handicap. The British class was a complete year six class. The Israeli class were members of the year five class (British year six equivalent) who volunteered to join the midrash class. The American class was an enrichment class that drew volunteers from each of the four fifth grade (British year six equivalent) classes.

4.3 The Pre-test/ Post-test Questionnaire

In each intervention individual questionnaires for self completion were administered before the first lesson of the mini-course (intervention) and after the last lesson. Its purpose was to test changes in midrash understanding over the course of each intervention. In designing the questionnaires I applied Nash's suggestion to use complementary research methods to form a "numbers and narratives" research methodology (2002).

The questionnaire, which was the main measuring instrument of the study, was designed with the aid of focus group discussions that were conducted with three groups of ten to eleven year olds. The discussions were centred on the midrash knowledge categories that became the focus of this study. This process provided base-line knowledge levels for midrash in this age group. It also became a preliminary forum for identifying issues in midrash that were a source of confusion and anxiety for young students. The questionnaire was first used in my IFS.

The questionnaire begins by collecting biographical data on the educational background of the student. Further background is provided by multiple choice and attitude scale type questions that require the student to reflect on his/ her efforts and interest in Bible classes. These responses provided the researcher with an idea of the

attitude that the student brought to the midrash intervention. This was to be used for a qualitative analysis of growth (or lack thereof) in midrash understanding. In the area of quantitative data, the questionnaire includes tick-box questions related to midrash knowledge. These are complemented by open-ended questions that also relate to midrash knowledge. The open-ended midrash questions function as corroborative data to the tick box questions. Their function is to minimise the possibility that the tick-box responses are guesses rather than a reflection of an understanding of midrash. Additionally the open-ended questions are useful, at post-test, in their ability to paint a clearer picture of the understanding gained during the intervention; for understanding the learning process. This stems from the rich data contained in self-expressed answers. Indeed, the *post*-test questionnaire includes additional open-ended questions relating to students' impressions of midrash and of the mini-course itself.

The design of the tick-box options took the tender age of the participants into consideration. My concern was that they might guess at answers if they were to feel boxed-in by the options. That is why they were offered an additional choice to the standard agree/ disagree. But the additional *sometimes* option led to some ambiguity in response, when a child didn't explain this choice. Fortunately this ambiguity was mitigated by the fact that there were other, corroborative tick box items. Indeed the scoring of the tick-box options was quite stringent for some categories in that more than one tick-box needed to be ticked correctly for the accumulation of a correct score in the category. This is most predominant in the "seriousness" category which requires correct ticking of three boxes. Below (figure 1) is a modified questionnaire. It includes a column for the description of the midrash category to which the tick-box item belongs. Also the acceptable responses are marked by an x. (There were slight changes in the language of the tick-box items in the different interventions. These were instituted to make the items more understandable to the children in each international context.)

Figure 4.1: Midrash Questionnaire

    I. **Introduction**: Thanks for participating. Your thoughts are important to us. This is not a test. There are no correct or incorrect answers to these questions. Just say what you think! We hope you'll find the discussion interesting.

II. **Biography of Student**

a) What's your name? _____

b) How old are you? _____

c) How long have you been at this school?

d) Do you prefer maths or English? (Circle answer)

e) Would you say that learning in Hebrew is easy/ ok/ difficult ?

III. **Let's talk about your Chumash lessons.**

Chumash class	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
Is interesting				

a) Do you think that in Chumash lessons you learn: a great deal / quite a lot/ not much/ very little ? (circle answer.)

b) Do you feel that during Chumash lessons you work: very hard/ the same as in other classes/ less than in other classes/ not hard at all ? (circle ans.)

Chumash class	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
Is boring				

c) Would you say that Chumash class is one of your favourite classes? Yes /no. (circle ans.)

IV. **Let's talk a little about Midrash.**

a) Are you learning midrash this year? Yes/ No.

b) If 'yes,' in which subject? _____

c) What subject is most closely connected to midrash? _____

d) How is it connected to midrash?_____

e) Have you learned Mishnah or Gemara ? (Talmud) Yes/ No.

f) Do you learn Rashi ? Yes/ No.

g)[5] If so, do you think Rashi quotes midrash? Yes/ No.

  If 'yes,' can you think of an example?

_____

h) Can you think of an interesting midrash to tell me about? _____

_____

_____

i) Do you think there is a difference between Chumash and midrash? Yes/ no.

  If 'yes,' what might it be? _____

_____

V. And now for some questions about Midrash.

a) Does midrash help us in any way? Yes/ no. (circle ans.)

  If 'yes,' in what way? _____

_____

  If you were to choose the kind of midrash to learn, which type would you choose?

_____

b) Would you like to learn more midrash in your school ?   Yes/ no. (circle answer)

  Why? _____

_____

c) Have you ever learned a strange midrash? Yes/ no. (circle answer)

  If 'yes,' can you think of an example? _____

_____

_____

_____

[5] This question gathers information on whether the student knows that Rashi quotes midrash. This is one of the knowledge items that is evaluated. The other categories are all in the tick box questions.

	Agree	Sometimes it's true. I'll explain	I don't know	disagree	**Midrash Category**[6]
a) Midrash is deep/complex. It requires us to think a lot.	X				complexity
b) Midrash teaches morals/ *mussar*	X	X			morality
c) There are stories, or parts of stories, or conversations in midrash	X	X			narrative
d) Midrash contains symbolic language or exaggerated language	X	X			non-literal language
e) It's always easy to understand midrash		X		X	seriousness
f) Midrash talks about how people should behave	X	X			morality
g) One should always interpret midrash literally		X		X	non-literal language
h) Midrash is for little children				X	seriousness

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[6] This column has been added here for explanatory purposes. It does not exist on the actual questionnaire.

i) We can learn from midrash	X				seriousness
j) Midrash is not very deep; not much thought is put into it.				X	complexity
k) Midrash helps us learn Torah	X	X			exegetical
l) Midrash helps us to understand *Chumash*	X	X			exegetical
m) There are *meshalim* (parables) in midrash	X	X			parables

Thank you for participating!

Responses to the additional open-ended questions on the *post*-test questionnaire were designed with an eye to understanding the children's impressions of the mini-course. These could be used to improve the intervention before its next application. I also hoped that the responses would help me to gain a deeper understanding of the way the students viewed the midrash texts. These are discussed further in section 4.4.3 below. Other questionnaire-related issues are discussed in Appendix D.

4.4 Other Methods of Data Collection

4.4.1 The Pre-test Phase

The purpose of the pre-test phase was to attain a base-line measure of the children's understanding of midrash. This base-line measure was to be used later, at post-test, to assess what midrash knowledge had been gained during the intervention for each student. The basic measuring instrument for this was the questionnaire. But in addition to these self-completion questionnaires, the study included one-on-one interviews that

I conducted with a sample of the students. The sample was composed of students with various achievement levels in Jewish studies (as reported by their Bible teachers). The purpose of choosing students with differing achievement levels was to ensure that the measures would reflect knowledge rather than intellect; and that the student sample would be a fair reflection of the class overall. The aim of these interviews was to enable students to give fuller responses – in the relative ease of a verbal format- than they might have done on the written questionnaires. This is in accordance with Quinn's (1997) assertion that there is a large discrepancy between the strength of what children can verbalise and their capacity to express the same ideas in writing (p. 124). With some variation from one intervention to the next the interviews took place in public areas of the schools such as small halls, the school library or in learning areas that were multi-functional (such as for lessons or presentations or for consultations). The interviews lasted about ten minutes each and were audio-taped or video-taped according to the permissions of each school. The taping enabled me to create transcripts for later data logging and analysis. The pre-test interview questions checked basic midrash knowledge – and impressions of -midrash. They are reviewed in figure 2 below.

Figure 4.2: Pre-Test Student Interview Schedule

1. Tell me what you know about midrash.
2. Try to think of a midrash that you have learned and tell me about it.
3. Is there a difference between Torah and midrash?
4. Where do you think midrash comes from?
5. Do you think that Rashi quotes midrash?
6. Do you think that midrashim are easy to understand?
7. Do you think that midrashim are supposed to be easy to understand?
8. Do you think that midrashim are mainly for little children?
9. Do you think that the language in midrash is clear and straightforward?
10. Did you ever hear of a confusing midrash?
11. What do you think the purpose of midrash is?

I also interviewed the Bible teacher and the headteacher. The headteachers were interviewed in their offices whereas the teachers were interviewed in their classrooms. These interviews were designed to get a sense of the way that Biblical interpretation was viewed in each school; and of the way that the Jewish studies staff thought that it

should be approached. The interviews also served to verify the assumption of this study that midrash is not currently being explicitly taught in the primary school. These interviews lasted up to half an hour. I took notes during these interviews, instead of taping them, so as to put the staff members at ease. (In one school I had been specifically asked not to record a staff interview, but was given permission to take notes.) These interviews were much less structured than the student interviews as I wanted to afford as much flexibility as possible for the adults involved to tell me about their approach to Bible teaching. I did not want to colour their responses by using weighted questions. Thus the interview was structured around the following four questions:

1. **How does this school view the teaching of Bible?**
2. **How does this school view the teaching of Rashi's commentary?**
3. **What guidelines are given to teachers for teaching midrash?**
4. **What guidelines are given to teachers for teaching Rashi's commentary?**

The intention in interviewing the Bible teacher as well as the head teacher was to determine whether classroom pedagogy applied that which the head teacher or head of Jewish studies described to me in his/ her interview; and if this were not the case, I was interested to know where the differences lay.

Additionally I reviewed curriculum materials for Bible and I observed a Bible lesson. Both of these activities were done in order to gather background information on the way that midrash and/ or Rashi's commentary were being presented to the students in each context. Whilst observing a Bible class I was also interested in classroom management. This was because I would be a guest teacher in these classes during the midrash mini-course and I would need to manage the class in the way to which the students had become accustomed.

4.4.2 Data Collection During the Intervention

During each intervention the lessons were either tape recorded or videotaped, depending on the permissions of each school. This enabled me to transcribe the lessons for data collection. Additional sources of data included the midrash worksheet and

homework assignments. The midrash worksheet walks the student through the interpretive process of one midrash text and was completed by the students in class. The midrash about the modesty of Avram and Saray is the subject of this worksheet. The idea in designing the worksheet in association with the first midrash unit was to give the students some time to reflect on the midrashic process in class. In this way they worked independently with the midrash text, but had the reassurance of the presence of the teacher for help in areas that were still unclear. Similarly this gave me a view of their learning in process so that I could ascertain if there were difficulties with the pace or pedagogy of the intervention.

Figure 4.3: Midrash Worksheet

In-Class Worksheet   Midrash Comprehension   Student's Name:_____

          1. To which story in the Torah is this midrash connected? _____

2. What is worrying Avram? _____

3. What difficulty can be found in the wording of the verse? Please explain._____

_____

4. Is it logical to assume that until now Avram did not know that his wife is beautiful?

_____

5. What is the simple explanation that Rashi offers?

_____

6.   What does the midrash say about this verse? (look in Rashi)

7.   Is this a logical answer to the difficulty in the verse?   (and please explain your answer)

8.   Does the midrash have a message for us, and if so, what is it?

         9. What does the midrash add to our story in the Torah? _____

_____

10.   Circle the correct answer:
Why has the midrash based itself on the words, *Behold now, [please], I know that thou art a fair*

woman to look upon:

    a)   **Because this phrase can be connected to Avram and Saray's modesty.**

    b)   **Because it is easy for us to remember a message of modesty from Avram and Sarai.**
    c)   **Both of the above**

Homework assignments consisted of four or five questions on each midrash text. These were assigned after each midrash text was taught. Their purpose was to find out whether the students had grasped the main ideas and the purpose of each text of the mini-course. In addition to being used for individual student data logging, the responses on these assignments were used in the formulation of follow-up quiz and quiz contest questions. (The quiz and quiz contest were discussed in section 3.2.1 above.)

Accordingly quiz responses and the notes in my teaching journal rounded out the data that was collected during each intervention. I entered notes into my teaching journal after each class that I taught. They would begin with a summary of the material covered, and would move on to questions that were raised by the students and directions of discussion that were particular to that class. In this way I was seeking to understand how each educational context was bearing upon textual comprehension and midrashic understanding. I also noted interesting comments that were made by individual students, as well as making notes on textual or theological issues that would need follow-up in the following lesson. The student comments so noted were to be used for their midrash knowledge profile as well as to promote further class discussion. The other notes included questions that would be in the next lesson's quiz and issues that might need further clarification. I also took down notes that I had made on the board as a record of the discussions from that class. Of course all of this was complemented by the video or audio tape from the lesson itself. Additionally the journal notes were useful in the case where the audio was not clear (or where the children had temporarily turned off my microphone).

4.4.3 Data Collection at Post-test

After the completion of the mini-course, the post-test questionnaire was administered to the students in their classroom for individual self completion. The body of this questionnaire was the same as that of the pre-test. But there were some additions. A question was added to the beginning of the questionnaire to gauge the students' overall impression of midrash; and a series of questions was added to the end of the questionnaire to see what the students' feelings were about the mini-course. The questions will be reviewed here.

As you learn a Midrash from Rashi's commentary, or from your teacher,

which of the following thoughts go through your mind? (You can circle more than one)

a) I wonder what the message of this Midrash is going to be.
b) It may be difficult to understand this Midrash.
c) It will be interesting to find out how the Midrash explains the Torah.
d) I think that Midrash commentaries are just for little children.
e) Maybe this Midrash will solve a problem in the Chumash.
f) Maybe there will be symbolism in this Midrash
g) I hope the teacher will explain this Midrash clearly.
h) Maybe the Midrash will make the story in the *Chumash* more interesting. (First page, post-test questionnaire)

The overall-impressions question was designed to gain an understanding of how midrash understanding had been internalised by the students. Moreover it was hoped that the responses would shed light on the way in which the students had come to terms with this difficult subject matter. For example a student who would pick b) and g) only would be taking away an impression of midrash as of difficult subject matter. Whereas those who would focus on a), c) and e) would have gotten beyond the feeling that midrash is simply difficult and had begun to see its value as interpretation.

The extra questions at the end of the questionnaire read as follows,

In Conclusion

• What is the hardest part of learning midrash?
  _____

• In what way is midrash useful to us?
  _____

• What was the most interesting part of the midrash series?
  _____

• What was the least interesting?
  _____

• What did you learn for the first time during this
  series?_____
  Which lesson in the series was the most enjoyable?

  _____

• Were some of the topics in the series too difficult? Yes/ no

- If so, which topic was too difficult?

_____

(Last page, post-test questionnaire)

These questions were useful to corroborate the extra first page questions, but they were also useful for evaluating how the mini-course was received.

I also conducted follow-up student interviews with the students from the pre-test interview sample. Data from these interviews was used for the individual midrash knowledge profiles of the students, but it was also used for a pre-test to post-test comparison of midrash understanding of a sample of the students. The questions were slightly different at post-test. They were aimed to elicit rich qualitative data about what the students had understood about midrash from the mini-course. They are enumerated below.

Figure 4.4: Post-test student interview schedule

* Does the midrash make the story in the Torah different for us?

1. What is the hardest part about learning midrash?
2. Can you tell me the difference between *Chumash*/Torah and midrash?
3. Does Rashi quote midrash?
4. Do you think that midrash is meant for little kids?
5. Why?
6. Why do you think we learn midrash?
7. Does midrash ever carry a moral message?
8. If so, how does it do this?
9. Is midrash supposed to be simple to understand?
10. Why?
11. Did any of the *midrashim* in the series use symbolic language?
12. Which?
13. How does symbolic language help?
14. Might it confuse us?
15. How does a midrash connect itself to the verse that it interprets?
16. Can you think of a midrash that is complex? that explains more than 1 thing about a verse in the Torah?

4.5 Methods of Data Analysis

Data analysis for each intervention began with scoring the tick box items of the questionnaire. The items, mentioned above, tested the students' understandings of the aspects of midrash that were the focus of the mini-course. Accordingly pre-test to post-test comparisons were made for each student.

Additionally a log of student responses, a midrash knowledge profile, was compiled for each student for qualitative data analysis that would provide corroborative data to the tick-box data. Moreover, this data would be used to understand how the children were making sense of the midrashic process. One of the aims of the design experiment is to learn about how students make sense of subject matter. Thus I set up the midrash knowledge profile so that I could read the students reflections on midrash in their own words. I logged data for each child according to the midrash knowledge found in the short answer questions of the questionnaires as well as the other data sources mentioned in section 4.4.2 and 4.4.3. The data was classified into the same midrash knowledge categories that were the basis of the investigation. Thus if a student mentioned in class, or in a student interview that, "midrash explains the verse in the Torah," for example, this statement would be logged in her midrash knowledge profile in the 'exegetical' category. Accordingly a bank of data was assembled for each student that profiled what the student had learned in each midrash category; in his/ her own words. It also detailed the source of each student quote, whether it came from a class transcript, a homework response, a quiz response and so on. This will be discussed further in the findings chapter.

5.0   Limitations of the Study

Clearly the scope of the research was limited, but this three continent model, with one school per continent, was the best that one researcher could do alone. It was felt that in keeping with the International EdD framework there would be much to be learned through this international model vis a vis Jewish Bible education in disparate geographical learning contexts. A further limitation was the relatively short duration of each intervention. The framework of ten lessons was slightly constrained from a researcher's point of view, but the participating schools would not allow a disruption of their regular classes for longer than this period. An additional limitation was that two of the classes had less than twenty participating students. However, the advantage of a relatively small class size was that there was more interaction between the teacher and each participant. Additionally it made the chances that a participant would 'tune-out' of the lesson smaller than would be typical in a large class. Finally there was the potential

for the Hawthorne effect since the researcher was conducting the interventions. It was hoped that the thorough gathering of data together with its analysis would compensate for this potential problem, in the sense that knowledge gained would need to be reflected in the data, not just in the teacher or the students' enthusiasm.

6.0 Ethical Considerations

When the research was being designed consideration was given to the potential for causing disadvantage or inconvenience to the students or the staff at the participating schools. A primary ethical consideration was the issues of informed consent. There was concern that students would feel coerced to participate. Certainly in an ideal world each participant would make an independent decision to willingly co-operate at the outset of the research project. But in practice it was the heads of the schools who undertook the seeking of permissions through the parents of the ten to eleven year old participants. It would have been inappropriate for me to challenge the schools on this. Informed consent was thus negotiated through the guardianship of the schools for each study (BERA p.7). Additionally in keeping with ethical guidelines parents received follow-up reports after the completion of the studies, as did the schools (BERA, p.10).

It is important to note that parental permission was sought. Indeed I was involved in drafting the permission request letters that were sent out by the schools (see Appendix C for a sample letter). Thus in the British school, in accordance with the decision of the head of Jewish Studies and parental co-operation, all the students in the year six class were required to participate in the midrash mini-course. But the lack of independent agreement from the participants themselves was mitigated by the fact that the students were learning midrash, Biblical interpretation, in their scheduled Bible class period. This did not amount to a significant deviation from their regular Bible studies. (Moreover individual consent was obtained, as in the other interventions, for students' participation before each student interview was undertaken.)

The situation in the other two schools was quite different because there students did pull out of the study. In the American class there were two students who asked to pull out of the midrash lessons (in front of their classmates). This was after individual permission slips were signed by their parents for their participation, supposedly with

the agreement of the children. Nevertheless these students were permitted to drop out, with the agreement of their head teacher; thus reflecting un-coerced participation by those who did participate in the mini-course.

In the Israeli school the head teacher came to the class to ask which students wanted to participate in the midrash mini-course, after the children had participated in a couple of 'trial' lessons. (For them it was a trial, for me it was the beginning of the mini-course.) From that point onward those children who had chosen to opt out of the mini-course were taken by their regular class teacher to a different classroom for extra Hebrew comprehension time during subsequent midrash lessons.

There was concern for the difficulties that might be caused by pulling students out of their regular classes; for disrupting the regular teaching day and for feelings of exclusion for those students who were not participating. The first two interventions involved my teaching in the regular class, so no student was pulled out of class in order to participate. In the third study it was the staff that decided on this format. Indeed that school offered specialty/ enrichment lessons in other subjects for which students were regularly pulled out of class as well. Therefore the students were accustomed to a situation where some of their classmates were in a different learning area from the rest of the class. In this latter case, the school already had procedures for dealing with issues of perceived exclusion that arose from enrichment classes. Therefore for midrash lessons, too, these issues were mediated by the head of the Jewish Studies department together with the Bible teachers (see BERA, p.8). Disruptions to the regular teachers were minimised in accordance with their requirements and requests in the negotiated access discussions. For example in all the interventions the midrash lessons did not take place at the same time every day, but were assigned times by the class teachers that would suit the rest of the teaching schedule. I was uncomfortable with the time allocated to me in one of the schools as it turned out that my mini-course was taking place in a geography time slot. Unfortunately I was unable to negotiate for the use of the Bible period of that class.

An additional ethical concern, the confidentiality of the students, was maintained in all of the interventions. Identification of students has been anonymous in all reports of the

study, (BERA p. 8) thus "reducing the sense of intrusion" (BERA, p.7) for the student. This extends to video recordings of the classes which are considered confidential and will not be visually presented. They were taken for the creation of lesson transcripts only.

Chapter Five: Findings

In this chapter questionnaire data as well as supplementary data will be presented. The data review will start with a presentation of the quantitative questionnaire data and it will continue with an overview of the supplementary data. This, in turn, will be followed by the story of the midrash mini-course as it took place in one school. Since a primary area of this investigation has been to determine whether children can make sense of sacred texts I thought that it would be meaningful to present qualitative data in the form of this narrative which depicts the way that children engaged with midrash texts. Thus the emphasis is placed on telling this story in the words of the children. The reader can see from the words of the students how they approached the midrash texts; how their thinking was shaped by the ideas in these texts; and how they grappled with their content. In this way the development of their midrashic understanding is articulated by the students themselves.

1.0 Questionnaire Data Overview

The purpose of this three part study has been to design and then to test the efficacy of a midrash teaching strategy for the explicit teaching of midrash in the primary school. In order to measure the success of each intervention, a midrash knowledge questionnaire was designed for pre-test and post-test administration. Categories of midrash knowledge for which each student was tested were the following: an awareness that midrash is exegetical; that it is moralistic; that it is complex; that it is serious; that it contains non-literal or symbolic language; that it contains narratives; that it contains parables; and that Rashi quotes midrash. The questionnaire contained tick-box items that related to the first seven categories just mentioned. Additionally one short answer (yes/ no) question asked the respondent whether Rashi quotes midrash. The questionnaire is discussed in detail in chapter four, section 4.3.

1.1 Questionnaire Results Overall

Each participating class demonstrated growth in midrash knowledge within a scope of 32-38%. The improvement across all interventions is demonstrated in figures 5.1 and 5.2 below.
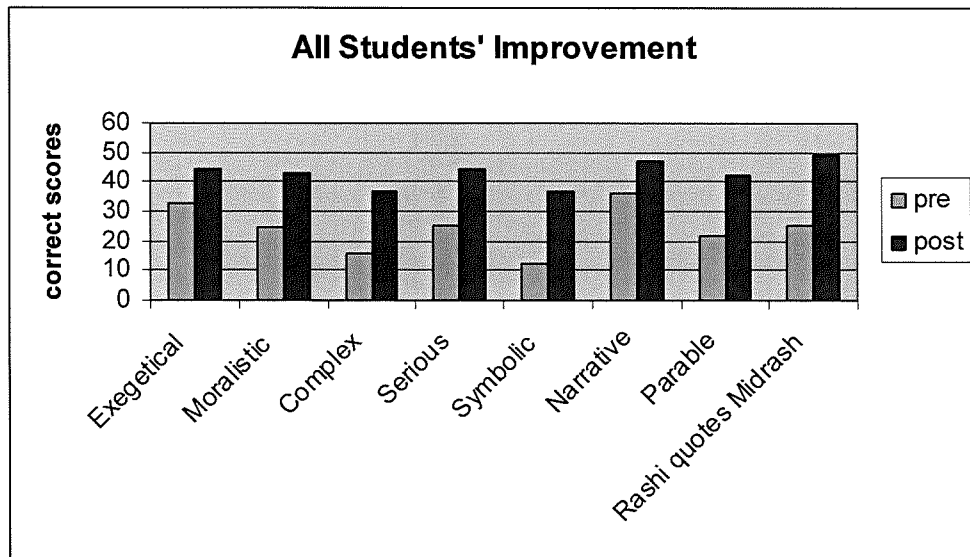
Figure 5.1   Midrash knowledge scores for all students

Figure 5.1 is a reflection of the actual number of participants who were aware of the various characteristics of midrash, both at pre-test and at post-test. This has been termed, *scores* in the caption for the figure.
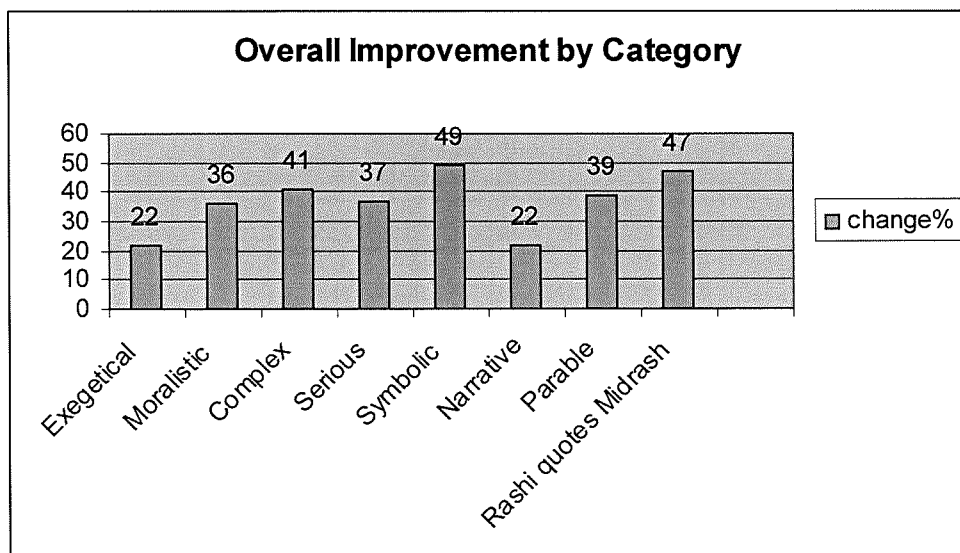
Figure 5.2   Amount of improvement in midrash knowledge for all students

Figure 5.2 demonstrates the amount of improvement seen across the study for each midrash knowledge category. Accordingly the category that saw the highest rate of improvement is that of symbolic or non-literal meanings. This is a reflection of the fact that before the intervention many of the students were not aware of the fact that midrash texts are not to be read at face value, or literally. Similarly about half of the children were not aware that Rashi quotes midrash despite the fact that Rashi's commentary is the most familiar to them. This fact was understood well by most participants at post-test. Midrash complexity was another category that saw substantial improvement.
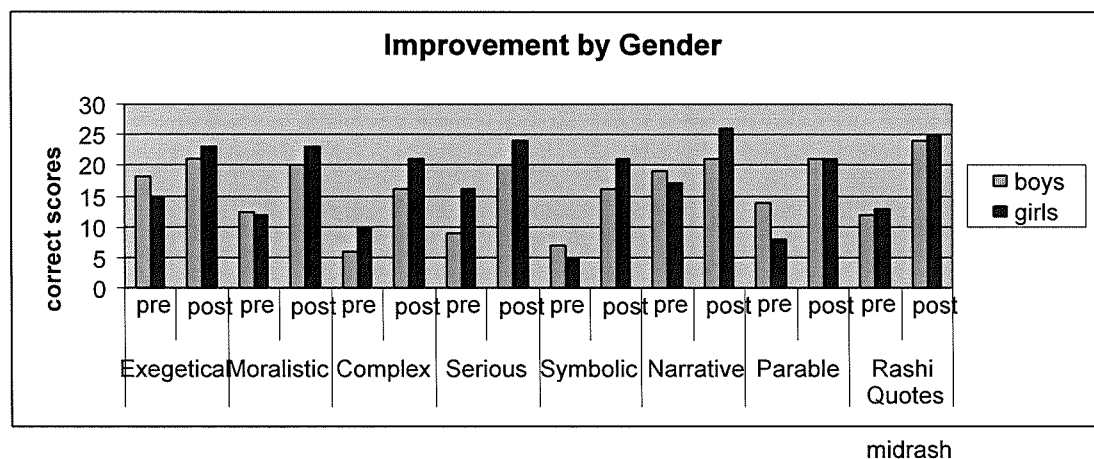
Figure 5.3   Midrash knowledge scores for all students according to gender

The gender chart, figure 5.3, shows that although the boys started with higher midrash knowledge in 5 of the 8 categories, they fell behind the girls who were ahead of the boys in 7 of the 8 categories at post-test. (In the eighth category, the midrashic parable, the boys and girls were even at post-test.)

In summary, the average rate of improvement – from pre-test to post-test – as tabulated by midrash category was 37%. The lowest scores at post-test were in the same categories as the lowest scores at pre-test, namely the symbolic and complex

categories. While improvement in scores in both of these categories was above average (49% and 42% respectively), they still remained at the bottom of the post-test scores for individual midrash category.

1.2 Questionnaire Results: The Israeli Intervention

Title	E		M		C		Se		Sy		N		P		R	
	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post
Total	4	**12**	5.5	**8**	0	**7**	3	**8**	1	**4**	5	**9**	4	**8**	2	**13**
Diff.		0.61		0.2		7		0.39		0.23		0.31		0.31		0.85

Table 5.1: Israeli Intervention pre-test / post-test table of class midrash knowledge scores

Title=name of midrash category

E=exegetical; M=moralistic; C=complex; Se=serious; Sy=symbolic; N=narrative; P=parable; R=Rashi quotes midrash.

Total refers to the total number of students who scored correctly in this category.

Diff=difference between pre-test Total and post-test Total

Number of participants: 13

	Pre-test score	Post-test score	change
Class Average	2	**5**	**.38**

Table 5.2: Average Student progress across all eight midrash categories

Although there was improvement in all midrash categories, it can be seen from this table that this class had the most difficulty with non-literal meanings in midrash. This was only understood by 4 students at post-test. Nevertheless, the average student score for midrash knowledge improved from 2 out of 8 to 5 out of 8. This is a significant improvement of 38% in theoretical knowledge about midrash.

1.3 Questionnaire Results: The British Intervention

Title	E		M		C		Se		Sy		N		P		R	

	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post
Total	16	**17**	13	**20.5**	10	**15**	15	**21**	4	**18**	16	**22**	11	**19**	11	**22**
Diff.		0.04		0.34		0.23		0.27		0.63		0.27		0.36		0.5

Table 5.3: British Intervention pre-test / post-test table of class midrash knowledge

Title=name of midrash category

E=exegetical; M=moralistic; C=complex; Se=serious; Sy=symbolic; N=narrative; P=parable; R=Rashi quotes midrash.

Total refers to the total number of students who scored correctly in this category.

Diff=difference between pre-test Total and post-test Total

Number of participants: 22

	Pre-test score	**Post-test score**	**Change**
Class Average	4.4	**7.0**	**.32**

Table 5.4: Average Student progress across all eight midrash categories

The quantitative indicators demonstrate that all of the participants' midrash knowledge increased. At pre-test the average number of midrash categories of which the students were aware was 4.4 out of the 8 categories taught. This average score improved by post-test to 7 which constitutes a 32% improvement in midrash knowledge. Although there was improvement in all categories of midrash knowledge, this table demonstrates that this class had particular difficulty with the complexity of midrash. It is significant, though, that 45% of the participants achieved full marks at post-test.

1.4   Questionnaire Results: The American Intervention

Title	E		M		C		Se		Sy		N		P		R	
	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post
Total	14	**15**	6	**14.5**	7	**15**	6	**15**	6	**15**	15	**16**	7	**15**	14	**14**
Diff.		0.06		0.53		0.5		0.56		0.56		0.06		0.5		0

Table 5.5: American Intervention pre-test / post-test table of class midrash knowledge

Title=name of midrash category

E=exegetical; M=moralistic; C=complex; Se=serious; Sy=symbolic; N=narrative; P=parable; R=Rashi quotes midrash.

Total refers to the total number of students who scored correctly in this category.

Diff=difference between pre-test Total and post-test Total

Number of participants: 16

	Pre-test score	**Post-test score**	**Change**
Class Average	4.7	**7.5**	**.35**

Table 5.6: Average Student progress across all eight midrash categories

At post-test these students achieved relatively high scores in all midrash categories, with the lowest per category score of 14 out of 16, or 88%, at post-test in the 'Rashi,' category. Additionally at post-test 3/4 of the participants attained full marks on the questionnaire. Similarly almost every student improved upon his/ her pre-test score. The one boy who remained at his pre-test score (G.M.) provided qualitative reasoning for his choice of tick-box when he knew he was choosing a different box from that which was expected of him. This will be discussed below. In summary the average score for midrash knowledge went from 4.7 at pre-test to 7.5 at post-test. This constitutes a 35% improvement.

Corroboration of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire data was corroborated by students' responses on the midrash worksheet, homework assignments, quizzes, student interviews and class comments. These were logged in each student's midrash knowledge profile. The reader will recall that the midrash knowledge profile was organised according to the same categories of midrash knowledge for which the student was being assessed. (More details on this can be found in chapter four, section 4.5. Additionally one student's profile can be found in Appendix H.) Thus if a student presented corroborative data for each midrash category

for which he scored a point on his post-test questionnaire, his corroboration rate would be 100%. But if, for example, a student scored 8/8 on the post-test questionnaire, but only demonstrated corroborative data in his/ her profile for four of these categories, his/ her corroboration rate would be 50%. In fact there were some cases where no corroboration of midrash knowledge- as demonstrated on the post-test questionnaire- was available for a particular student in a particular midrash category. Thus the overall rate of corroboration (on average for all 51 participants) across the study was 89%. It is possible that the uncorroborated questionnaire responses were lucky guesses on the part of some students. On the other hand, it is also possible that a student had understood the midrash characteristic that was the subject of a particular questionnaire item, but had not participated in class discussions or had been absent when quizzes were administered or when homework was assigned - therefore leaving his/ her midrash knowledge profile incomplete for data corroboration in this area of midrash. (A unique case where corroboration was incomplete was a boy with mild cerebral palsy who was exempt from most of the written homework assignments.) In general the internal corroborative mechanism of the questionnaire itself – together with the stringent scoring regime for the tick-boxes - limited the chances of lucky guessing. (See chapter four, section 4.3 for tick-box scoring.)

2.0 Other Data Collected

The tick-box data from the questionnaires provide the reader with a partial view of the knowledge gained by the participating students. The full picture includes the narrative of the children's learning from inside the intervention. This emerges from the supplementary data. Thus in addition to corroborating the quantitative data, the supplementary data enrich and complement the data provided by the tick-box responses. For instance one factor that led to some of the low questionnaire scores related to students' struggles to understand the abstract language of some of the questionnaire items. This was most pronounced in the first intervention which included some children with learning difficulties.

This is exemplified by D.S. whose struggle with some of the language became apparent at post-test. Several of the items that he had ticked incorrectly, in the tick-

boxes, he answered correctly, verbally, during his interview. Here are some examples of learning that was not conveyed by the tick-boxes:

Midrash category	Student Quote
exegetical	We learn to differentiate between the Torah and its interpretation .. [that] answers the questions that we have about the Torah.
Non-literal language	They lose the whole thing. [This was his comment about those who interpret non-literal language, literally.]
Complexity	Midrash is deep. It requires a lot of thought.

Table 5.7   Sample of supplementary midrash data

The sources of qualitative data, above, contradict his low score (1) on the post-test questionnaire. A similar problem was encountered with his classmate, E.H. At post-test he ticked almost one third of the questionnaire statements as, 'I don't know.' When pressed for clarification at the post-test interview, he demonstrated that 3 categories which he had left as 'I don't know' were, in fact, areas of midrash that he had understood.

Similarly, the qualitative data from the American intervention enriched the data picture overall. For example, G.M. made the following comment to me before I began the mini-course: "No offence, but I don't like midrash." In fact at post-test G.M.'s score of midrash knowledge was not improved. It was through an analysis of his post-test questionnaire and his post-test interview data that I managed to piece together an explanation for his lack of improvement.

Accordingly in his post-test questionnaire he defined midrash as, "helping us understand *Chumash* better." This response would have scored a point for him in the exegetical category had he responded in kind in the tick-boxes. But in the item, *Midrash helps us to understand Torah*, he ticked, *I don't know*. Therefore to fill out the picture I reviewed his post-test interview. When he was asked at that time, "Why do

you think we learn midrash?" he answered, "To help understand better. It's the rabbis' excuse to teach us." *Excuse*, here, seems to imply that while he did not want to accept that midrash is exegetical, he understood that that is what the mini-course had been teaching. This conclusion is supported by another interview response of his. When asked, "What is the hardest part about learning midrash?" he answered, "Understanding it and agreeing with it." In this way the qualitative data fleshes out the thinking that took place during the intervention.

2.1   Complementary Data on the Questionnaire

The short-answer questions, in addition to their primary function as internal corroboration for the tick-box responses, elicited rich data relating to the students' understanding of midrash. These understandings demonstrated understanding beyond rote learning, or lucky tick-box guessing.

For example in response to,

If you were to choose the kind of midrash to learn, which type would you choose?

one of the Israeli boys suggested, "a hard one."

Similarly, in response to, *Were some of the topics in the series too difficult? Yes/no,* one of the British girls suggested, "They were good challenges." Both of these examples showed an interest in understanding the midrashic process. They also showed that most of the students did not shy away from engaging with midrashic concepts. For example in response to, ***Can you think of an interesting midrash to tell me about?*** the following was offered by her classmate, "The one which compares Avraham to a flag on a ship because he has faith and is our leader and we look up to him like a flag." This response includes her analysis of the metaphor used by the midrash which was not easy for the students to grasp. Her formulation of the meaning of the metaphor reflects an understanding that is beyond rote learning or lucky guessing. Indeed here, at post-test, she cites this example as one that was interesting to her. A third girl offered a different example in answer to the same question. She replied, "When Cain kills Abel. He talks to *Hashem* and *Hashem* asked did you kill him he says no, but his hands were dirty." This student had internalised the parable in the midrash to the extent that she mentioned that Cain's hands were dirty, which is a suggestion made by the midrash but not by Scripture. This was her way of saying that Cain's guilt was obvious, which was

the message of the midrash. This is a far richer response than a simple tick in a box which suggests agreement to the statement, "there are parables in midrash."

In some cases the repetitive nature of these questions elicited nuanced understandings of midrash that might not have been seen otherwise. This phenomenon was most striking in the British intervention.

For example one of the girls gave nuanced responses to similar questions in the following way:

Q: Does the midrash help us in any way?
A: It helps us understand the Torah.

Q: Why would you like to learn midrash in your school?
A: Because it explains difficult verses in the Torah.

With her second response she elaborated on her first response, namely, on the way that midrash helps one understand Torah. Similarly, the repetitive format cajoled answers out of a weak student who left most of section iv blank, ignoring questions like the one that asked for a definition of midrash. But he relented and filled in one short answer in section v. Thus to the question, *Does midrash help us in any way?* He answered, "It helps us understand the Torah." This latter response demonstrated that he had understood the relationship between Torah and midrash that had been alluded to in an earlier question; one that he had neglected to answer.

2.2   Supplementary Data Sources: The Midrash Worksheet, Homework, Class Comments and Student Interviews

For each participating class qualitative data was entered into each student's midrash knowledge profile. This was a log of the individual student's midrash knowledge as it was reflected in her worksheet, homework, quizzes, class comments, interviews and questionnaires. These logs were organised according to midrash knowledge categories. Accordingly they provided a snapshot, as it were, of the student's midrash

understandings as formulated by the student herself. An example of such a log can be found in Appendix H. The learning trends that emerged from these profiles were positive overall. Although some students learned more than others, there was evidence of improvement in midrash knowledge for each participant. This should not be a big surprise when one considers that these children had not previously been exposed to a systematic way for understanding midrash. In terms of midrash categories, most logs had the most data in the area of the narratives. This could be because most children were aware, before the intervention, that midrash contains narratives. Indeed, this was the only aspect of midrash that was known by almost all students at pre-test. Conversely the categories of seriousness and of complexity were the most difficult for the students to comprehend, and therefore to articulate, overall. The category most quickly comprehended was that of the midrashic parable.

2.2.1 The Midrash Worksheet

The midrash worksheet was done in class after the discussions on the first midrash had been drawn to a close. (For a description of the midrash text see chapter 2, section 4.2.2). It was designed to walk the student through the process of analysing a midrash text. The average score in each class was over 80%. This is remarkable for students who had not been previously exposed to the midrashic process. This discussion will follow the key questions of the midrash worksheet while presenting some of the American children's responses to each question.

All of the participants understood that the use of the word, *behold*, is troubling to the rabbis.

(1) What is strange about Avram's statement, *Behold I know that you are a pretty woman?*

T.B.: Avram says _behold_ you are pretty not, "you are pretty." Did he just notice she was pretty? She is his wife!

Similarly in answer to a later question on the worksheet one of the girls pointed out the lexical peculiarity that is an invitation to commentary,

It says a strange word that doesn't really make sense, so it will need explaining. (H.W.).

Similarly, the interpretive process was outlined by her classmate,

[']Behold my wife is pretty ['']. He just discovered that she is pretty therefore he never looked at her. (T.B.)

All but one of the American students managed to identify the two distinct interpretations presented by Rashi (straightforward and midrashic). This was a higher comprehension rate than was demonstrated in other classes.

Sh.B.: He says he never [k]new he[r] beauty would be a problem.

This response described the straightforward interpretation. The following response articulates the midrashic interpretation.

Y.B.: That Abraham and Sarah were so modest that they didn't look at each other.

(7) How does the verse allow itself to be explained by this midrash?

The students needed some scaffolding in order to understand what was being asked here. I elaborated upon this question, orally, by asking the students to reflect on the way that the language of the verse lent itself to the midrashic interpretation.

A.K.: *That you are a beautiful woman.* Beauty comes with modesty.

As A.K. mentioned in class, the verse discusses the fact that Saray is pretty. Thus it has introduced a topic that is related to modesty. Indeed, this student elaborated on this

idea earlier in her worksheet regarding the lack of 'fit' between this interpretation and the plain meaning of the story.

A.K.: (6) No, it does not [fit]. But the rabbis chose this opp[o]rtunity to teach about modesty.

This issue was probed a little further,

(9) Why does the midrash choose to link this message to our story?

T.B.: Avram and Saray are our role models and we want to be like them – modest.

T.F.: To show that *midrashim* don't just float anywhere, and that this is a story of beauty.

T.F.'s comment reflects the linkage between midrash and Scripture. He applies this to the text with his explanation that modesty can be related to a story of beauty, and with his assertion that midrashim are grounded in Scripture. They, "don't just float."

2.2.2 Quizzes and Homework

In addition to all the correct responses, throughout the study, there were many errors in the quizzes and homework assignments. The different errors from each class enabled me to understand the areas of a particular midrash text, and of the midrashic process, that needed further explanation in subsequent lessons for a particular mini-course. Accordingly quiz (and homework) questions were repeated in subsequent quizzes until most of the class answered correctly. Responses were always reviewed, orally, in the following lesson, so that students could engage with and internalise the material if they had not understood it when undertaking the homework or the quiz. Thus homework and quiz responses were used as feedback for planning the pace of teaching in each mini-course as well as to iteratively reinforce new midrash knowledge.

Children commonly had trouble giving up the idea that midrash is *not* for little children. This was true for higher achievers as well as for lower achievers. Thus this concept was revisited in the quizzes. One quiz question asked, "Is midrash meant for little children?" One Israeli boy remarked on the first quiz, "Midrash is for serious people but they can also be little children. " But on the follow-up quiz, in answering the same question, he amended his response to, "It is for serious people." The latter response showed growth in understanding.

Moreover quiz responses enriched the data as sometimes the students added some analysis to their responses. For example this Israeli girl, in response to the same quiz question, explains the seriousness of midrash,

Midrash is for adults, because it makes the [bible] story more difficult [to understand] and it goes deeper into the story.

Indeed some of the qualitative data was surprising. A case in point is an Israeli girl who had done poorly on quizzes and had not participated in class but produced the following incisive homework on the second midrash text:

The Midrash is made up of 2 stories wherein the characters are different, but the idea is the same, the willingness to sacrifice .. The use of the story helps us to understand the depth of Avraham's and Isaac's sacrifice.

Similarly the class-wide quiz contest that took place during the final lesson of each intervention was an enjoyable and an interactive way of tying midrash knowledge together. Moreover it provided qualitative data for the participants' individual data logs. (A transcript of the American quiz contest can be found in Appendix G.) The latter point was also true for children's comments that were made during midrash classes. These were logged from the lesson transcripts and were augmented according to the notes in my teaching journal. Excerpts from class transcripts are used in the narrative of the American school later in this chapter (section 3.0).

2.2.3 Interview Data

Student interviews enabled the students to present their midrash knowledge in their own words – thereby enriching the data for the intervention. This was especially significant in the first intervention where there were students who had difficulties with written work. Additionally the interviews provided an opportunity for deeper discussions of midrash concepts. One example is the interview question that asks the student whether the midrash makes the Bible story look different. This question might have been too abstract for the written questionnaire, but could be discussed with some elaboration for each interview subject. Thus the interviews had the potential for eliciting deeper understandings.

The interviews also produced surprising data at times. For example one student who had been characterised as an average achiever by his Bible teacher surprised me when he suggested that the modesty of the patriarchs was being taught in the midrash as a model for the reader, to emulate to the point of, 'above and beyond' the call of duty. This understanding went beyond the class explanation that the rabbis exaggeratedly portrayed the patriarchs as models of modest behaviour. Another student described the midrashic vantage point as one that looks deeply into the Bible story. These comments were meaningful as they came from students who had been previously trained to read for plain-meaning only. Similarly one of the girls suggested to me that the midrash, 'changes your thoughts about what the Torah is saying, and it makes you think more.' Additionally one of the boys was able to describe the complexity that underlay the simple midrashic narratives associated with the story of the Sacrifice of Isaac,

The *akeidah* really gets real. Like, there's a problem with the *akeidah* .. and you just look at a conversation like its nothing. But then you realise that you need to have devotion to really sacrifice yourself or your son.

Similarly the interview enabled one girl, (L.S.) to share with me how she had grappled with the symbolism in midrash. She remarked that she had felt that the midrash with the flag did not, at first, make sense. But she said that she understood, later, that it was about Abraham's greatness in his faith in God.

The students' comments about midrash thus reflected how they had progressed beyond rote learning to assimilate their new understandings of midrash.

3.0 The Story of a School

The American school is the subject of the school narrative. The head of Jewish studies framed the midrash mini-course as an enrichment class[7]. He targeted students with an interest in Bible class for participation in the intervention. Parents were requested to sign permission slips. Participation was voluntary and was open to students of mixed Jewish studies achievement levels.

The classroom context for this intervention presented some challenges. Because the class was made up of students from various year six classes, these students had to be brought together from their normal class activities at the start of each midrash lesson. On some days I was able to gather them from their classes and to bring them to the midrash learning area; on others they made their way on their own. The result was that some settling down time was needed at the beginning of each class; and that quizzes were not undertaken by children who arrived too late to a midrash class. These problems were somewhat ameliorated by the fact that the students in this class were eager to learn and so they put extra effort into understanding the classes. An additional problem related to the 'extra-curricular' nature of the lesson which persuaded some of the children that the lessons were not compulsory. This, coupled with the fact that I was not a regular member of the teaching staff, proved problematic: Two girls dropped

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[7] One of the veteran Bible teachers described the enrichment classes in a letter dated 19th July, 2005:

"The enrichment classes are usually classes that meet once or twice a week; only some students from the [regular] class are taken out to go to it; the material is presented in a different format.. It is another way to .. expose the children to something a bit different [educationally..]"

out of the intervention early on[8], and one boy almost dropped out toward the end because he had been punished. Aside from these difficulties the intervention proceeded as planned. The story of the intervention will be recounted through the midrash teaching units.

3.1   Introducing the Students to Midrash

The two purposes of midrash that are the focus of the mini-course are its exegetical and ethical functions. (The ethical function of midrash will be explained with the first midrash teaching unit below.) At the beginning of the mini-course the exegetical function of midrash was explained to the students in terms of its role as interpretation. Foremost the children learned that an interpretation is connected to that which it interprets. While this may seem obvious to an adult, a child is still being introduced to the concept of interpretation. Moreover, since some children had been exposed to midrash without learning about its nature, they may not have been aware of the fact that midrash is connected to Scripture. Thus during the first lesson, I used a hook and a scarf as a teaching aid to demonstrate the connection between midrash and Scripture. The children were asked to explain the nature of these objects in relation to the lesson's topic. The pedagogical motivation for challenging the students in this way was twofold: On the simplest level, its purpose was to keep the students actively engaged in the lesson. This is because the students were invited to play a kind of mind-game; and because they were evaluating objects (the hook and the scarf) at the same time as they were reviewing new knowledge about midrash. The other part of the motivation was to encourage the students to think about the activity of interpretation whilst reviewing their knowledge of midrash. Thus the objects were akin to signposts that reminded the students of the function of midrash. It was hoped that this kind of reflective activity would help the students to internalise an understanding of the interpretive function of midrash. It was also hoped that this would help the students to understand that a midrashic message that is linked through commentary to the Bible

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[8] They were not numbered among the participants for data collection.

story is likely to endure in Jewish tradition. This aspect is demonstrated by the scarf which gets mislaid when there is no hook upon which it can be hung.

In the introductory lesson the children also learned that in addition to the interpretation of Scripture, midrash teaches religious lessons such as appropriate behaviour. It seemed, from the pre-test scores and from the first quiz, that these students were already familiar with the function of midrash as commentary, but were not familiar with the moral or religious aspect of midrash.

Indeed this class displayed a high level of interest in Bible as well as a high level of base-line knowledge of midrash as exegesis.[9] These factors enabled me to place more emphasis on the lexical connections between Scripture and midrash in this intervention than had been possible in the previous interventions. Some of these were illustrated on their worksheets (section 2.2), others will be pointed out below.

3.2   Unit I: Religious Morals in Midrash

The first midrash unit, in addition to its focus on the midrashic process, focuses on the religious message that the rabbis put forward about the modesty of Avram and Saray (who the Bible names, later, Abraham and Sarah). The midrash text that is the basis of this unit is described in chapter two, section 4.2.2.

The foundations of midrashic understanding were built in this unit through understanding the provocation for the midrash and through understanding the way in which midrashic commentary is a departure from the plain meaning of Scripture. Accordingly the problem-solving approach to midrash that was used in the mini-course focused the reader on the peculiarity in the text that is the motivation for midrashic commentary. The midrash comments on the verse,

.. he said to Saray his wife **Behold** now, [please], I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon. .. (Genesis 12: 11)

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[9]At pre-test fourteen of the sixteen participants were aware that midrash commentary is exegetical.

The peculiarity here is the use of *behold* which seems to imply discovery. The students first discussed the plain meaning of this verse before moving on to the midrash text. The students learned that *peshat*, straightforward interpretation, makes sense to the reader within the context of the Bible story being read. One of the students suggested in class, from my description of *peshat*, that it is, "apparent from the text". This idea was further developed by looking at other familiar Biblical references with the same Scriptural key words as those chosen for interpretation by the midrash in our unit. In this case, the lexical foundation is the word, *behold*. The leitmotif, here, is one of discovery. The children enjoyed looking at other cases where behold is used in Genesis. One example used was when Jacob wakes up the morning after his wedding and *beholds* the woman whom he has married is the sister of the woman to whom he was betrothed. (Genesis 29: 25) They suggested to me that the use of *behold* reminded them of the surprise element in a magician's act. The class was then able to understand the peculiarity in the language of the verse under study. Indeed one of the girls formulated it this way, later,

Doesn't Avram know already that his own wife is pretty? (A.K., homework)

Once the lexical peculiarity had been identified, Rashi's commentary was read together with the students. It presents both types of interpretation, *peshat* and *derash*. The divergence of the interpretations is over what is assumed to have been discovered. Rashi's straightforward interpretation suggests that Avram discovers that his wife's beauty will be problematic. The midrash that Rashi cites diverges from the plain sense of the story to talk about modesty. Its interpretation maintains that Avram discovers that his wife is beautiful- a fact not previously known to him due to their modesty. Thus the students learn how a lesson in modesty is pegged to an incident in the life of the biblical forefathers.

This was followed by a discussion on the exaggerated stance of modesty taken by the rabbis. This was the first encounter with non-literal meanings in midrash for the students. The students were asked to think about why the rabbis chose to use exaggeration in their commentary.

One student suggested,

When we see this exaggeration, we're like, "This is so weird. Is this what we should look [up] to?" (E.L., lesson transcript).

This student's response is the rather typical one, for children as well as for adults, that wonders at the implausibility of what should be serious rabbinic interpretation. The child maintained his focus, however, on the fact that it is Scriptural interpretation when he asked if the rabbis were serious about valuing extreme modesty, *weirdness* aside. Meanwhile his classmate worked toward finding meaning in the *weird* exaggeration,

If it starts at such a high level, then people have something to look up to. At such a high level people would say, "Wow they were so modest."
(G.W.)

Indeed the students' understanding that the language of the midrash was not to be taken literally was echoed in their quiz responses and in class comments:

A.K.: The midrash says that Avram and Saray did not look at each other at all. That midrash was not literal, but it was teaching us modesty.. they [the Bible] were talking about how you dress and how they're [Saray is] pretty..

The response of A.K. includes an explanation for the exaggerated stance in the midrash. She suggests, as had been mentioned in class, that a message of modesty was carried in the exaggerated language.

Her responses are also a reflection of the purpose of this discussion: to show the students the way in which midrashic interpretation fits in its own way to the Bible story to which it attaches itself. Although the midrash does not explain the plain meaning, it situates itself within the themes of the story.

Separating *derash* from *peshat*: the challenge

Thus far the discussion has covered what the children managed to understand with relative ease. Now the discussion will address one of the difficulties encountered in the mini-course. Actually this difficulty was encountered in every intervention. Although I presented midrash as an alternate interpretation to the *peshat*, there were students who tried to combine the two types of interpretation. This did not work. In this intervention H.W. gave voice to this dilemma in a homework assignment:

Question: Is it logical to assume that until now Avram did not know that his wife was beautiful?
Answer: (Well it can be logical because they were so modest that they didn't look at each other.) But it also wouldn't be logical, because they had to look at each other at least once. (homework)

The use of brackets in the student quotation, above, may be indicative of this girl's wish to respect the rabbis' view that the patriarchs were very modest, while she indicates, outside the parentheses, that the exaggerated position is implausible. But despite their initial difficulties with understanding the difference between plain interpretation and the midrashic process, almost all of the children fully comprehended the message of the midrash by the completion of the unit.

3.3   Unit II: Midrashic narrative

The teaching of this unit will be described in detail. This is because the transcripts from this unit illustrate important aspects of the midrash learning experience and of the midrash teaching strategy. The latter include the pedagogy of initiation into analytical thinking; the exploration of complexities in the text; and the theological questions that the midrash raises in the mind of its reader.

The midrash text for this unit is made up of two narratives that try to explain the impetus for the *akeidah*. One focuses on a dialogue between God and Satan, where

Satan prods God; the other one focuses on a dialogue between Ishmael and Isaac,
where Ishmael prods Isaac. This midrash text is described in chapter two, section 4.2.2.

The discussion began with an exploration of the motivation for the midrash. The
children were asked, "What were the rabbis asking about the Scriptural text?" In the
other classes, students viewed the rabbis' question in a straightforward way, suggesting
that the rabbis were asking, "What things happened before the *akeidah*?' The American
students worked collaboratively in an effort to understand the question more deeply,

A.P.: "What are the things that happened." I think it's explaining what
happened.

..

T.F.: Why did God decide to test Abraham? What made Him decide to test
Abraham?

..

A.P.: What was the cause for that. Like, what things?

..

T.B.: It said, like, *After these things*, like, God said to [Abraham], "Sacrifice
your son."

T.F. uncovered the interpretive significance of the rabbi's question. Unlike the previous
classes, the American class was skilled in collaborative thinking. Thus T.F.'s
classmates used his comment to sharpen their understanding of the midrash. Their
collaborative thinking enabled me, at times, to teach at a quicker pace as they needed
less of my scaffolding of meaning – since they were helping each other to find the
meaning of the midrash.

In the case of this midrash, the lesson moved relatively quickly from the interpretive
question to the underlying theological issues.

Teacher: This is a complicated issue. Now what's difficult about [this story ?]
Problematic?

D.R.: Losing your son.

Teacher: Stronger than that. Stronger.

S.B.: Killing your son.

Teacher: Excellent. We're now getting into the deepest aspect of the story. The problem of?

G.W.: We don't murder. The whole thing of God is, like, there were people who were sacrificing their babies .. was that He was a good God ..

Teacher: Molech worship.[child sacrifice] (Class discussions)

This excerpt illustrates the levels of thinking that I encountered throughout the study. Most students viewed the Bible story as D.R. did, above. They had not been guided to think about underlying religious and ethical problems since Bible teachers for young students generally talk about the patriarch's personal challenges when discussing a Bible story. But when they are guided to do so, young students can also consider the ethical and religious inconsistencies in the Bible story – as seen here. Moreover, the children raised these issues on their own: The Bible prohibits murder and child sacrifice.

The class was given a quiz at the beginning of the following lesson to assess whether they had understood the complexities of the Bible story. A review of the quizzes determined that three quarters of the respondents had understood the difficult issues surrounding the story. The lesson commenced with a review of these issues, which is in line with the iterative nature of this midrash teaching strategy. During that discussion it emerged that some of the students were troubled by the suggestion that there could be a religious problem inherent in a Bible story.

B.C.: And, if God tells you to do something, why can't you do it?

Teacher: ok. So B is asking ..

G.W.: But it goes against His own nature.

Here G.W. reiterates the point that he had made in the previous discussion. Namely that God is a good God. Whereas B.C., for his part, suggested that there are occasions

when Biblical law is violated for specific religious needs. This was followed by a class discussion on the permissibility of such things. This class was the only one that challenged my suggestion that an inconsistency in a Bible story is problematic. It was interesting, and remarkable, to see that they recalled (Jewish) legal precedents for their assertion that there are times when Biblical laws may be violated. For example, T.B. brought up the issue of violating the Sabbath in order to save human life. The level of the discussion was surprisingly advanced and thoughtful for students of this tender age. While I guided this discussion in the direction of their assertions, I still needed to answer the inconsistencies that were the basis of the midrash. So I raised the issue again and received the following response:

T.B.: Yeah it makes sense that God would let us [Abraham] do that. Because it's saying God told us to do it and its just like for his [Abraham's] sake.

Teacher: How is it for his sake?

T.B.: God is testing him, to see if he will actually do it, he tested him; Like he gave him a lot of tests, for his sake to know, ..

T.F.: For Abraham's sake, because it's going to be his nation.

...

G.W.: To prove that he could be the leader of all of the children of Israel.

Thus in a collaborative way the students arrived at the view that the trial of the *akeidah* would prove Abraham's worthiness to lead the Jewish people. T.B.'s mixing up of *us* with *Abraham* is illustrative of the way in which Bible students put themselves in the place of the patriarchs. This was done by this class more than in others. These students were always in tune to the possible message of the Bible story for the reader.

The discussion, however, proved too difficult for at least one student. She interrupted the class to ask, "What's going on?" This call for help led to a reiteration of the discussion, this time led by one of the students. This latter student then described how the *akeidah* changed Abraham's status and even helped God,

A.K: It [The story of the *akeidah*] also helps God because when other people read the Torah that are not Jewish, um, if God made him do this they would probably think Abraham was a chosen person, he was leading the Jewish people.

Similarly, Isaac's role in the story was discussed. B.W.'s reading of Isaac's role in the dialogue was that he was willing to "kill himself" for God. This suggestion is analysed in further depth in the discussion chapter.

In one student's reflection on Satan's role in the midrashic narrative, he concluded that the Satan character was necessary, "Because why else would *Hashem* ask Abraham to kill" (T.F., quiz,).

As the children assimilated the issues raised by this midrash, they began, in a lively discussion, to voice their doubts about learning midrash. They suggested that midrash is confusing and that it brings up questions; and that the answer to a question seems to be more questions![10] I took this as a sign that the students were beginning to grasp the complex nature of midrash. I explained to the students that this is serious, 'grown-up' material; and that is why it can seem so confusing. Below is one student's homework reflecting her understanding of midrashic complexity.

One Student Describes the Complexity of Midrash

Q: What makes this midrash complex?
A: .. it has many layers. There is the basic midrash. What the midrash shows, why it shows that and it continues. There is a lot to think about.
Q: What makes the midrash add a little story to the beginning of the *akeidah*?

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[10] Similarly, G.M., in his post-test interview, declared that the hardest part of midrash is, "agreeing with it."

A: The story helps us understand what could have possibly happened or persuaded God to do this. It's not really an explanation, it just help us come to terms with our problem.

Q: Why does the midrash use the strategy of telling a story, or part of a story, here?

A: .. because it shows how much devotion Abraham and Isaac have for God. It does not answer our question fully though, but it explains (says) a lot about Abraham and Isaac.

(A.P., homework)

3.4 Unit III: Symbolism in Midrash

In like manner to the second unit of the mini-course this unit is based on the sacrifice of Isaac story. Additionally this unit builds on the non-literal understandings that were developed in the first unit. The midrash text upon which this unit is based is described in chapter two, section 4.2.2.

I had concluded from reading the pre-test questionnaires that the students had been taught that one should not take midrash literally. However, while they could tick the appropriate box to signal that midrash should *not* always be taken literally, they did not know what this meant. This was evident in several students' pre-test tick box choices which showed that they did not know whether there was symbolic or exaggerated language in midrash.[11] This third unit exposed the students to the use of symbolic language in midrash. In this case the rabbis compare Abraham's rise to greatness to the flag on the mast of a ship.

Accordingly once the midrash text was read together with the class the class explored possible meanings for the symbolism used, here, by the rabbis,

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[11] When I suggested that this was the case to the students, none of them disagreed with me.

Teacher: What might, *like a flag on the mast of a ship* symbolise here?

G.M.: That Abraham could be a higher authority...

B.W.: The flag symbolises something very important. So does Abraham.

..

A.P.: We raise the flag.

Teacher: So, we have .. being raised .. put at higher heights.

B.W.: Let's talk about greatness!

..

Teacher: With the symbolic language .. being made great, what are we learning about the *akeidah*?

E.L.: 'Cos, like, they want to even more show you. It shows how, like, Abraham is getting greater by doing the *akeidah*. We always have to do whatever God asks him to do, even though it's such a terrible thing, he's doing it (class comments).

The collaborative discussion, with very little teacher input, created a chain of thoughts that developed into midrashic understanding. This was remarkable for a class with very little training in the interpretation of symbolic language. Here, one can see the thoughts moving from notions of height and stature to ideas of religious stature. Moreover the last comment shows how one student works out the way in which the symbolism of the flag on the mast drives home the rabbis' message of Abraham's elevation in religious stature. Additionally, it provides us with a glimpse into the thoughts of the student as he searches for that extra layer of interpretation: the rabbinic message for the reader.

Later A.P. framed the message of the symbolic language in terms of achievement, which was a context that was not mentioned in class discussion, but was a discourse that she built based on previous discussions about the impetus for the *akeidah*,

.. 'cos we can think about what Abraham has achieved or what *Hashem* can help Abraham achieve and how it relates to a flag, and .. that Abraham can be high .. like, characteristics.

(Post-test interview)

I was very impressed with the way that she viewed the two midrash texts together in order to build her own understanding of the interpretive mindset of the rabbis. B.W.'s comment about greatness, above, was more sophisticated than her individual quiz response where she suggested that, "Avraham is high up – so is a flag." It's possible that the collaborative discussion enabled her to sharpen her thoughts about the metaphor in the midrash so that being high up became, "Let's talk about greatness." Incidentally it is evident from the video recording of the lesson that she made that comment very enthusiastically. She seemed pleased with her understanding and eager to develop it further with her classmates.

Similarly one boy -whose only gap in midrash knowledge at pre-test was his lack of knowledge regarding non-literal meanings in midrash- made the following comment about this midrash at post-test:

The only thing I learnt [that was new to me] was .. the one with the flag on the mast of the ship, so like, that was, like, really fun.

The fact that he characterised this learning as fun is significant when another post-test comment of his is taken into account. When describing the hardest part about midrash he said,

The explaining part. When you have to understand, like, I mean, it's really hard to understand things correctly and stuff. (S.B.)

Please see Appendix E for further illustrations of children's analyses of symbolism in midrash. (The transcript used there is from the British intervention.)

3.5   Unit IV: Parables in Midrash

The final unit relates to the rabbinic parable. In this case the parable is built around an instance of non-literal language that is found in Scripture. The midrash, described in chapter two section 4.1, discusses Scripture's depiction of Cain's guilt for the murder of Abel. Its focus is the phrase, *Your brother's blood calls out to Me from the ground.* And it formulates its interpretation through the use of a parable. In the parable, a man

is caught, with strawberry juice dripping from his hands, in someone else's strawberry patch.

As was the case in all of the previous interventions (including the IFS) the students grasped this midrash easily, demonstrating their previous exposure to parables as well as their understanding of the rabbinic message. The latter point was evident in many of the students' comments such as, "Cain has blood on his hands;" "His hands are dirty;" and " He [God] wants to see if he'll [Cain] say, 'Ooh, I killed my brother. I'm so sorry.' [The video recording showed that this last comment was made in a contrite voice and with a look of supplication]."

The children's analysis of the parable extended into their homework assignments. A.P.'s perception of the parable as exegesis can be found in Appendix F.

Concluding the teaching intervention

Each intervention was concluded with a class-wide quiz contest. The questions for this contest came from the intervention's quiz and homework assignments. I utilised the discussion of the answers as a pedagogical opportunity to re-thread the midrash units together. This was the final stage of the iterative teaching process. This lesson went particularly well in the American intervention as students were equally interested in adding to each other's responses as they were in finding out which team would answer more midrash questions correctly. Their enthusiasm made my teaching experience enjoyable and created a receptive environment for administering the post-test questionnaires after the lesson. The transcript of the American quiz contest can be found in Appendix G.

The quantitative data from the questionnaires reflect improvement in midrash knowledge throughout the study. The scope of improvement was between 32-38% for all classes. Overall the rate of improvement was greater for girls than for boys. The supplementary data reflect midrash understandings as they were formulated by the students. They thus provide a view for the reader of the way that the students engaged with the texts and developed their midrash knowledge. Additionally they provide qualitative data for students who under-performed in their tick-box responses. The

story of a mini-course, for its part, has highlighted some of the challenges and successes of the midrash students as they sought meanings in these ancient texts. It has expanded the reader's view – beyond a numerical accounting of children's midrash knowledge- to a deeper, qualitative focus on what goes on in the mind of the young student when he/ she encounters a midrash text.

Chapter 6: Discussion

This chapter will discuss the data that were presented in the findings chapter. It will consider the implications of these findings as they relate to the literature surveyed earlier and will seek answers - in the data - to the research questions which were the focus of the study. This, in turn, will enable a consideration of the implications of this study for the teaching of midrash in the primary school.

1.0   General Comments

It is my view that the iterative nature of the teaching strategy was one of the main factors, along with the systematic approach to reading midrash, that contributed to the overall improvement of midrash knowledge. Bruner's (1966a) spiral curriculum emphasises basic themes and meanings that are taught in an iterative process whereby each teaching iteration deepens the students' understanding. So too, in this study, the iterative readings and explanations of each midrash text, and the iterative quizzes, gave the students several opportunities to learn each text. To borrow terminology from Thompson (1995) one can say that these iterations provided frameworks for understanding (see p. 7). Moreover, they enabled lower achievers to do well in the mini-course. This was illustrated in the British intervention by M.B. When one of her classmates explained the lexical connection for the second midrash, M.B. suddenly blurted out, "Oh, *dibburim!*" She was gleefully acknowledging the linguistic basis for the midrashic commentary. She had missed this point during an earlier iteration of the midrash. This reminded me of Bruner's assertion (1966c) that both intellectual mastery and the deepening of earlier understanding are rewarding for the learner (pp. 30, 35). Thus the lexical connection just mentioned was reviewed collaboratively by the class during the quiz contest. One of the British boys commented that he enjoyed the quiz contest because, "I understood it much easilier. ... I understood the questions better – all over again." His comment highlights the pedagogical function of the quiz contest. The daily quizzes were similarly helpful. Indeed one Israeli student remarked, casually, to an 'uninitiated' classmate, "Deena always gives a quiz at the beginning of the lesson." Thus the students became accustomed to these quizzes. Their quiz participation enabled them to become actively involved in the learning process as they knew that

they would be quizzed in the following lesson about what they were learning in the current lesson (see Steadman, 1996, in Deroma,Young, et al, 2003).

Broadly speaking, both the quantitative and qualitative data demonstrate improvement in midrash understanding, overall. Improvement in all classes was seen for the girls as well as for the boys. Overall I could not discern a difference in response according to gender from a qualitative point of view; namely, from class comments or written work. But the quantitative data show that overall the girls improved in midrash knowledge more than the boys did.

There were some peculiarities however in the quantitative data. For example, pre-test questionnaire scores were remarkably low in the first intervention, with 5 out of 13 students receiving nil scores (on the tick boxes)[12]. I used the internal corroboration of the questionnaire to ensure that these children were not given inaccurate pre-test scores. The short answer responses for these participants gave evidence to these students' complete lack of background in the area of midrash. This was seen in responses such as, "I don't know what midrash is." In fact some of these students were non-religious students who had had no prior exposure to midrash. Others were students with very little exposure to midrash. Accordingly it is understandable that they scored so poorly on their pre-test questionnaires.

Despite this four out of five of these students attained 70% or above on their first assignment which was the midrash worksheet. This seems to be a testament to the fact that the midrash teaching strategy assumes no prior knowledge of midrash. Additionally, these students benefited from their fluency in modern Hebrew which helped them to understand the ancient Hebrew of the midrashic and Biblical texts.

A further peculiarity that was unique to the first intervention was mentioned earlier; namely that two of the students seemed to know less about midrash at post-test than they demonstrated at pre-test - when measured by questionnaire scores. It is therefore important to point out that the individual biographies of midrash knowledge for each

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[12] I.B. is excluded from this pre-test discussion as he left his questionnaire blank.

of these students demonstrate *growth* of midrash knowledge for both of them. Thus their qualitative data contradict their quantitative data. Their story highlights the difficulty of measuring abstract knowledge for young children, especially in tick-box format – and of the necessity for complementary qualitative data

In fact in the main the students' comments at post-test, recorded from their responses in interviews and from the open-ended questions on the questionnaire, reflected their appreciation of the nature of midrash. For example, there were several students, from different classes, who suggested that they learned, "what midrash is." This comment supports Sprinthall's (1990) view of Bruner's valuation of the understanding of subject matter over a simple accumulation of facts. This student response is especially significant since most of the participants, study-wide, had been exposed to some aspects of midrash before the interventions. Thus one might have thought that they would already have known *what midrash is* at pre-test. Similarly those who suggested that they had learned, "new ways to understand midrash," were reflecting on the nature of the subject matter. In so doing they were striving to make meaning and were thinking about the thinking process involved in its comprehension (see Watkins, 2001). It is possible that this strategy for teaching midrash, therefore, managed to align itself to Dewey's (1916; 1944) suggestion that education should further students' intellectual development through its promotion of good thinking habits.

Similarly other student comments at post-test reflect their thinking analytically about the midrash texts in order to understand the midrashic process. This mirrors Grant's (1988) suggestion that children do think critically or analytically. Thus the Israeli student who viewed the midrashic suggestion of exaggerated modesty (chapter five section 2.2.3) as a model for outstanding behaviour showed his search for an appreciation of the midrash. This dovetails with the suggestion of Tredt and colleagues (1989) that children comprehend as well as appreciate meanings in texts. Similarly his classmate's suggestion that midrash provides a different vantage point for the Bible reader mirrors the view of Levinson (2005). Moreover the British student who suggested that midrash, "changes your thoughts about .. Torah .. and it makes you think more," demonstrated an ability to think meta-cognitively about midrash (for children and meta-cognitive thinking see Marzano, 1995); to seek a deeper

understanding of midrash; and possibly to find meaning that may be an impetus for further learning (see Thompson, 1995).

An important finding was that the basic midrash to Scripture relationship can be understood with little training in lexical analysis of Scripture. This is significant because this is the foundation for understanding the nature of midrash. The visual aids of coat and hook proved very effective in this employ. Conversely, the students with more advanced skills could learn about the lexical basis of midrash. This extends to midrashic pretext; a point that was illustrated by T.B. who suggested that, "The rabbis wanted to attach *our* [Bible] story to *their* message because Abram and Sarai are our role models (italics mine)." Here it is understood that in this case a rabbinic message is the primary motivation for commentary.

2.0   Revisiting the Research Question: Can one design and evaluate a programme that would teach midrash explicitly in the primary school?

The reader will recall that the research questions were formulated in a hierarchy. The main question under consideration has been, can **we teach midrash explicitly in the primary school?** For a more detailed examination, this question was then broken down into the following set of subsidiary questions,

- Can children understand the motivations and the textual and religious underpinnings of midrash?
- Can they separate *derash* from *peshat*?
- Can they understand the literary strategies employed by the rabbis for the purpose of Biblical elucidation?
- Are some aspects of midrash easier to understand than others?
- Do differences in national curricula affect the possibility of teaching midrash explicitly?

2.1   Can Primary School Students Understand the Motivations for Midrash and the Textual and Religious Underpinnings of its Commentary?

In the main, the students understood that the rabbis had specific motivations for their interpretations. In particular the midrash whose religious message relates to the modesty of the patriarchs was well received. This is one of the illustrations of the way

in which the students became involved in what the United States Education Commission (1973) described as a reader-author relationship. Indeed, the data mirrored the assertions of Tredt and colleagues (1989) as well as those of Watkins (2001) who suggested that students are able to organise and to transfer their understanding. In this case, they could transfer the underlying message of the midrash to other midrashim that they had learned during the course of their Bible studies. Similarly at post-test over 80% of the students, overall, recognised the exegetical nature of midrash. This is one of the primary motivations for midrash.

The students worked hard to make meaning of the ancient texts. The American students' analytical thinking about midrash, geared for this purpose, was illustrated in the transcripts already presented: In the students' search for the rabbis' question in the midrash text; and in their analysis of the differing midrashic narratives and their motivations. The transcript excerpts (chapter five section 3.0) show how in searching for the meaning of the midrashic narratives the students engaged in a more nuanced and stronger reading of the Biblical text. Indeed Levinson (2005, pp. 218, 220) suggests that this is what the rabbis were doing when they formulated midrash. This was especially true of the student who drew attention to the textual language of God's command to Abraham, "Take, *please*, your son." He remarked that the midrash was throwing light on the fact that God was 'hard-pressed' to make this command, and that this fact was illustrated in the word, *please*.

The data indicate that, overall, primary school children can understand the serious nature of midrash and the nature of its religious underpinnings. But despite the fact that over 80% of the students overall scored correctly in the seriousness category on the questionnaire, there were some students, who struggled with this aspect of midrash. These students preferred to categorise midrash as texts intended for both grown-ups and serious children. Indeed, some students in the British and American classes insisted that little children (younger than themselves) could be taught some midrash texts such as those that contain midrashic narrative. It seemed that these thoughts might have been derived from their view of themselves as children. They may have been wondering why I was teaching them midrash if it were not intended to be learned by little children.

The students demonstrated their understanding of the textual underpinnings of midrash in their worksheets and homework assignments. All of the students understood that midrash is based on the language of Scripture, but not all classes were trained in the lexical analysis of Scripture. Therefore, while each mini-course stressed the relationship between midrash and Scripture, the teaching of the lexical derivation of each midrash was varied according to the receptivity of the students.

Indeed, in the third intervention, the students' high level of interest in Bible coupled with their base-line understanding of midrash as exegesis[13] enabled me to place more emphasis on the lexical connections between Scripture and midrash. This kind of close textual midrash teaching is possible for classes that are accustomed to close readings of Bible.

2.2 Can They Separate *Derash* from *Peshat*?

The midrash worksheet sought to guide the students through problematising the midrash text in order to learn to differentiate between *peshat* and *derash*. In this endeavour the students demonstrated Dewey's (1916; 1944) assertion that children can wrestle with issues. Additionally it seemed to me, as Bruner (1966c) suggested, that their curiosity was piqued by the lack of immediate clarity in the texts presented. In the findings chapter it was pointed out, however, that several of the students mixed *peshat* and *derash* (see section 3.2).

Indeed the participants found it difficult to separate *derash* from *peshat*. H.W. illustrated this dilemma (chapter five section 3.2). There were many students who initially tried to weave *derash* into *peshat* in order to reconcile both interpretations with the language of Scripture. Thus even students who were accustomed to a close reading of Scripture were not prepared for reading disparate interpretive approaches for a single Bible story. For example, some of them insisted, at first, that the rabbis' suggestion that Abraham hadn't noticed his wife's beauty fit the Scriptural word, *behold*, perfectly. Here they relied on the idea of discovery to carry them through the

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[13]At pre-test fourteen of the sixteen participants were aware that midrash commentary is exegetical.

story. They didn't think through the ramifications of this interpretation for that story. Thus one British girl suggested that it was logical that Abraham and Sarah didn't look at each other; Whereas T.F. in the American intervention suggested that the midrash reads the word, *behold*, as an exaggeration. His projection of the exaggeration into Scripture makes the rabbinic interpretation more plausible.

Certainly there were students who managed to differentiate *peshat* from *derash* from the beginning of the interventions; and by the end of the interventions the vast majority of the students understood, in the case of the first midrash, that the midrash was adding a measure of exaggeration to the Bible story as a strategy to communicate a religious message. This was evidenced by the qualitative data. As one British girl put it,

But we should remember that this is purposely exaggerated.. It is a midrash which confuses us and makes us laugh and then we think and we discover something which is not obvious. (A.W., homework)

2.3 Can They Understand the Literary Strategies Employed by the Rabbis for the Purpose of Biblical elucidation?

Non-literal language and narrative frameworks are the types of literary strategies - employed by the rabbis - that were included in the midrash mini-course. Non-literal language was exhibited in midrash texts that used exaggeration and symbolic representations. Narrative frameworks were seen in the elaborative narratives as well as in the midrashic parable.

2.3.1 Non-Literal Language in Midrash

The quantitative data show that correct scores were lowest in the symbolic category. They also show the most improvement in this category. Indeed one of the British girls described how she had grappled with symbolism as interpretation. At post-test L.S. said that she had felt that the midrash with the flag did not, at first, make sense. But she said that she understood, later, that that midrash was about Abraham's greatness in his faith. She suggested, in fact, that the symbolic language lent strength to the message of the midrash. Moreover she added that she liked the fact that in midrash classes she could think deeply. This seemed to be a reference to thinking beyond

superficial meanings. Similarly a classmate of hers suggested that the hardest part about learning midrash was in understanding the "unrealistic concepts." Interestingly, he also said that he found the "unrealistic bits" the most enjoyable part of the mini-course. This might be because his curiosity was piqued by the lack of immediate clarity in the midrash text.

Similarly one American student reflected this way on midrash,

I think that it's hard to understand sometimes why the midrash would connect this with that and why they would use the story or these symbols.. I think, like, why is this connected to the verse? What symbolizes what? Like, not that I find it *really* difficult but I find it hard-er to understand than the other things.
(A.P., post-test)

The class transcripts presented in chapter five illustrate the students' ability to grasp and to respond to non-literal language in religious texts. The students' comments seem to reflect Ashton's (1993b) conclusion that children can be educated in religious literacy without recourse to religious literalism. Their capacity to make meanings lends support to the assertions of Thompson (1995), Davidson (1976), Donaldson (1989) and Ashton (1993a and 1993b). These scholars have all suggested that children have the capacity to understand non-literal language

Similarly the midrash biographies demonstrate an overall awareness that there is non-literal language in midrash. It was surprising, therefore, to see the American student E.L.'s reaction to the exaggeration in the first midrash. His view seemed to be that if Avram and Saray were that modest they must have been ridiculous. This led him to the surprising conclusion that the midrash was teaching us (the reader) that we should not be so modest. But despite his initial misunderstanding, this student demonstrated, later, that he had learned the meanings of non-literal language in midrash very well. He did this when he argued that the message of the symbolic midrash was that Abraham was, "getting greater" even though he was being asked to do a, "terrible thing" by God. This explanation seemed to be an illustration of Walker and Soltis' (1997) description of interpretive understanding. Perhaps it can be said of his growth in understanding from

one midrash text to the next that this illustrates Bruner's (1966c) assertion that a student's efforts are motivated by a curiosity for deeper understanding (Bruner, 1966c).

In fact the class reading of the first midrash took an unexpected turn in the first intervention. Some students suggested that Abraham discovered Sarah's inner beauty. This side-stepped the issue of the unrealistic midrash. (How could Abraham be discovering his wife's beauty for the first time?) Thus, in their eyes, although Abraham clearly knew what his wife looked like, he could be discovering another kind of beauty. They were then burdened with trying to figure out how internal beauty could cause Abraham to be afraid of the Egyptians etc. In that intervention I was faced with a pedagogical dilemma: Although I wanted the students to seek and make meaning of the midrash text collaboratively, I realised that they were straying from the purposely exaggerated language of the midrash. I ended up disappointing them by explaining that the midrash was talking about external beauty and that the message was one of exaggerated modesty; that it was not referring to internal beauty. While the lesson followed an unplanned direction, the students' initiative of a non-literal reading of the midrash – as opposed to following the rabbis' non-literal reading of Scripture – pointed out their ability to interpret texts non-literally. (This was not reflected well, at post-test, in their tick-box answers when only 31% of them answered that there is symbolic/ non-literal language in midrash.)

Indeed, the midrash with symbolism elicited the most varied response- in the different classes- of all the midrash texts. The Israeli students' understanding was the most basic: Abraham's likeness to a flag on a mast symbolised the issue of Jewish identity for these students, much as the Israeli flag does for them; as one student remarked, "the flag is who we are." The British students demonstrated a keen creative ability for interpreting the symbolism in the midrash. The consensus of opinion in the British class revolved around Abraham's religious leadership; the forefather as forerunner (see Appendix E). The American students were most interested in the relationship between the imagery of height (raising the flag) and the concept of Abraham's religious stature. Moreover, the American students were unique, to this study, in their ability to keep the exegetical aim of the midrash in mind – the nature and function of the symbolism as explicating the Binding of Isaac – while suggesting their interpretations of the symbolism used. This was evident in E.L.'s comments above. This midrash text also

generated collaborative learning in the case of a student who described this symbolism, in her homework, in the context of Abraham's achievement of faith. A.P.'s class comment simply related to the fact that, "we raise the flag." Yet after the class discussion she engaged in what Watkins (2001) describes as learning about learning. She was thus able to view the symbolism of the flag in terms of Abraham's achievement of heights in his faith. In this way the midrash texts provided a rich context for thinking about the Bible story. This reminded me of Kornhaber and Gardner's (1991) assertion that children's thinking is fostered through their learning context. Additionally A.P.'s reflection on the class discussions surrounding the midrash text enabled her to make meaning of the midrash, as she engaged with the midrashic process. This seems to reflect notions of meaning making suggested by Marzano (1995) and Young (2003).

In the main, results in the area of non-literal thinking show that students at this age can understand midrash texts with non-literal language. It seems from this study that it is the employment of scaffolded teaching as described by Wood (1988; 1998) and Fisher (1995) that is the key element in engendering this understanding.

2.3.2 Reading Midrashic Narrative

The students' engagement with midrashic narratives demonstrated their ability to understand the motivations for these commentaries. The British and the American students even asked about the sacred status of these texts. Certainly discussions of the truth value of narrative as juxtaposed to the truth value of Scripture were beyond the scope of this research. Nevertheless the fact that these young students raised these issues is a testament to their ability to reflect upon religious texts in order to seek insights into religious meanings (Ashton, 1993b). Moreover, the students' engagement with the theological and spiritual foundations of the narratives was beyond my own expectations for students of this tender age. It seemed to reflect the assertion of Hay, Nye and Murphy (1996) that childhood understanding of religion should be framed in terms of spirituality.

Indeed A.P.'s homework comment (chapter five section 3.4) about how the narratives help our understanding of the Bible story by highlighting Abraham and Isaac's

devotion to God- the emotional and spiritual elements of the event – lends support to Minney's (1985) argument that children's emotional, moral and behavioural understandings can be harnessed and developed within religious education. In fact the ease with which the children read these narratives led to their difficulties with accepting that midrash is not aimed at little children.

Indeed, out of all the interventions only one student selected the short answer at post-test that suggested that, *I think that midrash commentaries are just for little children.* This shows that the vast majority of the students understood that despite the simplistic appearance of midrashic narrative, midrash is generally aimed at grown-ups.

In each class there were students who thought analytically about these narratives and about their purpose. For example, one Israeli student asked me whether the rabbis actually knew what Ishmael said to Isaac since it was not laid out in Scripture. In fact the depth of the children's analytical thinking surprised me. Accordingly the children demonstrated their ability to uncover the exegetical basis of the midrashic narratives on the *akeidah*. This reminded me of Dewey's (1916; 1944) view that a student needs to wrestle with the conditions of a problem in order to perceive meaning. But even this basis for midrashic narrative was challenged by students who were not sure that these stories were particularly exegetical or whether they clarified anything. As one of the American students suggested, "We didn't need a midrash here." These comments seem to illustrate Elder and Paul's (2003) suggestion that thinking is driven by questions. They also seem to reflect Dewey's idea that thinking is the key to learning (1916; 1944).

This was similarly demonstrated by the American student who suggested that, "the *akeidah* really gets real," through a reading of the midrashic narrative. This 'reality,' in his view included an explanation of sacrifice and devotion. This student seemed to support the theory that direct meanings are a prerequisite for complex meanings (Hillocks and Ludlow, 1984) when he remarked that, "'You just look at a conversation like its nothing; but then you realise that you need to have devotion." Here we see the student reviewing the impact of the midrashic narratives for their affective meanings. His comment also supports Egan's (1999) assertion that children view stories in terms of affective meanings. Similarly this student's admiration of Abraham seems to support

Levinson's (2005) suggestion that midrashic commentary engenders an admiration of the Biblical patriarchs in the mind of the reader. Thus, as Bruner (1986) suggests, a landscape for thinking is created. In this case the landscape is created through extra-Biblical narrative. In a sense the midrash is akin to a history book. It helps the student to develop a sense of the patriarchs and their dilemmas; of why they did what they did (see Bruner, 1966c, on teaching history).

In addition to their analytical comments, the children offered some erroneous analyses. For example two of the British students became focused on the narrative to the exclusion of the Scriptural story. One queried why God didn't defend Abraham against Satan and thus avoid the entire episode of the *akeidah*. Another student suggested that Isaac overreacted to Ishmael's taunts; also presuming that the episode was avoidable. In doing this they showed that they had forgotten that midrashic narrative exists to explain the Bible story; not as an alternative to it.

Additionally the complex questions implied by the midrashic narrative brought consternation to the students who suggested that midrash is confusing; or that it just raises questions. Nevertheless the students came to terms with the underlying complexity of midrashic narrative in various ways. In the British school one student referred to complicated midrash; a couple of students related to needing to think a lot about midrash and a third referred to the subtle message that makes midrash complex. Additionally a couple of the girls spoke about needing to look below the superficial meanings of midrash. In the American intervention, students referred to layers of interpretation and depth of meaning. During the interventions I had drawn an analogy between midrashic layering of interpretation and the interleaving of the Russian dolls of a *matrushka* toy. In fact one of the British students suggested at post-test that midrash is like the onion in the movie *Shrek*.

2.3.3 Reading Midrashic Parables

The midrash text that was most easily understood in all classes was the one with the parable. This was a literary structure with which the children were familiar. But there was some difficulty encountered. For example I.B., in the Israeli intervention, pointed out the asymmetry between an all-knowing God and the fallible, human owner of the

strawberry patch. Indeed this is one of the underlying anomalies of midrashic parables in general. Accordingly these thoughts point to a level of intellectual discomfort that some young students experience with material that is not completely straightforward. This sparked a discussion on similarities that the rabbis create in their parables in order to teach a lesson; similarities that are not intended to be equal in all respects to the Bible story that they parallel and explain.

In contrast to this the children displayed an ease of understanding when it came to the clearer parallels between Scripture and midrash. For example, in the Israeli and British interventions, one student from each class told me that the strawberry thief had blood - rather than strawberry juice - on his hands, as we were reading the parable. Since we always read the Bible story before the accompanying midrash, the students had an idea of the basis for the midrash. This enabled them to draw the parallel with Abel's blood, of the Bible story, while reading the parable. Conversely, an American girl told me that Cain's hands were dirty. Thus she imposed the interpretive parable – with the strawberry thief's dirty hands – onto the Bible story. But then her classmate protested that there was no screaming in the parable, again raising the issue of asymmetry. A third student responded that, "the screaming is that it's right there in front of their faces. The evidence is clear." This ease of understanding of the parable, experienced by most students, dovetails with Egan's (1999) assertion that the story form orients the reader's emotions to its events, characters and ideas and is thus particularly suitable for children.

2.4   Are Some Aspects of Midrash Harder to Understand than Others?

The students found it hard to engage with the complexities of midrash. This was most apparent in the cases of those texts whose underpinnings are theological. Additionally, as was mentioned in section 2.2, some students found it hard to separate *peshat* from *derash*.

2.4.1   The Complex Nature of Midrash

Although the midrash texts gave rise to interesting and upbeat class discussions, they also led to some confusion. The anguish of the student who lost the thread of the

midrash in the American narrative (chapter five section 3.3) highlights the challenge involved in teaching complex material to young students. Indeed students study-wide scored relatively low (73%) for understanding the complex nature of midrash at post-test. This points to one of the possible stumbling blocks that can be encountered when teaching midrash in primary school. One of the British students put it this way, "At the beginning, when you don't .. know what's actually happening and you want to know.. you just have to carry on."

Yet a significant number of students expressed an appreciation and enjoyment of this complexity. This seems to exemplify Bruner's assertion that understanding is a lure to effort (1966c). It also seems to bolster Elder and Paul's (2003) assertion that deep questions focus thinking on complexity.

In contrast to the majority of the students who seemed ready for the intellectual challenge of learning midrash, some were made nervous by it. But the additional time taken for scaffolding of complex material can lead to a degree of boredom for those who already understand the thread of the discussion.[14] (This fact is true for teaching any difficult subject in a mixed-ability class.) The narrative (chapter five section 3.3) demonstrates how one of the students who understood the material was asked to step in and explain the subject to a classmate who felt lost. In this way both girls remained engaged in the lesson. This kind of solution is clearly a partial one as some of the students may still have been bored. On the other hand, others may have been happy that someone had asked for clarification at this point, as they might have needed some as well.

2.4.2   The Theological Nature of Midrash

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[14] Children might be bored in a midrash class because they might feel that, "It dragged on too much – going over the midrash again and again" (G.G. post-test questionnaire, 2nd intervention). This might be due to the fact that a student is very bright and catches on very fast, or due to the fact that he/ she is losing the nuances that are added with each iterative explanation of the midrash. They might also feel that a midrash is not interesting if the topic is already familiar, "because I've already learnt it " (Z.K., post-test questionnaire, 2nd intervention). Again this points to a lack of literary training.

The most complex midrash texts to teach were those whose underpinnings were theological. These were the two relating to the *akeidah*. In these texts the use of narratives and of symbolism are the external trappings for theological questions of faith and sacrifice. All of the study participants were familiar with this Bible story and had encountered it as a story wherein God tests Abraham. Generally, at this age level, students would not have had complex discussions about faith or sacrifice when studying the stories of the patriarchs.

The students, overall, did not expect the midrash to raise questions about the Biblical text. They were mostly prepared to read these midrash texts for basic meanings of language and of plot with an eye toward its Biblical commentary. During the interventions they were encouraged to describe their own reactions to the midrash texts in an effort to develop their reasoned judgement about it. This approach accorded with Bailin and Siegel's (2003) suggestion that an analytical stance is central to understanding. Initially the participants found it difficult to consider the theological questions raised by the midrash; those that revolved around the probable cause of the divine commandment for the Binding of Isaac. Several iterative readings were needed to uncover these issues. But with each reading the students became more aware of these underlying issues and engaged further with them.

Indeed, one American student took issue with the idea that the rabbis might have found a problem in a Bible story. He was questioning the parameters of Jewish theology as the rabbis viewed it. His indignation shed light on his coming to terms with this religious subject matter and on the rules for its acquisition. For me this was reminiscent of the discussions of Sprinthall (1990) and Young (2003), respectively, on the nature of subject matter and on the rules of acquisition of particular knowledge.

The class discussions on these complex religious issues seemed to support Short's (2003) suggestion that children can cope with far more complex concepts than was previously thought. In two of the classes the theological discussion continued into a discourse over coming to terms with – rather than solving- theological problems. These discussions were based on the supposition that although Isaac was not sacrificed, the command to bind him and *offer him up* remains in the story; therefore

the problem of the commandment to do this remains in the Bible. This was difficult for these young students to accept. One student agreed with me when I suggested, privately, that whilst in primary school children are accustomed to having problems solved for them by grownups, but Biblical problems are more complex. A.G. interjected by saying, "spoon feeding, lick, lick," as he demonstrated a lapping motion with his tongue.

The most troubling, contemporary issue that was raised by the students on the topic of the Binding of Isaac was the possible undercurrent, in the midrash, of suicide in the name of God. I had not anticipated this topic in general, and I especially did not expect it from such young students. This issue came up in every intervention. In the last intervention one girl suggested that according to the midrash Isaac was willing to kill himself for God.

In Israel, I taught this lesson in the middle of the *Intifada* (Palestinian uprising) and the concept of Isaac as *shahid* (religious martyr) was suggested by my students. I, probably, was naïve in not preparing for this issue to be raised. In the British intervention one student raised the issue twice. When I asked what the midrash demonstrated, A.G. responded, "That Isaac wanted to die." I corrected him by suggesting that this was not a death wish but a willingness to serve God. He then challenged me further suggesting that this was a silly way to demonstrate one's devotion to God. In his words, Isaac was saying, "O.k., so I'll just go out and kill myself." I stated very clearly and unequivocally that the rabbis were not condoning suicide as this is not a Jewish concept; that they were stressing devotion, and in this case, were overstating their case. The rabbis were contrasting Isaac and Ishmael in the most extreme terms, but any relationship to suicide was not literally intended. It is my contention that had we no experience of modern-day religious martyrdom these students would not have considered a literal interpretation of the midrash.

2.4.3 Separating between *Peshat* and *Derash*

Some students found it difficult to differentiate between *peshat* and *derash*. Thus there were students who were curiously insistent that it must be appropriate to assume that Abraham had never noticed his wife's beauty. This finding seems to dovetail with

Margaret Donaldson's (1989) work with children. She noticed similarly curious responses to illogical word usage. She suggests that children's interpretation of language may be powerfully influenced by context, to the point that there is a loss of adequate respect for the words themselves (p. 71). Perhaps, in the case of the children in my study, this was because they preferred to accept the midrashic interpretation at face value, since this was their customary learning style. Additionally they might have mixed the interpretations because they were unaccustomed to learning interpretations that did not make Scripture speak to them with one clear voice. Moreover they may have assumed, in a pietistic as well as an interpretive sense, that what the rabbis were presenting as interpretation ought to make sense to the reader - themselves. This assumption became apparent from students' comments that questioned the use of "unnecessary" and "confusing" interpretations in midrash. Similarly, they were not accustomed to being introduced to differing interpretations; or to interpretations that were irreconcilable with one another. Indeed most Bible programs at this level focus on one interpretation at a time.

One surprising finding was the fact that if a student presents at pre-test with a fair amount of base-line knowledge of midrashic characteristics, this does not mean that he/ she understands how to differentiate between *peshat* and *derash*.

Accordingly the children found it hard to separate *derash* from *peshat*. This may have been due to their pious will to accept all interpretations. It may have been because they were accustomed to straightforward interpretations only. Similarly it might have been because they had not previously encountered multiple or conflicting interpretations.

2.5   Do Differences in National Curricula Affect the Possibility of Teaching Midrash Explicitly?

Because of the limited number of schools in this study one cannot draw firm conclusions regarding the effects of national curricula on the receptivity of children to learning midrash. Rather one can make observations about the data from the participating classes and offer some tentative suggestions about what the national curricular effects might have been on the particular classes studied. The largest qualitative variation from class to class lay in the direction that each class took in its

collaborative discourse about the midrash texts. While each class learned the characteristics of midrash that were the focal point of the mini-course, it seemed that the way that each class read a particular midrash text was influenced by their training in Bible and in literature. For example it seemed that differences in literary training emerged in discussions on the symbolic flag. Thus the symbolic message of Abraham being likened to a flag on the masthead was one of identity for the Israelis. As one student suggested, "the flag says who we are." In the British discussion it was seen as symbolising Abraham's religious leadership; whereas in the American discussion it was viewed in terms of Abraham's rise in spiritual heights through his willingness to follow God's imperative. These different readings led me to reflect on whether it might be possible that a national curriculum may influence the way that students read midrash.

2.5.1 The Israeli Example

In Israel, for example, the national curriculum for Bible studies in the primary school (Israel Ministry of Education and Culture, 1993) prescribes that all of the Pentateuch be taught by the end of year seven. This requires the class to learn many Biblical chapters, in the original Biblical Hebrew, over relatively short time spans. This broad view of Scriptural pedagogy relegates in-depth Scriptural readings to secondary school. For primary school it indicates that the Scriptural text should be read for plain meaning. This entails looking at linguistic themes; and instilling an understanding of the central Biblical characters and events only. This curriculum is complemented by the curriculum for language and literature in primary school (Israel Ministry of Education and Culture, 1979). That curriculum requires students to differentiate between central and secondary topics in a text; and to be able to recognise literary constructs.[15] Thus the latter curricular criteria might have influenced the ability of the students in the Israeli school to conceptualise midrash with the visual aid of the coat and hook; and their understanding of the midrashic search for the motive of the *akeidah* - as well as its use of narrative and parables. Further it was predictable that the

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[15] See chapter four of *Hebrew Language and Literature*.

Israeli students would be most skilled in their ability to understand the linguistic meanings in the Bible and midrash texts since these are in Hebrew.

However, it seemed to me that their training in Scriptural reading for breadth rather than depth made them less ready to discuss symbolism as interpretation; or to discuss the issues with which the rabbis were troubled – and that underlie their commentary. It also seemed to have discouraged them from looking for additional meanings for words and Biblical topics with which they were already familiar.

Additionally the Israeli class was the only one in the study that included non-religious students. Whilst conducting this study, I noticed that the non-religious students - who had the weakest foundation in Bible knowledge - needed the most scaffolding for understanding midrash. This phenomenon was evident in the lesson transcripts as well as in my teaching journal.

2.5.2   The British Example

The National Literacy Strategy for England includes a daily literacy hour in primary schools. This hour includes a plenary session where pupils reflect on what they have learned (National Literacy Project, 2006). Additionally, ".. linguistic terminology taught through sentence level objectives allows teachers and pupils to talk about how texts are put together (Palmer, 2000)."

It might be possible that the skills gained in the literacy hour in reading secular texts - their language, how they are put together and for reflecting upon them - carried over into the study of Jewish texts. This seemed to be reflected by the students' ability to summarise the contents of the midrash and to retrace the interpretive discourse; including the attachment of new interpretive meanings to familiar Hebrew words. Similarly the students' interactive reflection on the meanings invoked by midrashic symbolism was most creative.

But when compared to the American and the Israeli students this class was found lacking in awareness of surrounding Biblical issues, such as the similarity of the *akeidah* story to the Biblical prohibition of Molech worship (child sacrifice). This was

most likely due to their smaller Biblical knowledge base. They also seemed to lack some critical thinking skills. This may be due to the fact that British youngsters are not expected to respond critically to texts until age fourteen.[16] Thus their analysis of the symbolic midrash did not include an awareness of the interpretive connection between the midrashic commentary and the rabbinic query of the Bible story. Similarly when the students commented about Isaac's role in the story, as told by the midrash, they sometimes missed the point of midrash and its purpose. For example, one boy who suggested that Isaac had a death wish had not fully understood the purpose of the midrashic narrative. He seemed to have lost sight of the fact that the midrash was trying to interpret an existing Bible story which involves the potential sacrifice of Isaac. One of the girls raised a similarly misplaced critical comment about the first part of the midrash. She asked, "Why didn't God simply defend Abraham [against the allegations of Satan] and then the *akeidah* would not have needed to happen?"

2.5.3 The American Example

In the U.S. most targets for literacy are similar to those in Israel and in England (excluding the British literacy hour). But *The Nation's Report Card* (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2006) for national achievement levels in reading includes an additional target that is absent from the Israeli and British curricula; namely that students should, "be able to judge texts critically. .. and explain their judgments clearly."[17]

It seems that this expectation is rooted in a kind of national pedagogical ethos of inquiry. American education, today, is influenced by the educational philosophy of John Dewey. Garrison (2006) suggests that Dewey is regarded as the founder of the progressive education movement in the United States. His educational philosophy was based on a positioning of inquiry at the centre of the acquisition of knowledge as necessary for the intellectual growth of the student (see Dewey, 1916; 1944).

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[16] See attainment targets in *National Curriculum, U.k.*

[17] See *National Assessment of Educational Progress in Reading*, for 'grade four, advanced.' Note: My students were in grade five, so I am using the advanced grade four criteria, here, as there are no specific criteria for fifth grade.

It seemed that this spirit of inquiry was applied to Bible studies as well as to secular studies in the American school. Possibly the combination of this spirit of inquiry, coupled with significant time allocation to Bible classes, enabled the American students to understand midrashic texts and to think deeply – in a collaborative way- about them. Additionally, it appeared that the investment of time in Bible studies furnished them with strong textual skills in Biblical Hebrew. But the most dramatic illustration of the analytical thinking of these students is demonstrated in their discussion relating to rabbinic questions about the Bible story. The transcript excerpt where B.C. challenges, "And if *Hashem* tells you to do something why can't you do it?" introduces this critical debate (chapter five section 3.3). Here the students reason through the issues at hand, making use of their knowledge of Jewish law to reach conclusions in their critical inquiry of the rabbis' question. Further, at the end of this unit these students were able to review the different layers of rabbinic interpretation, in this complex midrash, from top to bottom. The in-depth analysis coupled with a keen ability to understand the multiple layers of interpretation seemed to reflect the American inquiry-based training.

2.5.4 Possible Ways to Adapt the Midrash Teaching Strategy

It is my view that the research contexts were sufficiently different to justify the claim that one can effectively teach midrash explicitly in any Orthodox primary school, with some guidelines for particularisation. The three main issues that will guide the midrash teacher in a particular context are, the level of Bible knowledge of the students; their literary skills and their background in analytical thinking. Scaffolding around these issues will determine the pace of midrash lessons; the success which the strategy will meet as well as the character of the midrash discourse in each context.

For example those classes with little experience in the interpretation of non-literal language will need more explanations of midrashic use of non-literal language. Similarly classes whose literary training emphasises broad understandings of texts will need more training when it comes to exploring the depth of Biblical analysis found in midrash texts. This would entail special emphasis on the analytical thinking skills that are necessary for learning midrash. Further, students will need to be coached in

patience while learning midrash commentaries on Bible topics that are already familiar to them; as students in this age group do not understand that their knowledge is very basic. Moreover since children of this age - even those who have learned many chapters of the Pentateuch - have had little exposure to the process of Biblical interpretation, they need to be guided through the religious and ethical underpinnings of rabbinic commentary. This is similarly true for the textual underpinnings of midrash, again regardless of children's exposure to many Bible stories. Additionally students who have a strong textual background in Bible and in Hebrew can benefit from an extra emphasis on the lexical connections between Scripture and midrash, and on the midrashic process itself. In general it is important to note that the data seem to indicate that the student's background in Jewish studies makes a difference in his/her readiness for midrash, but not in understanding of - or achievement in - midrash.

3.0   Comments on Generalisability

Crotty (1998) asserts the importance that, in the eye of the observer, research outcomes "merit respect" by ensuring outcomes that are valid and generalisable (p. 13). Generalisability implies that outcomes can be applied to larger populations than the specific population with which a particular study was carried out. This is possible when the population used is viewed as typical of the general population to which the findings would be applicable (Borg and Gall, 1989). Thus a degree of generality can be seen when the argument can be put forward that it is reasonable to generalise results to other populations or settings (Robson, 2002).

The reader may recall that the paradigm used in this study is that of the design experiment. The purpose of design experimentation, in education, is to explore how students think and learn in order to describe theoretical understandings of how learning takes place (Barab and Squire, 2004). Brown (1992) explains how generality applies to the design experiment paradigm. She suggests (ibid.) that the theoretical descriptions that delineate why a particular intervention had successful outcomes render a particular design experiment generalisable. Accordingly generality is argued from the interpretation of the outcomes. Indeed the comprehensive data record that is generated by the design experiment enables the formation of a narrative account of the outcomes. This account is grounded in learning theory and includes generalisability through its

description of how learning took place (Shavelson, Phillips et al, 2003). Thus through this interpretive process the researcher develops generalisable theories about the students' learning that took place during a study (Edelson, 2002).

The participants in this study were intended to be a small sample of Orthodox primary school year six students. Accordingly the participating classes were similar in some ways and different in others. On the one hand, all of the participating schools taught the Pentateuch in primary school with Rashi's commentary as is commonly found in Orthodox schools, globally. Similarly gender generality was sought in participating classes in regard to the co-educational nature of the students. Additionally the sample included relatively small and relatively large schools; with heterogeneous socio-economic makeup; and classes of mixed achievement in Jewish studies. These factors were intended to mirror the internal diversity of the larger global population of Orthodox schools.

On the other hand, the geographically different contexts added different contextual parameters to each intervention of the study. These related both to the educational context as well as to the students' learning skills. For example while all the schools studied *Chumash-Rashi*, each educational context had its own emphasis on how much of the Pentateuch to cover during the academic year and how much interpretation to introduce in Bible classes. Additionally the hours devoted to Bible study varied from one context to the next. Similarly the students' Hebrew skills varied from one context to the next. Moreover in their broader educational context each school had a different national educational context; such as a national curriculum for literature, or for reading; or as in the case of Israel, even a national curriculum for Bible.

Now it is specifically these disparate contexts that were of interest to me as a researcher in Jewish Bible education. This is because any new strategy for teaching midrash would need to be generalisable, at least to some extent, to the disparate, global population of Orthodox schools. Clearly the scope of this study is limited, but it is hoped that the representative nature of the sample can allow a tentative claim to generality. Indeed it was for this reason that schools were chosen in three countries where there are significant numbers of Jewish students in Jewish day schools. Thus it was intended that each class would be representative of a Jewish day school class in

that country. (In fact similar results were also found in the IFS that took place in a different primary school in Israel, in similar manner to the current study)

Further let us return briefly to the aims of design experiments, in relation to the development of theories of how students learn. The many forms of data, in addition to the questionnaire, collected during the interventions enabled me to observe how children engaged with midrash texts in disparate contexts. This was because through my participation in the videotaped lessons and through the words of the children themselves (in their class comments and their written work) I could observe their progress in midrash understanding. This in turn enabled me to make some tentative theoretical suggestions about the way that midrash learning took place. And led to some tentative suggestions for changing the emphasis of the midrash mini-course from context to context, to suit the participating class' background in Bible and literature. (See section 2.5.4.).

4.0 Can we Teach Midrash Explicitly in the Primary School?

Broadly speaking, the tentative answer is affirmative. Both the quantitative and the qualitative data reflect children's capacities to understand midrash. The quantitative data reflect improvement overall in all midrash categories. In fact the most significant improvement was seen in the areas of midrash that were found to be difficult for the students to grasp. And for their part the qualitative data describe the children's midrash understandings from the perspective of the children themselves. A brief summary of the journey taken to the aforementioned tentative conclusion will follow.

In order to explore whether children can be taught midrash explicitly chapter three of this paper explored the literature relating to children's understandings. We saw that although children's understandings differ qualitatively from those of adults, children can be assisted to understand 'grown up' ideas. Thus Vygotsky's thinking (chapter three, section 2.1.2.3) and the consequent discussion of scaffolding of learning (ibid.) helped form the theoretical basis for teaching complex material to children through the intercession of adults. To add to this, recent scholarship on children's religious understandings was reviewed to form the theoretical foundation for a view of children's religious understandings, and therefore, for teaching religious concepts to

children (ibid., 2.0). The third theoretical pillar for this study came from scholarship in the area of the sense-making capacities of children. That discussion included children's affective understandings and analytical thinking. It also included a discussion on how children make sense of general and sacred texts (ibid., section three).

The aforementioned theoretical areas of children's understanding formed the foundations for understanding the outcomes of the three interventions of this study. Specifically they provided the theoretical underpinnings for understanding how children can be taught to make sense of midrash texts. And for understanding how the children were able to engage with the various aspects of midrash that were part of this study. Accordingly it was found that in the main children can be taught midrash explicitly. But it was also found that some aspects of midrash are harder for children to understand than others. And that much patience and several iterations of a complex midrash text may be needed to achieve that understanding. (See section 2.4 above.)

In summary the outcomes of this study tentatively suggest that children can be taught midrash explicitly. This tentative suggestion arises from the following assumptions about children's mediated learning: that children are capable, through the intercession of adults, of understanding religious concepts; of making sense of sacred texts; and of thinking analytically about them.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this original research has been to investigate the various effects of teaching midrash explicitly in the primary school, in a range of educational contexts. Its originality stems from the fact that this is the first empirical work to be done in the area of midrash pedagogy in the primary school. Until now midrash has played an ancillary role in Bible class and has not been taught as a discrete subject. The thesis has been that this author's explicit strategy for the explicit teaching of midrash deepens understanding, and promotes growth, in students' midrash knowledge.

On the strength of the numeric data, gathered over the course of the three interventions, I am confident that a marked gain in understanding of midrash has been demonstrated overall by the participating students. Similarly the qualitative data, in the main, support my thesis. The qualitative data draw on the students' own descriptions of their understanding of midrash. This serves to mitigate the difficulties associated with the reliance, solely, on quantitative data. Indeed it is my view that the qualitative data, while it corroborates the numeric data, also presents a fuller – and a more nuanced - picture of the kinds of learning that took place during the teaching series.

2.0 Revisiting the Research Methodology

The foundational theory of design experimentation has been useful for this study. In particular since this experimental model is generally used to design, refine and evaluate innovations for learning in educational settings (see Cobb, Confrey et al, 2003; Kelly and Lesh, 2002), it was a good fit for the design and evaluation of my midrash teaching programme. Additionally Kelly and Lesh (2002) have pointed out that the goal of the design experiment paradigm is one of informing practice; And that this is accomplished within a real world working space in which teaching innovations can grow. Accordingly this paradigm was helpful for reflecting on my professional practice. It was also helpful for refining the programme and for changing the emphasis from class to class, depending on the students' strengths and weaknesses. Moreover the naturalistic settings of the interventions enabled me to view the learning process by

capturing the social interaction in the classroom, as suggested by Barab and Squire (2004). This was illustrated in the story of one school when A.P. reviewed what Abraham had achieved (chapter five section 3.4). Her analysis was the product of her *classmates'* contributions to class discussions in which she participated.

For data analysis the complementary data types, or Nash's (2002) numbers and narratives model, proved important for attaining a view of what the young participants learned. This was especially true for those who had difficulty with the theoretical language of the tick box items of the questionnaire. Similarly the qualitative data enabled me to collate individual biographies of midrash understandings for each participant.

While my own participation in the research provided me with a 'front row' view of the intervention, I was at a disadvantage in that I was a guest teacher in each school. Thus I faced some difficulties relating to my unfamiliarity with the students which may have led to their feeling that perhaps I was not to be taken too seriously. My classes were sometimes viewed as optional by the students because they participated by their own agreement. My colleagues at the schools were helpful in mitigating these issues so that they did not bear heavily on the teaching. I certainly did not feel that I suffered from the Hawthorne effect, rather the opposite. Perhaps I should say that I felt at times like a supply teacher who has to work extra hard to gain the confidence of most students since they are not invested in co-operating with her.

The benefit of the small class size to the researcher was that I could reflect more on the in-class responses of the students, during the lessons, as my attention was not being pulled in too many different directions.

Finally, the tender age of the participants presented some challenges relating to testing their understanding of abstract midrash knowledge. For example in some cases, the language of the questionnaire was difficult for the students to understand and evaluate. Thus the most difficult aspect of the paradigm was the self-completion of the questionnaires by the young participants. Because the children were not used to completing questionnaires, this was hard work for some of them. Unfortunately the

schools' schedules of access for the interventions did not include a mechanism for assisting each child in completing the questionnaires.

3.0 Educational Implications of the Study

Ironically despite the difficulties involved in teaching complex material to children, it is possible that some of the strategy's success was brought about by the challenging nature of the midrash texts. Bruner's (1966c) suggestion that learning is motivated by curiosity (p. 114) seems apt when viewing the children's comprehension of the difficult elements in midrash. For example one student was so pleased with herself for being able to review the thought process of a particular interpretation that she smiled widely as she did so. This was an illustration of body language (Kamler, 1997) conveying the child's happiness at her achievement of interpretive understanding. Indeed the data seemed to reflect the receptivity of children to intellectual challenges (see Fisher, 1995, p. 111). Similarly I found that some bright students with behavioural difficulties were more calm and engaged when they found that a particular midrash text challenged them to think. Other students acknowledged plainly that they enjoyed thinking deeply like A.G. who suggested, "I like thinking."

3.1 Implications for Jewish Literacy

Chapter one outlined the importance of Bible study – together with midrash – for Jewish literacy. The writings of Rosenak, Chazan and Stern described the issue there. Rosenak (1987) explained that the religious literature of a community provides an existential link to that which is sacred. Thus Chazan (2005) pointed out that the centrality of Bible education in Jewish schools is a reflection of the role of the Bible as the Jewish community's religious legacy. Similarly Stern (2003b) noted that Jewish literacy is linked to a deep familiarity with Jewish sacred texts. So how do the outcomes of this study tie in with these issues? The outcomes of the study seem to indicate that the explicit teaching of midrash is advantageous for Bible studies; for a deeper understanding of the Bible story and for understanding the relationship between text and interpretation. Accordingly when rabbinic interpretation is put into perspective for the student this helps to solidify his/ her educational foundation in Biblical

understanding. Moreover the data tend to reflect Wachs' (1990) suggestion that value-laden midrash texts are useful for teaching religious ethics and values.

Thus the deeper understanding of Bible and of religious values that are offered by midrash can expand the student's Jewish literacy.

3.2 Implications for General Studies

Perhaps students' literary skills may be expanded through learning midrash texts that employ different literary strategies. For example one American student suggested that the parable is a simple story that is similar to the Bible story, "Somebody did something bad, and the[y']re caught (A.P.)." Thus the process of reading midrash texts can shed new light on literary devices as they are harnessed for interpretive elucidation of the Biblical text. As one of the British girls reflected (on literary devices), "*Chumash* leaves blanks which the midrash quotes and explains."

It is possible that the explicit teaching of midrash also expands the analytical thinking capabilities of the students as they analyse the Bible story through the viewpoint of the interpretive midrash text. It may also be true that the students' metacognitive skills are expanded as they think about what midrash entails. Indeed at post-test A.P. made the following metacognitive remark when she was asked to describe the most interesting part of the mini-course: "I thought it was really interesting when we learned how to think about midrash."

One issue that was beyond the scope of this study and may be valuable for further research relates to the truth value of midrash. To put it another way one might want to explore children's attitudes to Jewish sacred texts. As children begin to think more about midrash it would stand to reason that such an exploration of children's views of sacred texts aside from, or indeed including, the Bible itself could prove meaningful. Additionally another question that was beyond the scope of this study relates to the possibility that superficial teaching of religious texts may lead to unquestioning acceptance or even to indoctrination. This may be an avenue for further research.

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Appendix A: Midrash Survey

Oral Traditions of Midrash

Midrash developed from oral traditions into written texts (Shinan and Zakovitch,
1986). This section will look at the development of traditions of midrashic narratives
and the attempts by scholars to determine their antiquity. It will also briefly examine
exegetical traditions.

Although the earliest existing midrashic collections were redacted in the amoraic
period,[18] "they are, presumably, the literary representatives of a much older, oral
process (Jacobs, 1995)."

Narrative Traditions

One of the trademarks of midrash is the tendency to elaborate on the Bible story
through narrative expansions. This began as an oral process. Oral roots can be inferred
through an analysis of parallel midrashic texts. These are texts that can be found in
different midrash collections that share a common narrative. Scholars have noticed that
the common narrative is often slightly altered from one text to the next. They infer
that these alterations reflect oral changes that have been made through the course of
time. Heinemann (1974) focuses on the aural aspect of oral tradition, and its impact on
the process of oral transmission. Accordingly, he attributes the changes made in
narratives found in midrash, to the receiver (listener) of the oral transmission. The role
of the receiver, Heinemann emphasises, is crucial to the accuracy of the oral process.
Clearly, if he does not listen attentively, he is prone to re-transmit the story
inaccurately, causing inadvertent changes. (Incidentally, these aural changes do not
read like textual or transcription errors.) Similarly, if his memory of the material is
inaccurate, he may not transmit the material accurately. Imperfect recall can result in
various forms of corruption including paraphrasing of the narrative of the story, instead
of word for word transmission; changes in the detail of the narrative; and repetition of

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[18]See "Classification of midrash" below.

phrases in a story, an indication of a concerted effort to remember crucial aspects of the tale.

As a result of the aforementioned aural and memory factors, the redacted tradition reflects the oral process itself, including the development of parallel, but not identical narratives.

Although scholars agree that midrash evolved as an oral tradition, they cannot agree upon the age of these traditions. This is due to the fact that it is impossible to date these traditions with any certainty. In order to get some idea of their antiquity, scholars have examined the narrative contents in order to determine external cultural influences on midrashic tradition. For example they have found that some of these influences could originate in the pre - Biblical period. Similarly some midrashim may have been influenced by other cultures that existed in the second Temple period (c.300 B.C.E) (Jacobs, 1995).

Exegetical Traditions

In addition to oral traditions for extra-Biblical narrative, there is evidence of the existence of oral traditions for Scriptural exegesis. Albeck (1987) demonstrates this aspect of midrashic development by pointing out that identical exegetical derivations appear in disparate midrashic works. This, he asserts, is an indication of an early unwritten tradition which made its way into different written collections.

Additionally, it is possible to identify evidence of exegetical traditions linking Pentateuchal verses with Hagiographic texts. This is manifested by themes which are linked midrashically. An example is the rabbinic exegesis of the book of Canticles in Canticles Rabbah. The Hagiographic text refers to a love affair between a man and a woman. Rabbinic tradition sees this story as a metaphor for the love of God for Israel. Thus, the events that take place in the story are interpreted metaphorically as events in the history of Israel.

Oral traditions, whether for elaborative or exegetical purposes, formed the backbone of midrash and its development. The rabbis, in addition to passing on these traditions by

word of mouth, took these traditions one step further - they expounded and elaborated upon them. This activity took place in various forums.

The Practical Development of Midrash

Batei midrash (rabbinic study houses) and Synagogues were forums for *derashot* (rabbinic expositions of Scripture). Not much is known of the nature of the *beit midrash* in Amoraic Palestine. Rubbenstein (1999) asserts that, "there is no scholarly consensus on this issue (p.22)." It is most probable that the Rabbis taught small groups gathered around themselves in disciple circles. These circles dispersed when the Rabbinic masters died, at which time the students attracted disciples of their own.

Synagogues have existed in Israel since the second Temple period (c. 516 B.C.E. - 70 C.E.). According to Levine (2000), "The synagogue incorporated Jewish communal life within its walls: the political and the liturgical, the social and educational, the judicial and the spiritual (p.158)."

Part of the educational mission of the synagogue was accomplished through the weekly Bible sermon (Heinemann, 1974). These public lectures delivered on the Jewish Sabbath included Scriptural exegesis, homiletics and religious exhortation. The role played by the sermon increased in importance after the destruction of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, in 70 C.E. At that time, the sermon served as a means for the rabbis to encourage and console the Jewish community after the tragedy of the destruction and its aftermath.

The first century synagogue [became] a pivotal institution in Jewish life, one that played a major role in enabling communities .. to negotiate the trauma and challenges created by the Temple's destruction (Levine, 2000, p. 158).

The profusion of midrashic material in the classical period (which dates to approximately four centuries after the destruction of the Temple), however, seems to parallel the rise of the Christian, Byzantine powers over Palestine, and their negative stance toward the Jewish population. "Roman legislation went out of its way to limit the legal status of the Jews .. Protection was granted to Jews who abandoned their

religion (Gafni, 1987, pp. 26-27)." Additionally, the code of Theodosius II (438 C.E.)
forbade the Jews from building new synagogues. These events presented a challenge
to the Jewish leadership in their struggle to maintain their followers' sense of
community, and sustain their belief in the Torah and its values. During this period, the
synagogues became distinctively religious institutions. Orientations of synagogue
buildings were toward Jerusalem and Temple related matters were introduced into the
liturgy (Levine, 2000). It is fair to assume that an abundance of *derashot* were
delivered by the rabbis, at this time, to strengthen the resolve of the Jewish
community.

Based on the foregoing discussion, one can conclude that existing midrash literature is
a reflection both of rabbinic oral traditions and of the Jewish experience in the rabbinic
period.

Classification of Midrash

Midrash can be broadly categorised as *halakhic* (pertaining to Jewish law) or *aggadic*
(non - legal) in content. This study focuses on *midrash aggadah*, and its texts, only.
Aggadic discourse contains,

**religious truths, maxims of morality, colloquies on just retribution, descriptions of
Israel's greatness in past and in future, scenes and legends from Jewish history, parallels
drawn between the institutions of God and those of Israel, praises of the Holy Land,
edifying accounts and all kinds of consolation (Strack, 1969, p. 202).**

Aggadic *midrashim* (plural of midrash) are at times exegetical, interpreting a Biblical
text verse by verse. At other times they are homiletic, reading like a public sermon.
The existing written collections of early midrash date back to Palestine toward the end
of the amoraic period[19] (400 - 640 C.E.).[20] These are known as classical amoraic

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[19] The rabbis who were active from the completion of the Mishnah (c.200 C.E.) until
the end of the completion of the Talmuds (c. 500 C.E.) were called amoraim.

[20] A detailed table of midrashic classifications can be found in (Herr in Encyclopaedia
Judaica vol. 11, p. 1511.

midrashim. The oldest of these is Genesis Rabbah, an exegetical collection on Genesis. (This collection is used in the midrash mini-course that is discussed in the methodology chapter.) Among the literary structures found in perfect form in this collection is the proem. It introduces an exposition of a segment of Biblical text, and may have been delivered as a public lecture. It typically expounds upon a verse from the Hagiographa, linking it to the chief verse of the public weekly reading of the Pentateuch.

The middle period of midrash begins with the Moslem conquest of Palestine and continues until the end of the tenth century. Midrashim were also composed during the Medieval period. However, these commentaries are quite unlike classical midrash. For example, there are no proems, and the Hebrew is Medieval.

The Audience Controversy

The modern reader of these texts might well ask to whom this rabbinic literature was speaking. Who was the intended audience? The answer to this question is mired in a controversy, involving two schools of thought: One that insists that the audience included the general Jewish public. While the other maintains that these midrashim were discussed exclusively in scholarly forums.

Modern scholars examine these midrashim from different perspectives in order to determine the composition of the audience. Ginzberg (1967) analyses the language of the midrash. He asserts that the use of commonly spoken Galilean Aramaic, in stories and anecdotes featured in Genesis Rabbah, suggests that popular sermons (as opposed to scholarly discussions) were a major source for its material - thus supporting the theory of the general audience (in Jacobs, 1995).

Similarly Heinemann (1970) concentrates on midrashic style. From this vantage point, he agrees that the audience was mostly the general Jewish public. He justifies this assertion by calling attention to rhetorical devices used in these lectures, devices necessary to keep a general (non - academic) audience engaged.

Fraenkel (1996) controverts these positions asserting that the audience was composed of scholars only. He argues that the material contained in today's midrash collections is too complex, or requires too much Scriptural background, for the average Jew of rabbinic times to have understood. Thus, he asserts that most of the extant material stems from discussions held by the rabbis amongst themselves, in *batei midrash.*

It is unclear how Fraenkel (1996) would respond to Heinemann (1970) on the role of rhetorical devices in existing midrash literature. One might have thought that these devices would be unnecessary for scholarly discourse in the *beit midrash*. This would seem to weaken Fraenkel's (1996) thesis. However, his thesis may be supported in either of the following contexts: Firstly, not much is known of the nature of the *beit midrash* in amoraic Palestine,

there is no scholarly consensus on this issue. It is most probable that the rabbis taught small groups gathered around themselves in disciple circles. These circles dispersed when the rabbinic masters died, at which time the students attracted disciples of their own (Rubenstein, 1999, pp21-22).

It is possible that the rabbis had to be creative in their teaching methods in order to maintain the interest and loyalty of their small following. This may be the motivation for the rabbinic exhortation in Mishnah Avot to "Raise up many disciples." (1:1)

Further support for Fraenkel's (1996) thesis may be found in his analysis of rabbinic rhetorical activity. While describing the rabbis' use of linguistic and aural plays on words, he categorises this aspect of exegesis as the bread and butter of midrash. Hence, for Fraenkel, it would seem that rhetorical devices are characteristic of midrash in all forums, scholarly or public.

As is the nature of any controversy, the question in this "audience controversy" remains open to further discussion and research.

Scholarly Approaches to the Modern Study of Midrash

Louis Ginzberg's (1967) approach to midrash was through its legends. His interest was in what he considered the popular folk literature of ancient Judaism.[21] Accordingly, he researched the origins of the Jewish legends that can be found in midrash, as well as in other rabbinic and early Christian sources. Ginzberg (1967) concluded that they were of a popular nature; were Biblical in character; and that they had circulated among the Jews for many centuries. He explained that these legends supplied nourishment to the Jewish imagination as it roamed through the Bible, finding its way into midrash because of its sacred value to the rabbis. The rabbis, in turn, elaborated upon these legends when they included them in their midrash commentaries, using them for didactic purposes. By connecting Jewish legends to Scripture through their exegesis, the rabbis ensured that these narrative traditions would be secured a long life. Accordingly the rabbis sanctioned them while utilising them for their religious, homiletical objectives.

Ginzberg's chief work, *The Legends of the Jews*, provides a synopsis of Jewish legends paralleling the Biblical story. Additionally, it provides a comprehensive, scholarly index of sources of these legends which is unparalleled in modern midrash scholarship.

The weakness in Ginzberg's (1967) approach, however, lies in his attitude to midrashic exegesis. He regarded exegesis as a tool - useful, solely, for sustaining the life of Jewish legend. He viewed the rabbinic scholarship in midrash as "later learned additions" to the "original elements" (volume I, p. xi). David Stern (2003a) notes that, "in the course of his own career, Ginzberg himself, partially revised his earlier views. .. [In his later years] Ginzberg acknowledged that most frequently scholastic ingenuity [namely, midrash] and popular fancy both contributed toward the production of these legends." (p. 12) With this revision, he addressed his earlier disregard for midrashic exegesis.

In contrast to Ginzberg's popular view of midrash, Fraenkel's (1996) approach to all aspects of midrash is a scholarly and serious one. He maintains that midrashic

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[21]Stern (2003) p. 9.

exegesis was part of the erudite learning that took place in rabbinic study houses. It was through midrash that the rabbis communicated their views on religion and ethics; the Jewish nation, its genealogy and tradition; the non-Jewish nations; the creation and nature (Volume 1, p. 1). Thus, the ethos and philosophy of the rabbis, matters crucial to Judaism, are seen as the underpinnings of all the material in midrash. Accordingly, Fraenkel views the legends found in midrashic works as important and scholarly, rather than popular, creations. He maintains that the proximity in the Talmud[22] of these legends to discussions of Jewish law proves their seriousness in the eyes of the rabbis.

Fraenkel demonstrates the critical, religious (Jewish) basis of midrashic legend, while praising the rabbis' creativity - their ability to weave their didactic message into the fabric of the legend.

With regard to Jewish legends, he makes the case that popular, mythical stories were introduced into midrash and reworked, by the rabbis, for their spiritual, didactic aims. These, he suggests, may include the dispelling of superstitions contained in popular myths.

In contrast to both Ginzberg (1967) and Fraenkel, Heinemann's (1974) approach to midrash is primarily through its homiletical encounter with its audience. He points out that the rabbis' primary objective was to engage their general, Jewish audience in the study of Torah and to make it come alive for them. The following paragraph encapsulates Heinemann's approach to midrash:

[The rabbis] packaged their innovative and far-reaching ideas in the modes of stories and explanations, parables and short tales; and [they] ingenuously developed, through the medium of the public sermon, which was designed for the widest possible audience, a multi-coloured rainbow of rhetorical devices, of realization of the abstract; [of] envisioning; in order to capture the hearts of the people and to train their thoughts on [their] tradition. (pp. 8-9) (*translation mine*)

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[22] Legends are found in the Talmud as well as in midrashic works.

He highlights the creativity of midrashic exegesis and its power as a tool for teaching Torah. However, his approach presents midrash as it was meant to the audience of that historical period. This makes his approach somewhat limited from the point of view of the current midrash student.

The work of Isaac Heinemann has been discussed in many sections of this chapter already. Thus, in order to avoid needless repetition, this section will just briefly summarise his approach to midrash. This will enable the reader to view the modern, scholarly approaches side by side.

Isaac Heinemann's (1949) approach to midrash is comprehensive, applying to all aspects of midrash, including Jewish legend, Scriptural exegesis and homiletics. The basic assumptions of his approach are twofold. In the first he outlines the rabbinic view that Scripture is the basis of Judaism, containing its laws, ethics, morals and theology. The second assumption concerns the purpose of interpretation. This, I. Heinemann describes as the rabbis' fulfilment of their obligation to maintain the religious piety of their followers. To this end, the rabbis approached their sacred Scripture, both in popular and scholarly venues, with an interpretive eye that was both erudite and imaginative. Indeed, their didactic messages were not limited to the audience of their day, but continue to resonate with the modern student of midrash.

Daniel Boyarin (1990) finds weaknesses in both I. and J. Heinemann's approaches. He maintains that I. Heinemann wrongly ignores the historical and social context in the production of midrashic texts; Thereby losing some of their force and meaning. Conversely, Boyarin rejects J. Heinemann's representation of midrash, claiming that it "places midrash too firmly in its own historical circumstances (p. 10)".

Accordingly, he suggests a different, literary approach to reading midrash texts, the intertextual approach. Boyarin (1990) explains that the reader should view the Bible as a mosaic of discourse. As is the nature of dialogue, each discourse articulates more than one viewpoint and at once reflects and reinterprets that which came before it. Thus the Bible can be seen as a self glossing text. The rabbis, accordingly, embrace the entire inter textual mosaic: As each textual stratum strives to fill out the Biblical

picture, it rewrites the earlier text, transforming the meaning of Scripture in the process.

His intertextual model suggests that it is the intertextuality that leads to ambiguity in Scripture. Therefore, just as the full presentation of a mosaic must be viewed as a totality of its fragments, so, too, a complete textual understanding requires the reading of more than one textual segment. Boyarin (ibid.) finds support for his model in the Jerusalem Talmud which says, "The words of Torah are poor in one place and rich in another.[23]" The rabbis, Boyarin maintains, in their reading of Scripture, explore its ambiguities and intertextual relations in order to draw their own interpretive picture. Boyarin (1986) suggests, therefore that in this way midrash, thus, creates its own dialogue with the Biblical text, while raising its latent ambiguities to the surface.

Boyarin (1990) offers a compelling model for reading Scripture as a whole unit, (despite its contradictions, repetitions and gaps) and for reading midrash. However, in his effort to place midrash in the framework of modern literary scholarship, Boyarin seems to de-emphasise the sanctity of Scripture and the essentially religious nature of rabbinic interpretation. Instead, he characterises the religious context of rabbinic exegesis as "cultural codes" (p.12) which both motivate and limit the production of midrash. By not discussing these codes or ideological motivations, he ignores that which makes midrashic literature unique.

In contradistinction to Boyarin's somewhat secular approach, David Stern (1996) offers a modern, literary approach to midrash which applies the rabbis' own tradition of Scriptural polysemy - "the habit of presenting multiple interpretations for Scriptural verses or phrases"(p. 16). He introduces this notion - of numerous meanings for Scripture - through its rabbinic derivation in Talmudic discourse. The rabbis validate the principle of Scriptural polysemy through Scriptural exegesis.

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[23] Tractate Rosh Hashanah (3: 5).

In its locus classicus, cited by Stern (1996), two different proof texts are presented as sources for the principle of Scriptural polysemy.[24] Let us examine one of them. *Once God has spoken, but twice I have heard. (Psalms 62: 12)* The interpretation offered, exegetically changes the word *once* to *one*, and *twice* to *two-* as if to say that *one* verse has *several* senses.

Stern considers Scriptural polysemy a "virtual ideological cornerstone of midrashic exegesis"(ibid, p.18). This notion provides a view of tradition as heterogeneous, which is to say, speaking with more than one voice (Fraade, 1991; See also Sifrei, 306). As Stern comments, elsewhere (1986), "The *other opinion* represents the basic delight midrash always takes in offering still another interpretation, no matter what its relevance to the theme at hand may be (p. 112)."

This approach to Scripture in general, and to its interpretation, is not without its problems. The difficulty lies in defining its boundaries. Did the rabbis consider Scripture a text completely open to any interpretation? Indeed, the rabbis, themselves, grappled with this question.

Viewing midrash from this perspective, Stern (1996) offers the following ideological explanation for a polysemic approach to Scripture:

...the object of midrash was not so much to find the meaning of Scripture as it was literally to engage its text. [Following the destruction of the Temple] midrash became a kind of conversation the rabbis invented in order to enable God to speak to them from between the lines of Scripture, in the textual fissures and discontinuities that exegesis discovers. The multiplication of interpretations in midrash was one way, as it were, to prolong that conversation (p. 31).

To summarise the above approaches one can say that they follow a common thread. Although modern midrash scholars approach midrash from different angles - Ginzberg, from the perspective of Jewish legend; Joseph Heinemann, from a homiletical point of view; Boyarin and Stern with literary points of view; and Fraenkel and Isaac

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[24]Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 34a.

Heinemann from more comprehensive perspectives - they share the conception of midrash as a rabbinic didactic tool. They agree that midrash was an expression, both, of Torah learning for the rabbis, and a reflection of their motivation to keep Scripture close to the minds and hearts of their followers.

The Relationship of *Derash* to *Peshat*[25]

A survey chapter on midrash would be incomplete without a discussion of a different interpretive perspective on Scripture, namely *peshat*. Although there are references to this view of interpretation in the Talmud, it is not clear how the rabbis defined it[26]. Biblical commentators in the middle ages, however, interpreted this perspective as focusing on the plain meaning of the text (Jacobs, 1995). Some modern scholars dispute this narrow definition.

Weiss-Halivni (1991) points out that the Hebrew root of the word *peshat* is p-sh-t, which means to extend. He asserts that extension also carries the connotation of context. Thus it is his view that the *peshat* of a particular verse is obtained by viewing the word or verse in its textual context.

Loewe (1964) analyses the meaning of *peshat* from its linguistic root as well. However, he understands its source, p-sh-t, as connoting to spread (as opposed to extend). He broadens this definition to include the, "diffusion of an opinion, by a teacher in a position to express it .. consequently [meaning] authoritative teaching (p. 181)". The emphasis, here, is put on the point of view of the teacher (and his received interpretation) over the Scriptural context. Thus *peshat* may vary its focus depending on the traditional interpretation of a particular verse. Jacobs (1995) elaborates upon this definition. He describes the acceptance of received, traditional interpretation of Scripture as the "exegetical reality " of the rabbis (p.13). The authenticity of the received interpretation creates the reality of meaning, the only true interpretation. Hence, Jacobs interprets *peshat* as exegetical truth.

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[25] *Peshat* is commonly translated as the plain meaning of Scripture.

[26] See for example, Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 63a.

Whether one is to define *peshat* as the plain, contextual, or authoritative view of a Scriptural text, one might wonder, "What is its relationship to *derash*?" Some scholars view *derash* as an addition to *peshat* (Heinemann, 1949). Reasons for addition include, elaboration of the text; strengthening its meaning with a deeper explanation; and presentation of a different connotation, to form a multi-layered view when seen together with the plain, or contextual, meaning. Others believe that the rabbis intended to place their midrashic interpretations within the boundaries of plain meaning (Jacobs, 1995).

Occasionally, however, *derash* contradicts *peshat* (in its sense of plain or contextual meaning of Scripture). Heinemann (1949) offers several explanations for this. These include the rabbinic need to preserve the honour of Israel and its righteous people; and the need to preserve religious morals.

Fraenkel (1996) maintains that *peshat* (plain or contextual meaning) is not relevant to the act of *derash*. He draws a comparison to the world of theatre. Thus he suggests that just as the world of make-believe exists alongside the real world, the world of *derash* exists alongside the world of *peshat*. Likewise, just as the world of theatre is predicated upon different norms from the real world, so too, the world of *derash* has its own norms of interpretation. The object of midrash, he offers, is to uncover the 'other world,' the hidden meaning of the text; Thereby bringing new meaning into the reader's everyday life (volume 1, p. 84).

To summarise, the differing opinions given for the meaning of *peshat* reflect the difficulty in defining it. Accordingly the difference between plain, or contextual, meaning and *derash* is far greater, conceptually, than authoritative meaning and *derash*. The latter meaning seeming to meld itself into the traditional, rabbinic interpretations that constitute *derash*. Thus, clearly, the nature of the relationship of peshat to *derash* still needs further study.

This chapter has investigated midrashic interpretation of Scripture from its definition and classification; through its oral traditions; its ideological motivations; and strategies

of interpretation. It was incumbent upon the investigator to address the issue of other Jewish methods of Scriptural interpretation. Hence, the discussion, above, on *peshat*

Whichever way one defines *peshat*, the existence of different traditions of interpretation highlights the richness of potential meaning that is bound up with every verse in Scripture.

Appendix B: Letter to Head Teacher: Request for Access

Dear Rabbi G.:

Thank you so much for considering my request to teach 10 lessons at <your school>. I know that D. has told you a little about me, but I would like to elaborate further.

I am currently pursuing a doctorate in education, Ed.D., at the Institute of Education, London. The Institute is an international teacher-training institution and is part of the University of London. I am in the international EdD program, which means that I commute to London from Israel for doctoral seminars, research and for meetings with my supervisors. The international EdD is a practical doctorate which requires practical educational work in addition to the theoretical work of the thesis. The international component means that research is done internationally, In my case the framework demands practical educational work in London, Israel and the U.S.

My interest is in teaching midrash, explicitly, in elementary school. My thesis posits that it is worthwhile, even necessary, to teach midrash explicitly, instead of in an ad hoc adjunct to Chumash lessons. To this end I have done midrash work in 3 schools in Jerusalem and in 1 school in London. The work in Israel has included focus group work in order to ascertain kids' understanding of midrash as well as classroom interventions in the form of teaching my midrash mini-series. The same mini-series has now been taught in 3 schools.

The miniseries, as you know, consists of 10 taught lessons in midrash. The age group for all interventions is 5th grade, in co-ed. classes. The framework has been set up by my supervisors, so the 10 lessons must be given to a single class. They maintain that less than 10 lessons to a single class cannot constitute reliable research. Therefore, this point is, unfortunately, non-negotiable.

The pedagogical basis of the mini-series is the need to familiarise kids with the basics of midrash knowledge in order for them to understand the seriousness of midrash texts, their educational value and their purpose in explaining the Torah. The areas of midrash knowledge covered by the mini-series include morals in midrash (e.g. tsniut); the purpose of aggadic narrative and its depth of interpretation; non-literal language in midrash and the necessity to understand it non-literally and mashal in midrash (and its interpretive function). The overarching aim is to furnish the children with a positive and comprehensive view of the purpose of midrash. They can, in turn, build on this basic midrash knowledge through learning further midrash texts as they advance in their Torah education.

Being a graduate of <your school> myself, I look to <your school> as a school that exemplifies good Torah education, and one that involves itself in improvements in Torah teaching. I had a very positive experience many years ago when I attended <your school>, and I have heard excellent reports about <your school> over the years. It is for this reason that I seek permission to teach my mini-series at <your school>. I believe that the school is a good fit for educational dialogue regarding improvements in Torah teaching, and that midrash is an area in which this dialogue should occur. I would be happy to include some time to meet with teachers and to discuss the issues of midrash education, if you would be interested.

I have received positive feedback from the kids in the other schools in which I have taught my miniseries. Kids have responded saying that, 'I learned what midrash is, 'I learned that midrash answers questions about the Torah,' 'midrash makes it interesting to learn Torah,' 'midrash helps us understand the Torah.' and 'midrash gives differing explanations for what happens in the Torah, and then I can choose its explanation.' The overwhelming response from all the schools has been positive. While principals were understandably hesitant at first, they were pleased that their students were exposed to the midrash mini-series. They also wanted the Chumash teacher to stay in the class while I taught so that she/ he could learn from my method. I have found these teaching experiences to be rewarding from a teaching perspective as well as from a research perspective.

I belive that it would be beneficial for your students to engage in my midrash mini-series and to gain a foundation in midrash knowledge; and I do hope that you will agree to let me teach it.

I thank you in advance for your consideration, and for your prompt and timely response.

I can be reached either at: deenaedd@yahoo.co.uk

I look forward to your reply.

Many thanks,
Deena Sigel

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent for Midrash Teaching

(adapted from Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (1999). Designing qualitative research

(3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, p. 99)

Informed Consent for Dissertation Research -

Teaching Midrash in Elementary School

Dear Parents,

I am a doctoral student at The Institute of Education which is associated with the University of London. I am in the process of writing my doctoral dissertation. The program in which I am enrolled is an international doctoral program which is based on practical (teaching) research. I am interested in developing methodology for teaching midrash to elementary school students. Thus far, in addition to preliminary, practical research in a school in Jerusalem, I have tested my methodology in two other schools in Jerusalem and in one school in England. The last element of my practical research involves teaching midrash to American students, specifically at <name of school>. Thus, the dissertation will involve an analysis of the results of applying my methodology in these international settings. My focus is on 5th graders in co-educational classes, in Orthodox elementary schools. Each study involves teaching a ten lesson midrash mini-series which I have designed specifically to teach students about the workings of midrash.

Your child's participation in this study will include at least one interview in addition to filling out a questionnaire at the beginning and the end of the study; as well as his/ her participation in the ten midrash classes which I will teach. Please note that

all questions that will be put to the students will relate to midrash knowledge, and will not be at all personal in nature.

In the write-up of this study, all names will be disguised in order to protect the privacy of the students and the school.

This study will be shared with my dissertation committee and other appropriate members of the Institute of Education community. The dissertation that results from this work will be stored in the library of the Institute of Education, London.

I appreciate your giving consent for your child to participate in this study, which will help me refine my methodology for teaching midrash in elementary school. I hope to use this information to help my colleagues teach midrash meaningfully to young students. If you have any questions please feel free to email me at deenaedd@yahoo.co.uk. You may also contact my dissertation sponsor, Dr. Michael Hand, at the Institute of Education, m.hand@ioe.ac.uk.

Thank you again,

Deena Sigel

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Please sign the consent form, below, to enable your child to participate in the dissertation research project outlined above.

Signature _____   Date:

_____

Print Name _____

Name of participating student _____

Appendix D: Questionnaire Appendix

Children's Understandings of Tick-box Options

While piloting the questionnaire, and during my evaluation of the IFS and its post-test phase, I realised that I was expecting too sophisticated an interpretation of the abstract questionnaire statements from my young students. Because of this the questionnaire assessment at the early stage of the research was too stringent. The post-test interview of the IFS was instrumental in this reflective process. For example, I learned from the IFS that children sometimes view these statements in absolute terms. Thus, when I asked them to agree or disagree with the statement that midrash teaches morals, they would respond, "not always." This would lead them to choose, "sometimes." This differs from the way that an adult might interpret these statements. An adult might agree that midrash teaches morals in the sense that moral teachings are characteristic of midrash in general; they appear in midrash texts. In contrast, the children would think of individual midrash texts with which they were familiar and test the statements against these specific texts. In this way, they preferred not to agree with statements which did not apply equally to all midrash texts. This was true despite the fact that I had not specified that the statement should apply to *all* midrash texts. Conversely, some students felt that in choosing "sometimes," they were disagreeing with the more universal statements. These students preferred not to tick the "disagree" box. For example, to the statement, "It's always easy to understand midrash," a student would respond, "sometimes." This was her way of saying that it is *not* always easy to understand midrash. Her response would also enable her to maintain her stance that some midrashim may be easy to understand. Indeed, one girl chose the "sometimes" option for this statement and she added, "sometimes it[s] confusing."

Thus, my reflections on the students' responses in the IFS clarified for me what my expectations should be for the three-part thesis study. Once I understood the way in which the children evaluated my questionnaire statements, I decided to include the "sometimes" response as an acceptable option for the midrashic characteristics that are not necessarily universally true or false for all midrash texts.

Appendix E: A Class Discusses Symbolism in Midrash

Teacher: The symbolism of the flag .. non-literal understandings..

A.G.: A flag stands out.

Teacher: .. how that might relate to making Abraham great.

A.K.: The Israel flag. Everyone already knows it. Literally, people could see it. They could see how great ..

..

Ar.G.: It's like a nationality because he [Abraham] starts a nation.

Teacher: Flags .. nationality, [we're getting] close. Midrash is about religious things ..

A.G. The flag on a ship. It's held up so people can see what's coming.

Teacher: Go on.

A.G.: People can see it from far and they know what to expect. They could be waiting, like, for the Hashem boat; to get an idea of what He wants us to do.

Teacher: We have identity; it identifies something, but it's great ..

H.C.: Like the flag on a pirate ship .. I don't know...

Sh. A.: If a flag is brightly coloured it stands out. Also it's at the front of the ship. They're leading the ship ..

Teacher: Has anyone ever heard the word flagship?

R. S.: If you have a whole load of ships like in the Armada, the leading ship.

Teacher: .. Are we getting close? Remember this is a midrash. Remember the symbols. Think of Abraham. Think of making great.

S.R.: Everyone could see a flag. Everyone could see how great Abraham was. He was the leader of a great nation so everyone would copy him.

Teacher: He would be demonstrating what?

A.G.: Faith in God.

..

Teacher: .. Think of the *akeidah* because, "*nissah*" is the introduction to the *akeidah*. Symbolism, Abraham .. How are we making Abraham great?

A.R.: ..Big. Abraham is showing that he is big; has faith in God. He's about to kill his own child.

..

A.W.: When he did the *akeidah* his identity changed. He became a more holy person.

Teacher: Religious identity.

S.B.: He is the beginning of Jewish identity.   (British class, transcript)

Appendix F: Reading Parables in Midrash

Q: How does the midrash explain the idea of the blood calling out?

A: It's saying that it's so obvious that it's like the blood of Abel is calling out. It's sayng: you can't hide from God.

Q: What kind of message does it teach?

A: It teaches that you can't hide from God and where God asks Cain where Abel is he's asking to give Cain a chance to repent.

Q: What makes the parable an effective tool?

A: It makes a simple story that is similar to the *peshat*. Somebody did something bad, and [they're] caught. For me the parable makes it much easier to understand what the verse " the voice of the blood of your brother .." means and symbolises.

(A.P., homework)

Appendix G: Quiz Contest Transcript

Teacher: Why did I bring a hook to class?

T.F.: Um, to show that the midrash is hooked onto the Torah, that its not just floating in the air.

T.B.: Can I add to that?

Teacher: Yes.

T.B.: If it weren't connected to a verse in the Torah it would just be weird information.

Teacher: Yes, it would seem strange, or pointless.

Teacher: Why did I bring a little Matrushka doll to class?

S.B.: Oh, that! To show the outer explanations of the midrash ..

Teacher: More than that.

S.B.: And to show how, um, ..

Teacher: almost there. To show that there are outer layers, but there are also ..

S.B.: Inner layers.

Teacher: Does anyone want to add to that?

B.W.: The outside things, that's, the midrash itself, then there's the explanation and deeper meaning and it goes very deep ..

Teacher: Which of our midrashim have 'fill in the blanks' for the missing part of the story?

D.R.: um .. About the *akeidah*.

Teacher: What about the *akeidah*?

D.R.: The conversations.

Teacher: Very good. What are the two purposes of midrash?

Sh.B.: So like its teaching us, helping us understand Torah better, and helping us get a little deeper into Torah and learning .. the things the Torah teaches us.

Teacher: You've given one reason.

Sh.B.: Also, it gives us a message, trying to teach us something, how to be better ..

Teacher: Moral message. Well done. *After these things*. What are we missing?

B.C.: What things?

Teacher: o.k. What is the biggest difficulty with the *akeidah*?

B.C.: Human sacrifice.

Teacher: B. is dying for a question! Hopefully .. Was that literal or figurative?

Class: Figurative!

Teacher: How do the conversations help us come to terms with the difficulty of the *akeidah*?

B.W.: The first one was with God and Satan, was that God really didn't want, wasn't comfortable with the idea, like He was forced to do it. The second one with Isaac and Ishmael, um, Isaac wasn't [forced?] , um, he said he believed in God so much that if God told him to do it, he would be willing to do it, and God would help him.

Teacher: Excellent. What do we learn from this midrash, about our forefathers?

B.W.: That they believed in God so much that they would even sacrifice themselves.

Teacher: Excellent. This is their righteousness. Allright. E, what is *Bereishit Rabbah*?.

E.L.: A collection of midrashim

Teacher: ok. G, which midrash used symbolism?

G.M.: Um, um, I think the one where it talks .. *gidlo kenes lasfinah.*

Teacher: And what was symbolic about it?

G.M.: Um, when Abraham got raised on a flag.

Teacher: I need an example of a midrash that looks simple at first, then it turns out to be complex and deep. Looks simple and cute but turns out to be complex and deep. One of ours was very deep.

A.P.: With the two conversations.

Teacher: Excellent. What about them was simple?

Teacher: S, do you want to add to that?

S.B.: I think it was the Cain and Abel, like the simple .. story

Other kids: The strawberries.

Teacher: That's an interesting point, a parable is designed to be a simple story, to explain something deep. Our case [in question] is where the midrash is built as such: simple *and* deep.

In the parable, who was the owner of the garden ?

Y.B.: God. 'cos he's the one who caught the person red handed, He says, 'I know he did it'… and it was like, he was the owner of the precious thing and, like, someone took it.

Teacher: Excellent, the owner of the precious thing.

Sh.B.: And it was like the blood was screaming.

B.W.: Can I add to that?

Teacher: Yes.

B.W.: There's no point in hiding it.

Sh.B.: It was obvious.

B.W.: He was the only one there, the only one that had a reason to do it.

Teacher: Well I think that the bigger point is that God sees everything; that God would know who did it.

Teacher: What did we learn from *gidlo kenes* .. ?

T.F.: We shouldn't take things so literally.

Teacher: o.k. that's true. Now what was the actual meaning?

T.F.: We learned about his leadership.

Teacher: And what's *gidlo*?

T.F.: He made him great.

Teacher: Did you all understand that? By demonstrating his faith he made him great; he demonstrated his leadership qualities.

A.P.: A flag gets raised in the morning .. [I think that the reference is to the raising of the American flag in the morning together with the declaration of the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States.] God was raising Abraham to a higher level.

Teacher: Exactly. Abraham was being raised by God to higher heights. What kind of heights?

B.W.: In his, um, importance.

Teacher: Importance, or?

Sh.B.: In his holiness.

Teacher: In his spirituality. Very good.

Teacher: E, what did we learn from *nissah oto bevadai*? He really tested him.

E.L.: Um, Because He wanted to see if he would go on the journey and he could have said .. oh, I don't want to do this ..

Teacher: Exactly, so that's why it was a real test.

B.W.: So he wouldn't be confused.

Teacher: God didn't what?

B.W.: Um, stun him.

Teacher: Good. Well done everybody.

How does the midrash interpret the word *devarim* in, *And it came to pass after these devarim*?

H.W.: *dibburim.* [words]

Teacher: Good. You got it. And what were the *dibburim*?

H.W.: Conversations between Satan and God and Ishmael and Isaac.

Teacher: What is the straightforward meaning of *devarim*?

Class: Things.

Teacher: And the midrash re-interpreted in order to do what?

B.W.: To explain it. To explain why He asked Abraham to do it.

Teacher: Excellent. O.k. I would like at least one example of non-literal language in midrash This is a question for S.

Sh.B.: He doesn't know what literal is.

Teacher: o.k. if you take a midrash, and it means exactly what it says.

S.B.: Oh, o.k. sorry.

Teacher: One more minute to think about it. Think of our *midrashim*, think which had non-literal language, that we didn't take literally.

S.B.: Oh, .. When he had, like, blood screaming out to him.

Teacher: It is true, it is the language of the Torah, but I'm looking for an example of the language of midrash.

S.B.: Oh, oh, you said, like, an example! You didn't say midrash!

Teacher: o.k. go on S, but that was correct about the Torah.

S.B.: Um,

Teacher: You can collaborate for 5 points.

S.B.: Ok, we have it, *nissah oto kenes lasfinah*.

Teacher: Ok. S, do you understand why?

S.B.: Yes.

Teacher: T, one more example of non-literal language in midrash. Think back ..The rabbis purposely used figurative language.. seemed to be saying somehing that was not quite right.

Several of the kids: Oh! [in tone of, 'I just figured out what she's looking for, I wish she would call on me!']

Teacher: When the midrash was too strange .. something doesn't make sense. [tension builds in the room!]

Teacher: When the midrash uses language that is not to be taken literally.

Y.B.: The midrash says that he didn't look at his wife, but that's not possible.

Teacher: O.k. do you all understand? This is non-literal language.

Class: Yes.

Teacher: Last question: S, When the rabbis use a parable, what is the purpose of the parable in the midrash? As in, the form of parable, how does it help the rabbis in their midrash?

Sh.B.: I wan't here for that lesson.

Teacher: O.k. guys, I have to move the question to another person. B, why do the rabbis use parables in midrash?

B.W.: To relate to a topic in a different way; to explain something so that you can understand it.

Teacher: That is correct. My final point about parables. It is a kind of story that the rabbis make up in order to explain what's going on in the Torah. They make up a very simple story to explain, from real life, what's going on in the Torah.

B.W.: Can I say something? You know how in the Torah the blood is crying out? It's not really related, but the juice dripping out is like tears, like crying out.

Teacher: Now you could go into a whole different imagery thing, and say, 'As the blood is the soul.' Allright. so, you have a point there, that blood is like life, and the blood crying out is the soul crying out. Thank you very much.

Appendix H: Midrash Knowledge Profile for Lucy

Category	List of Quotes	Source for Quote
Seriousness	Q: What did you learn for the first time during this series? A: "Midrash isn't for little children."	Post-test questionnaire
	Q: Is midrash supposed to	Quiz, 13/7/04

	be for little children? A: "No, the midrash is too complex." Q: Are the stories in midrash aimed at little children? A: No, you have to think deeper than the outer reason. Q: Do you think midrash is meant for little kids? A: No, because You have to think deep and sometimes non-literally."	h.w. #2 Post-test interview
Moralistic	Q: Name 2 tasks performed by midrash. A: Explains the Torah and teaches morals or values of good behaviour. Q: Name 2 tasks performed by midrash. A: To fill in gaps in the Torah (things that haven't been explained) [and] to Put across morals to us. Q: Do you think you could	Quiz 30th June 2004 Quiz, 14th July Post-test questionnaire

	explain what midrash is? A: A story that might be true that explains some unfilled gaps in the Torah and tells us morals. Q: Do you think that any of the midrashim in the series had a moral? A: Yes. The first one with Avram and Saray and we should be modest.	Post-test interview.
Exegetical	Q: What is the purpose of midrash? A: So, um, to give - Let's say we don't know, why, um, something happened to give a reason why something happened which is not unclear, but to show something that's not completely clear. To give reasons for things that seem unclear. Q: Why is it important to us to explain why, or how, things happened in the Torah? A: So that we don't get the wrong idea about what	Class comment, 12/7/04

	they're trying to tell us.	
	Q: Would you like to learn more midrash in your school? A: Yes. It [midrash] is a nice way of thinking reasons in the *Chumash*.	Post-test questionnaire.
	Q: Does midrash help us in any way? A: [Midrash helps us] to understand unexplained gaps in the *Chumash* and gives morals.	Post-test questionnaire
	Q: Does midrash change the way we think of the Bible story. It makes you thin, 'yeah, how did that happen?' [midrash] makes you think [about the story in the Torah] from a different perspective.	Post-test interview.
	Q: What is the purpose of midrash? A: It explains the unfilled gaps in the Torah. Q: Why do you think we learn midrash?	Post-test interview

	A: First of all to get morals from it, and second of all, basically the same thing, if we don't know what something means in the Torah, why something happened.. Q: .. then what? A: And then its easier *to know what happened* and you can, like, know the Bible better.	
Non-literal ; Symbolic	Q: Which interpretation was purposely exaggerated? A: That he [Abram] only just realised that his wife was beautiful. Q: Why did the rabbis purposely exaggerate? A: to show that they were both very modest, and that we should be modest.	Quiz, 6/7/04
	Q: What do we learn from Abraham and the flag? A: Others should follow. Listen to God even if you don't really want to.	Class comment, 13/7/04
	Q: Abraham was made	Class comment, 14/7/04

	great like what? Made great so therefore-? A: Therefore the Jews can point to Abraham and say that that is what Judaism is.	
	Q: What did we learn from *He made him great like the flag on the mast of a ship*? A: That the Jews can look up and say that Abraham resembles the Jewish nation.	Quiz, 14th July, '04.
	Q: What did we learn from *He gave him a real trial*? A: Abraham knew what he was doing and he was willingly participating.	
	Tick-box statement: *midrash is complex or deep (has deep ideas in it)* Response choice: *sometimes.* "Sometimes you have to take it literally and sometimes not."	Post-test questionnaire.
	Q: Do you think midrash is meant for little kids? A: No, because you have	Post-test interview.

	to think deep and sometimes non-literally. Q: How about symbolism? Did we have any of that? A: Yes. With the flag and saying that Abraham is, like, the flag on a ship. so Jews could say, 'that's what our nation is like. We are great.' Q: Great in what way? A: Is that we have faith in God. Q: So, does the symbolic language help us? The use of something like the flag? A: Um, yes, to show how great somebody is. If you say something, um, sometimes you don't really understand. Um, it doesn't seem so great if you say, 'Was that playtime good? Yeah, it was great.' Although it was amazing you can't put it in a better word. You just say that it was good. 'Oh, yeah, it was great' [she says in a flat voice]. Q: Can symbolism confuse us?	Post-test interview

	A: Sometimes it can if you get it into the wrong bits and pieces. Q: What do you mean? A: You use it as something that the rabbi or the midrash is not trying to tell us. Q: Do you think that any of the midrashim in the series had a moral? A: yes. The first one with Abram and Sarai and we should be modest. Q: And was that literal or non-literal, their modesty; or the midrashic description of their modesty? A: Um, it said that 'Now I know that you're beautiful'; so it's kind of you had to think a bit non-literal. Q: Uh, huh, and do you think it was literal or exaggerated when – A: It was exaggerated. [she knew what I was about to ask so she just jumped in!]	 Post-test interview

	Q: Is midrash supposed to be simple to understand? A: Sometimes. Sometimes you have to take it literally and sometimes you don't.	Post-test interview
Narrative	Q: What is the midrash trying to explain by creating a conversation between the Satan and God? A: To explain why God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac.	Quiz, 9th July, 2004
	Q: In what way are the aggadic stories in the midrash useful to us? A: Aggadic stories: ..explain something that is not clear in the Torah.	Quiz, 12/7/04
	Q: Give 2 interpretations from the midrash on who caused the *akeidah*. A: The argument between God and Satan. Satan said that Abraham never ever sacrificed anything to God and God says that he only does things for his son and he would sacrifice his own	

	son.	
	The argument between Isaac and Ishmael, where Ishmael says that he didn't make a fuss about having a circumcision at 13 and Isaac says that he [Ishmael] only sacrificed one part on his body to God, Isaac would sacrifice his whole body to God.	
	Q: What makes the midrash add a little story to the beginning of the *akeidah*? A: To let us understand why the *akeidah* took place.	h.w. Unit 2.
	Q: How does the midrash connect itself to the part of the Torah that it speaks about? A: Let's say with the *akeidah*. No-one actually knows why it happened, so it explained why it happened and said the 'things' had said before, and so they use it *that* hint,	Post-test interview.

	to make something ..	
Parables	Q: Who is the parallel to the owner of the Garden? A: God.	Class comment, 14/7/04
	Q: Which was the most enjoyable lesson of the series? A: The one between Cain and Abel, I liked because .. I liked how they tried to explain it with a story [parable] .. it was a nice idea of looking at it [a nice way of looking at it].. how they explained it or interpreted it.	Post-test interview.
Complexity	Q: What was the most interesting part of the midrash series? A: ..I could think deep.	Post-test questionnaire
	Tick-box statement: *midrash is not very deep.* Response: *sometimes.* "Sometimes you just look at the top layer."	Post-test questionnaire
	Q: Do you think midrash is meant for little kids? A: No, because You have to think deep and	Post-test Interview.

	sometimes non-literally.	
	Q: Can you think of a midrash that explains things on different levels ? A: The *akeidah*, that it explains what *these things* were, and why the *akeidah* happened. Q: What technique did that midrash use? A: They used, kind of thing, hints from the Bible to make something. Q: What about the hints? A: They made like an idea or a story to make up what could have happened or might have happened.	Post-test Interview
	Q: What makes .. midrash complex? A: You have to think deep about why things don't make sense. [she meant in the midrash. She told me in the interview that the symbolism midrash didn't 'make sense' at first] Q: Give me an example of a midrash that looks simple at first but then it	h.w. #2

	turns out to be complex and deep. A: The one where .. inner and outer layers of the babushka [matrushka]. The conversations in the midrash. The one with the babushka when we talked about the inner and outer layers.	
	Q: Tell me about the conversations.[*akeidah*] A: I liked how they took the hints from what the Bible was saying, and kind of introduced it in, like a, maybe a jealousy kind of way or a 'showing-offy' kind of way or in an encouraging kind of way.	Post-test interview
Rashi Quotes Midrash?	Q: Does Rashi sometimes quote midrash? A: Yes	Post-test interview
	Q: Do you think Rashi quotes midrash? A: Yes.	Post-test questionnaire