



## Dr. Michael Chernick

is Deutsch Professor of Jewish Jurisprudence and Social Justice at HUC-JIR in New York. He specializes in Talmudic and halakhic literature and his publications include *A Great Voice that Did Not Cease: The Growth of the Rabbinic Canon and Its Interpretation* and *Essential Papers on the Talmud*.

Chernick not only analyzes and illustrates these hermeneutical methods in great detail. He highlights the significant changes that occurred in rabbinic legal hermeneutics from the tannaitic through post-amoraic strata of rabbinic literature – some 500 years at least – as well as the persistence and continuity of rabbinic hermeneutical interests as evidenced through such changes.

Of particular significance is Chernick's connecting of those changes in hermeneutical practice to changing rabbinic views about the level of the revelatory status of non-Pentateuchal parts of the Hebrew Bible and of rabbinic legal discourse as they developed during the formative rabbinic period. Indeed, Chernick's study draws its title from the Torah's portrayal of the Sinaitic revelation, when God spoke to the assembled people with "a great voice that did not cease" (*kol gadol ve-lo yasaf* – Deut 5:19). This view, Chernick believes, is at the core of rabbinic Judaism – the Judaism that claims to hear that "great voice" through the medium of interpretation, a notion imaginatively illustrated on the dust jacket in the painting "Harim" by artist Miriam Stern.

The Pentateuch's description of the Sinaitic revelation speaks of how God communicated with the Israelite community. As Deuteronomy 5:19 portrays the event, God spoke to the assembled people with a "*kol gadol ve-lo yasaf*." This phrase does not yield easily to translation. Recent attempts have suggested that it means that God revealed "those words – those and no more...with a mighty voice." The "words," of course, refer to the famous "Ten Pronouncements," better known as the Ten Commandments. Traditional

Jewish *targumim* (Aramaic translations) and commentaries did not accept this translation or understanding of the verse. The standard *targum*, traditionally called *Targum Onqelos*, translates the phrase as *kal rav vela pesak*, "a great voice that did not cease," and the so-called *Targum Yonatan* translates it the same way. Rashi, the famous eleventh-century Bible and Talmud commentator, follows the *targumim*, though he adds a comment and provides an alternative thought. His comment is revealing. He writes, "And we translate 'and it did not cease' for God's Voice was strong and it exists forever..."

This study proceeds from the views expressed by the *targumim* and in the first part of Rashi's comment. As I understand those views, they propose that the Sinaitic revela-

tion was produced by a voice that spoke at that moment and did not cease to speak to the Jewish people throughout history. This view, I believe, is at the core of rabbinic Judaism, the Judaism that interpreted and claimed to hear that voice through the medium of interpretation. This study will take us even further than that claim. It seems that at certain points in time the canon that starts with the Pentateuch seems to grow and extend, or to put it in a formulation attributed to R. Elazar b. Azariah, "The words of the Torah are fruitful and multiply." Our study proposes that each extension views the next canonical text as part of the divine revelation, as part of the "great voice did not cease."

In order to trace the development of the ideas stated above, this work focuses on sev-

## Mediating Modernity: Challenges and Trends in the Jewish Encounter with the Modern World

Essays in Honor of Michael A. Meyer, Wayne State University Press, 2008

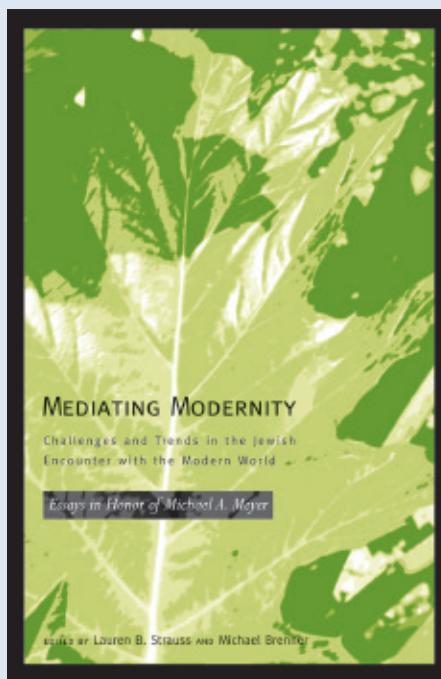
In *Mediating Modernity*, contemporary Jewish scholars pay tribute to Michael A. Meyer, scholar of German-Jewish history and the history of Reform Judaism, with a collection of essays that highlight growing diversity within the discipline of Jewish studies. The occasion of Meyer's seventieth birthday served as motivation for his colleagues Lauren B. Strauss and Michael Brenner to compile this volume, with essays by twenty-four leading academics, representing institutions in five countries.

*Mediating Modernity* is introduced by an overview of modern Jewish historiography, largely drawing on Meyer's work in that field, delineating important connections



between the writing of history and the environment in which it is written. Meyer's own areas of specialization are reflected in essays on Moses Mendelssohn, German-Jewish historiography, the religious and social practices of German Jews,

Reform Judaism, and various Jewish communities in America. The volume's field of inquiry is broadened by essays that deal with gender issues, literary analysis, and the historical relationship of Israel and the Palestinians. Contributors include David Ellenson, who offers an essay on "Michael A. Meyer and His Vision of Reform Judaism and the Reform Rabbinate: A Lifetime of Devotion and Concern."



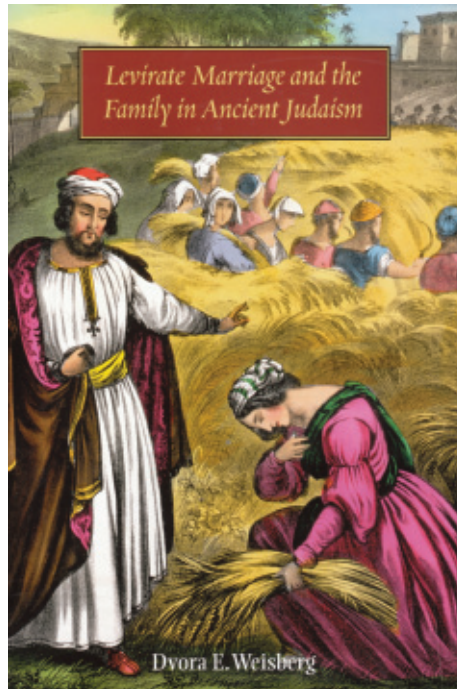
eral examples of rabbinic hermeneutics, which in this study are methodologies of interpretation applied by the Rabbis to the texts they regarded as scriptural. In rabbinic praxis, hermeneutics and *midrash* go hand in hand. The first generally produces the second. *Midrash* is by definition a form of interpretation of Scripture that goes beyond the text's most obvious meaning. Indeed, the Hebrew root of the word (d-r-s) means "to seek, to search," and clearly one need not search for that which is obvious and immediately accessible. This study, then, is on one level a standard academic rabbinics exploration of six interpretational methods: "even though there is no proof for this matter, there is a proof-text for it" (*af`al pi she-en r'ayah la-davar, zekher la-davar*), "the resolution of two contradictory verses" (*shenei ketuvim ha-makhishim zeh et zeh*), "transfer of the rules of one pentateuchal rubric to another" (*im'eino inyan*), "two verses that teach a single principle" (*shenei ketuvim ein melamedim*), "two restrictions" (*tere mi'utei*), and "these scriptural passages are necessary" (*tzerikhi*).

Consistent with that type of study, we analyze developments in the form, logic, and results of the interpretational methods under analysis. If there is chronological development, we chart it and try to account for it. Though this aspect of the study is mainly directed toward those in the field of historical-critical rabbinics, I have tried to make it accessible to those who are interested in the history of biblical interpretation, the development of rabbinic Judaism, or early rabbinic Jewish theology, all of which are also among the major concerns of this study.

In analyzing these *midrashic* methods, this work attempts to chart the interface between the rabbinic view of revelation and rabbinic *midrash*. I posit that because the *tannaim* connected the issue of revelation and canonicity primarily to the text of the Pentateuch, that text was almost the exclusive source for their *halakhic midrash*. Similarly, I hold that because the early *amoraim* extended equal canonical authority to the entire *TaNakh*, they applied *halakhic midrash* to the entire scriptural canon. Finally, because the late *amoraim* and *Babylonian Talmud's* redactors viewed rabbinic corpora

as divine revelation, they applied *midrashic* methods *mishnayyot* and *baraitot* as well. Since, however, their tannaitic and amoraic forbears' legacy was for them equivalent to Sinaitic *Torah*, their interpretations no longer extended the borders of *halakhah* but only maintained them.

As Martin Jaffee has proposed, the idea of Oral *Torah* was hardly existent in the tannaitic period, but it grew into a more defined ideology because of the requirement in amoraic rabbinic circles that a student study under a teacher in order to become a recognized *Torah* scholar. I would now add to this view that by the end of the period of the formation of the *Babylonian Talmud*, Oral *Torah* came to mean the entire legacy of those Rabbis whose views tradition had preserved. This rabbinic legacy, along with Scripture, was deemed to have been revealed by God and therefore to be canonical and, ironically enough given the later rabbinic emphasis on Oral *Torah*, "scriptural." ■



### Levirate Marriage and the Family in Ancient Judaism

Dvora E. Weisberg, University Press of New England, 2008

In this study, Weisberg uses levirate marriage (an institution that involves the union of a man and the widow of his childless brother) as described in biblical law and explicated in

rabbinic Judaism as a lens to examine the status of women and attitudes toward marriage, sexuality, and reproduction in early Jewish society. With her discussion rooted in rabbinic sources and commentary, Weisberg explores kinship structure and descent, the relationship between a family unit created through levirate marriage and the extended family, and the roles of individuals within the family. She also considers the position of women, asking whether it is through marriage or the bearing of children that a woman becomes part of her husband's family, and to what degree a married woman remains part of her natal family. She argues that rabbinic responses to levirate suggest that a family is an evolving entity, one that can preserve itself through realignment and redefinition.

To understand the constantly changing nature of families, just flip through a photo album. Begin by opening the album to a wedding picture. Captured on the page is a newly married couple, surrounded by parents and siblings. Before the wedding, the parents of the couple, together with their respective children, constituted two separate families. Now, those family units have been altered; each, according to our understanding, has gained a member. Moreover, the two original families' relationship to each other has been transformed; once unrelated, they are now each other's "in-laws."

If we turn the pages forward to the couple's twentieth anniversary, we will see more changes. The couple now has children. Brothers and sisters have married and may also have children. Grandparents, aunts, and uncles who were present at the wedding have died. Young relatives of the couple have grown up.

It is not uncommon today to hear people lament changes in the family. Families, they claim, are not as close as they used to be. Families are also seen as increasingly unstable, owing to rising rates of divorce and remarriage. In addition, definitions of family are being challenged by an increase in same-sex couples, blended families, open adoption, and couples living together for extended periods of time without marrying. But as our photo album demonstrates, the family is by its very nature a constantly changing entity. Individual families change, swelled by marriage,