"ABOVE ALL, THERE'S OUR HUMANITY"

Teachers' intertextual responses to reading an ancient Hebrew text

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Abstract

This study examines the role played by intertextual connections suggested by teachers engaged in an interpretive dialogue on a sixth-century Hebrew text. This is a multiple-case study based on intertextual conversation research. The participants—26 Hebrew-as-L1 teachers in secular schools in Israel—were asked to study the text in *havruta*, a traditional Jewish approach to studying sacred texts, involving a dyad of learners who debate their meanings. Every *havruta* conversation was considered a case and was compared to the others. After the conversations, interviews were conducted with some of the teachers to learn more about the intertextual links that emerged. The findings suggested significant variance in the number and content of intertextual connections between the groups, given the teachers' religiosity or previous experience with traditional Jewish texts. The connections suggested shaped the processing of the text, the teachers' attitudes thereto, and their willingness to teach it. The main conclusion is that studying in multicultural *havruta* groups increases intertextual connections emerge and helps teachers to interpret the text.

Keywords: intertextual connections, *havruta*, L1 teachers, ancient Hebrew text, Jewish religiosity, multiple-case study

1.   INTRODUCTION

Readers' first encounter with a text and its meaning for them lie in the merger that emerges between the text and their identity (Gadamer, 1976, 1986). In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer (1996) wrote: "Understanding is to be thought less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated" (p. 290). The reader's often-unconscious cultural context or prior history—to which Gadamer refers as "fore-meaning" or "preconceptions"—always play a role.

Specifically, Gadamer (1996) addresses the "awakening" role of the hermeneutic study of ancient texts. Ancient texts can offer a norm or a view that challenge the present or can help readers become aware of the patterns or the limitation of their cultural horizons. In the hermeneutic encounter with texts, and with ancient traditional texts in particular, the readers' prejudices are placed "at risk": they are provoked and made a visible so they might eventually be revisited. Ancient texts thus have the potential to reveal to and prompt readers to examine their own preconceptions and to help them distinguish between productive, unproductive or counterproductive preconceptions (Holzer, 2017).

The participants in this study were asked to read ancient texts in dyads or triads, in the Jewish traditional *havruta* approach. In this type of learning, a triangular discourse is formed between each of the participants and the text, and between the two (or more) participants. This article presents the intertextual connections suggested in *havruta* encounters between Israeli Hebrew-as-L1 teachers of varying religiosity and examines their dialogue and interpretation processes based on these connections.

1.1 Intertextuality and reading

The concept "intertextuality" has been variously defined by researchers from different paradigms (Allen, 2000). The sources of the term may be found in Bakhtin's philosophy, adapted and elaborated by Julia Kristeva (1980), who coined the term *intertextualité* as a comprehensive semiotic cultural phenomenon. Faced with any "text", be it any cultural phenomenon, our experience is influenced by previous encounters with it, which have imprinted our consciousness with a related "text". Every cultural presentation, argues Kristeva, conceals an endless potential of juxtapositions that are realized by the reader.

Intertextuality and reading may be examined from several perspectives. The structuralist approach narrows intertextuality down to the spheres of literature and art. Genette (1997), for example, created a methical system for discussing intertextual phenomena in the literary context from the perspective of structuralist poetics. Ben-Porat (2003; Ben-Porat et al., 2001) classified intertextual phenomena from a similar perspective, limiting her discussion to cases of "rhetorical intertextuality"—literary works deliberately intended to relate to previous texts, by

way of such literary devices as allusion or parody, which assume the reader's familiarity with the earlier text.

Semiotic, poststructuralist and postmodernist approaches, on the other hand, view intertextuality in its broad cultural context. Barthes (1977) reminds his readers of the etymology of the word "text"—a fabric or woven cloth. Weaving and a network of connections are fundamental to the idea of text. The contemporary author does not "create" an original fabric but weaves it using the "threads" of what has already been written and read: "The intertextual […] it itself being a text between of another text, […] The citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet *already read*: they are quotations without inverted commas (p. 160). Therefore, intertextuality is essential in order to delve deeply into the meaning of texts, but no consistent textual meaning is possible, as intertextuality essentially prevents it. Barthes' radical poststructuralism questions the very possibility of a literary discussion of any kind, since everything has already been written, and meaning is meaningless as all meanings are completely subjective.

As opposed to the focus of literary scholars on the author, the anxiety of influence (Bloom, 1973), or the text as an object of poetic and hermeneutic study, as experts on teacher training, we seek to restore intertextuality to its theoretical origins in Bakhtin (1981). This approach focuses on the dialogue between readers, following their reading, and the dialogue between readers and texts, which represents their social identities, cultural worlds and memories (Elkad-Lehman, 2005, 2011).

Intertextuality is unique in that it expands the bounds of interpretation of the text beyond the reader to a space that is in the movement between texts: "The act of reading […] plunges us into a network of textual relations. To interpret a text, to discover its meaning, or meanings, is to trace those relations. Reading thus becomes a process of moving between texts" (Allen, 2000, p. 1). Bloom and Hong (2013) define intertextuality as "the juxtaposition of two or more texts" in a reading process (p. 1).

Reading creates a three-dimensional space between the addresser (the narrator of a story or author of a written text), the addressee (the listener or reader) and the text. In this space, the linear succession of words creates an endless mosaic of juxtapositions. The texts being encountered are associated with others known from the past, making one's reading "intertextual". The reader's personal experience, knowledge, and ideology are all texts, creating a network. In the dynamic movement between texts, readers construct their own reading. The meaning of a text will be constructed by the work of each reader who positions the texts next to each other, and weave them into a personal meaning. Reading is a dynamic process in which readers are called upon to make an intellectual, cultural and emotional effort (Elkad-Lehman, 2005; Elkad-Lehman & Greensfeld, 2011).

Texts express "echoing" of the social context as an ongoing process. The text does not represent a steady, permanent meaning; it represents conflicts regarding the meanings of words and symbols. Hence the importance of the author and reader's

social context for the process of constructing the meaning of the text. Both the relationships between the words and the social context enter into the reading process, filtering through the echo provided in the readers' consciousness in the intertextual contact between the texts held in their mind and the new texts they encounter (Kristeva, 1980).

Importantly, intertextuality is socially constructed: "the juxtaposition of a text lies not in its nature per se, but in the social interaction of people using the text" (Bloome & Hong, 2013, p. 4). Dialogic interaction between culturally diverse readers is the headstone of interpretation. This is consistent with Bakhtin's (1981) perceptions of dialogue and with the focus on culture and context-dependent intertextual reading (Elkad-Lehman & Greensfeld, 2011) that construct heteroglossic interpretations (Bloome & Hong, 2013).

1.2 Havruta learning

The educational setting involves various intertextual tasks: reading, writing book reports or reviews, comparison between texts, creative writing following certain genre (Pantaleo, 2006), adaptation of a text to another modality (Booker, 2017; Sinyard, 2013), integration of sources, and dialogic practices such as *havruta*. *Havruta is* a classic and historically cherished collaborative practice of studying the Talmudic text, in which two students engage in debating its meaning "while intellectually juggling a host of other interpretations given to the same section, whether recorded in a given page or not" (Blum-Kulka et al., 2002, p. 1571). *Havruta* involves three interrelationships: between each of the learners (teachers, in this case), and between them and the text (Raider-Roth & Holzer, 2009). The text has a voice of its own as a third interlocutor. In the hermeneutical model of *havruta* learning, a relational epistemology operates at the heart of text study, as learning depends not only on the content that is encountered but also on the nature of the threefold dialogue conducted by the students: with their *havruta* partner and with the text (Holzer & Kent, 2013).

Although *havruta* learning is usually conducted in pairs, it often includes three or four students, but no more. The challenge created due to increasing the number of participants is obliging everyone to take part in the conversation. Since three or more partners mean that one or more participants would remain inactive, two is considered the ideal.

Studies on *havruta* (e.g., Holzer & Kent, 2013; Teomim-Ben Menachem & Holzer, 2023; Teomim-Ben Menachem & Livnat, 2018, 2021) point to academic, social and emotional benefits of this type of learning for the development of discourse skills and argumentative ability. Another study, which addresses learning that includes discourse about a text, found that the subjectivity of reading emerged from the idiosyncratic circle only during the reader's discourse with other readers, and that through discourse with a text, the reader gives weight to their world, personality and culture and constructs the meaning that emerges from the text through the dialogue

with the other (Schrijvers et al., 2019). In Jewish culture, *havruta* is traditionally associated with the study of the Talmud, the central text of post-biblical rabbinic Judaism and the main source of Jewish religious law.

In this study, the teachers studied shortly about the characteristics of the *havruta* method before studying the Jewish legend (see Appendix A). The study examined intertextual connections raised during the *havruta* learning—note that the teachers were not asked to suggest intertextual connections—they did so spontaneously. We find *havruta* to be an ideal platform for intertextual reflection, since in this learning approach, the learners—in this case, the teachers—interact with the text, with what they know and remember, and with each other. *Havruta* introduces another reader to the reader-text interaction, making for a discourse that is essentially intertextual in itself—at least two perspectives on the text, two different identities relating to it. Finally, the statements of the teachers studying in *havruta* enable us researchers to trace their thought processes, each with oneself and one with the other.

1.3 Challenges in learning ancient Hebrew texts

In a previous study, we found that teachers in secular schools had four main difficulties with processing the ancient text: (a) linguistic difficulties—many unfamiliar words that are differ from modern in terms of grammar, syntax as well as lexical items and meanings; (b) structural difficulties—the structure does not always mention the personal pronoun, the subject of the verb, saying for example "said to them," or "said to him" without telling us who talked to whom; (c) lack of prior knowledge needed to understand the text, such as historical and biblical or geographic knowledge; and (d) lack of identification with the characters (Teomim-Ben Menachem & Elkad-Lehman, 2022). Due to its considerable complexity, significant effort must be invested to understand all the meanings and nuances of the text's language, structure, content and logic, and learning in a *havruta* can help cope with those challenges.

Another difficulty currently arising in the study of ancient texts, including Jewish scriptures, has to do with the cancel culture, which is opposed to the teaching of ancient texts as they are unsuitable to present-day realities. Thus, texts that describe the oppression of women or members or certain races, or where their feelings are described by writers who do not belong to these groups, are inappropriate because they are outdated and do not represent advanced moral values. The U.S., for example, has recently seen arguments about ancient works that should be studied in school, including the demand to remove classical works for offending certain population (a prime example being Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*). Others argue that students can learn from every text, so long as it is examined critically (Brugman, 2016), and that avoiding the teaching of ancient text is a loss to the students' cultural capital (Thomas et al., 2019). Jewish scriptures and classical texts can also be perceived as racist and otherwise inconsistent with progressive values since they often include statements against women (Weiss, 2008) or against

non-Jews, which is also true of the text under study. Accordingly, in the present study we also examine whether learning in *havruta* that include teachers of diverse religiosities and raising intertextual connections while interpreting the text can moderate the resistance to it and prevent it from being "cancelled".

1.4 Research context

Israeli society is ethnonationally, religiously and culturally diverse, a diversity mirrored in segregated Arab and Jewish education systems (Levin & Baratz, 2021; Poyas & Elkad-Lehman, 2020). The latter is further subdivided into religious and secular schools. This study includes Jewish teachers employed in the Jewish education system, but only in secular schools. The religiosity of teachers in these schools varies, and includes secular, religious, and traditional[1] teachers.

In the Hebrew language curriculum of secular Jewish elementary schools (Ministry of Education, 2003), texts from Jewish scriptures represent 10% of all texts taught. Teachers may choose texts out of a list of suggested reading. The rationale for teaching these texts is part of a general cultural-linguistic worldview that considered the reading of ancient Jewish scriptures an important contribution to the study of Hebrew and to the students' cultural capital. Nevertheless, despite the direction to teach those texts, the Hebrew-as-L1 curriculum hardly addresses their methods of teaching.

This study is part of a broader research project on the teaching of ancient Hebrew scriptures in the education system. Here, we examine the contribution of intertextual connections arising spontaneously during the dialogue with the text to its interpretation, attitudes towards it, and the teachers' desire to teach it. The present study addresses the following questions: (1) What intertextual connections do teachers of diverse Jewish religiosities raise when encountering the ancient Hebrew text in a *havruta* setting? (2) What is the role of these connections in the learning process?

2. METHOD

This study is a multiple case study, an approach in which the researchers recognize what concept or idea binds the cases together. All *havruta* groups were characterized by different combinations of teachers in terms of their religiosity and prior experience in teaching Jewish traditional texts, and hence by different interactions between the teachers and the text, and diverse intertextual connections (Stake, 2006). We used a multiple case study to examine how the phenomenon of intertextuality in all those cases was reflected, in order to obtain the best possible explanation of the role of intertextual connections in the learning process.

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[1] *Traditionalism is a dialogic position regarding tradition, which maintains a favorable attitude towards faith but is selective in observance of the commandments (Yadgar, 2012).*

2.1 Participants and procedure

The sample included 26 specialist Hebrew teachers (all women) who were also Hebrew-language teacher instructors in elementary schools, having specialized in teaching Hebrew in teacher training courses. All participants were employed in the Jewish secular education system in Israel. They attended in-service meetings once a week where teaching ancient Jewish texts was one of the main topics.

   The first author met with three different groups of teachers via Zoom (due to COVID-19) for three hours each. At the beginning of the session, the teachers completed a personal background questionnaire that included items on their age, education, professional experience, religion and religiosity, and familiarity with Jewish scriptures. Next, they studied briefly about the *havruta* method and its pragmatic advantages (Teomim-Ben Menachem & Holzer, 2023), after which they were divided into Zoom rooms and studied the selected text together. The participants were asked to record their conversations. The teachers were not instructed in any way on how to learn in *havruta* or what to be mindful of when reading the text.

   Next, all participants reconvened and discussed their *havruta* experiences in the rooms. They were then asked to send the recordings to the first authors, to teach the text in their classes, and to send the authors their lesson plans and reflections. Finally, individual semi-structured in-depth interviews were held with ten participants who had agreed to delve deeper into their *havruta* conversations. In the interview, the teachers were asked to reflect on the intertextual links that arose, as well as on their thoughts and feelings, dilemmas and challenges in reading the ancient text.

2.2 Instruments

The instruments used in this study included 24 questionnaires; 11 *havruta* conversations (30 to 40 minutes each) about an ancient Hebrew text that were audiotaped and transcribed; and ten elicitation interviews to provide thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of their *havruta* conversation. This use of three instruments enabled triangulation.

   The analysis of the questionnaires suggested that the teachers were aged 33 to 64, highly educated (mostly at M.A. level), and experienced (*M* = 20 years in teaching). They varied, however, in terms of their social identity and religiosity: in a personal detail questionnaire, 15 defined themselves as secular, seven defined themselves as religious, three defined themselves as traditional, and one defined herself as "mixed" (a little bit of each).[2]

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[2] *Note that the researchers also differ in their religiosity: Teomim Ben-Menachem self-identifies as a religious Jew, whereas Elkad-Lehman is secular.*

The teachers' encounter with Jewish texts was highly diverse: 11 read very little, five read "not so much", four read every week, four read all the time, and two did not respond (see Table 1). All those who stated they read very little defined themselves as secular. Out of those reading frequently (all the time or every week), only one defined herself as secular (she had an M.A. in Jewish Studies). Out of the five who read "not so much", two were traditional, one was secular, and one was "mixed"). The types of texts encountered by the participants varied as well: the Bible (19 participants); Chazal (rabbinical writings from 250 BCE to 625 CE; eight participants); Jewish history (4); Halacha (Jewish law) and traditional customs (5); and not at all (3).

The participants studied the text in 11 *havruta* groups, eight of which included two participants, two included three, and one included four. The latter, larger groups were formed because of the participants' preference. In eight out of these *havruta* groups, at least one participant had a religious identity or previous background in Judaism; in three, all were secular. The teachers were asked to teach the text in their class and send the authors their lesson plans and reflections on the lessons—a third of the participating teachers did. All participants gave their informed consent and were represented using pseudonyms and without identifying details.

2.3 The text

The legend (*Aggadah*) studied by the participants was originally written in Aramaic and dated approximately to the sixth century CE (Hirshman, 2016). It had been selected by five out of six education experts asked to review three texts and assess them regarding the following questions: Are the values presented in the text relevant to our time? Does the text consciously reflect classic ways of Jewish thinking (Rosenak, 2015)? Does the text present a conflict between values that could stimulate a discourse or even disagreement? Does the text call for linguistic, structural and/or conceptual analysis?

Table 1. Participants' frequency of reading Jewish texts by religiosity

Reading Frequency Religiosity	Constantly	Every Week	Not So Much	Seldom
Religious	4	2	1	-
Traditional	-	1	2	-
Secular	-	1	1	11
"Mixed"	-	-	1	-
Total	4	4	5	11

The legend is about Rabbi Eleazar ben Shammua, who lived in the Galilee in the second century. It narrates an event that occurred at a time when the Roman Empire ruled the Land of Israel. A Roman, a survivor of a ship that went down at sea, came ashore naked and destitute and asked for help from Jews who happened to be

making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The pilgrims refused to help him. The survivor turned to one of them, who according to his dress appeared the most distinguished—Rabbi Eleazar—who agreed to help him. At the end of the story, the survivor, who was eventually appointed emperor, sought to take revenge on the Jews for refusing to help him, but remembered Rabbi Eleazar's kindness and rescinded the decree thanks to him. The legend calls for a discussion of the value of helping a stranger in distress and raises a dilemma: should one give succor to an enemy? Note that this story has an interesting hypotext—the story about Odysseus's last destination of in his ten-year journey before returning home (Homer, Odyssey, Book VIII). Note also that the *Aggadah* is unfamiliar to most teachers because it is not included in the Hebrew language curriculum.

2.4 Data analysis

The analysis of the *havruta* conversations was unique to this study and did not follow Stake's method. Rather, it relied on assumptions and knowledge from the field of conversation analysis (Hutchby & Wooffitt 1998), and on the constant comparison method, based on the principles of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Our analysis included the following stages. First, the two authors read the transcripts several times and indicated the intertextual connections that emerged. Second, we counted these connections, as well as the turns of every connection, to determine whether the conversation about each was short (one turn or mention) or long (more than two turns, enabling elaboration of the related concept). Third, we identified intertextual connections related to Jewish sources, such as Biblical, Chazalic, Halachic, or general sources (prose, current affairs, general knowledge). Next, we identified the speakers' religiosity and previous experience in reading ancient Hebrew texts based on the questionnaire. Finally, out of the entire corpus, we used conversation analytic tools to identify "thick" connections (Geertz, 1973) which elaborated on the concept in question, in order to learn about the role of the intertextual connections in the process of interpreting the text and their potential role in increasing reader engagement. The conversation analytic tools included examination of agreements or disagreements and characterization of disagreements such as: counterargument, grounded disagreement (see Example 1 below; Teomim-Ben Menachem & Livnat, 2018). In addition, we checked speaker engagement in terms of length and exchange of turns (see Example 4).

3.   RESULTS

During their *havruta* conversations, the participants spontaneously suggested various intertextual connections to both Jewish sources (Biblical, Chazalic, and Halachic sources, as well as concepts and proverbs), and general sources (current affairs, general knowledge, and prose). Glaringly missing was the obvious connection

to Homer, but this is perhaps not surprising given that Homeric texts are not part of the required curriculum in the Israeli education system.

The findings are summarized in Table 2 below. It presents the participating *havruta* groups, the self-reported religiosity of each participant, the number of intertextual connections suggested in each conversation, divided into Jewish and general sources, and the number of turns of each connection. Since the number of participants in each *havruta* was not identical (it ranged from two to four), the average number of connections per each participant was entered in a separate column; this figure equals all connections made (both Jewish and general) divided by the number of teachers in the *havruta*. In the last column, we entered the total number of turns related to both Jewish and general connections.

In general, the number of connections to sources of both kinds in *havruta* groups that included one religious teacher (with greater experience in learning Jewish scriptures) was higher, and they involved longer turns. In *havruta* groups where both participants were secular (with less or no experience with Jewish scriptures), there were fewer intertextual connections, and those made involved fewer turns (usually one). We also found that the number of connections to general sources was higher than connections to Jewish sources (72 vs. 60, respectively), but that connections to the latter involved more turns (215 vs. 198, respectively). The number of connections per participant ranged from two to eight, with an average of five to six in *havruta* groups with one religious' teacher, compared to two to three in those without religious teachers.

Table 2 enables to compare the various conversations in terms of the number of turns including intertextual references. This number ranges widely between 114 and 4. Note that the higher the number of speech turns about each connection, the longer the conversation time. For example, Revital and Orna (in the first row) have six connections to Jewish sources, in 28 turns, and four connections to general sources, in 40 turns, for a total of 68 turns. This suggests that they spent more time discussing general connections compared to Jewish ones, despite the higher number of the latter.

In what follows, we present five examples from the conversation in detail. These exemplify intertextual connections including more than four turns, thus allowing not only to present the connection but also elaborate on it. Additional considerations in selecting the examples are connections that have recurred in other conversations; unique connections shedding light on the text and contributing to the teachers' engagement with it; and conversely, connections that have obstructed the interpretation of the text and reduced that engagement, and in turn, the willingness to subsequently teach it.

Table 2. Intertextual connections and number of turns by religiosity

	Pseudonym	Religiosity	Jewish Sources	Jewish Sources: Turns	General Sources	General Sources: Turns	Total Connections	Connections per Teacher	Total Turns
1	Revital Orna	Traditional Secular	6	28	4	40	10	5	68
2	Nava Vered	Secular (Judaism background) Secular	6	30	3	7	9	4	37
3	Tamar Ruth Ayelet	Religious Religious Secular	7	23	12	39	19	6.333	62
4	Merav Nili	Secular Religious	2	2	2	30	4	2	32
5	Rinat Sarah Efrat Leah	"Mixed" Religious Ultra-Orthodox	23	95	11	19	32	8	114
6	Ora Moran	Religious Secular	9	30	7 Nudity*	14	16	8	44
7	Shiri Dana Maayan	Secular Secular Secular	0	0	6 Nudity* Meta-linguistic (-)	6	6	3	6
8	Rotem Lilach	Secular Traditional	2	2	2	2	4	2	4
9	Natalie Einat	Secular Secular	1	1	4 Nudity* (-)	11	6	3	12
10	Bareket Chen	Secular Secular	2	2	7 Sexual abuse* (-)	8	9	4.5	10
11	Shir Nurit	Secular Traditional	2	2	14	22	16	8	24
Total			60	215	72	198	132	132/26 = 5.076	413

Notes: (-) indicates misunderstanding; *These connections are indicated using words because they are misleading; see more on that below.

3.1 Example 1: "Peace is made among the people": The jewish legend of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza

The connection to the Jewish legend of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza[3] was made in three conversations, all of which included at least one religious teacher. The number of turns varied across the *havruta* conversations (5, 12, 16). In what follows, we present excerpts from two of the longer conversations.

1. Sarah (Religious (R): Look, I'm now looking at the story of Rabbi Eleazar Ben Shamua thanks to whom […] the Jews were saved. And if we look at the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza, which because of their disrespect […] for each other the Jewish people were doomed.

2. Leah (R): Destruction, true.

3. Sarah: Destruction.

4. Rinat ("Mixed"): So maybe some of the ideas here, not only giving and human dignity and humanism, but that truly, perhaps peace is made among the people, among the simpletons and not up there, among the politicians […].

5. Sarah: True. It's senseless hatred [sinat chinam], yes.

6. Rinat: And perhaps here it was precisely the good and humane deed between two simpletons that later saved our people from that calamity.

7. Leah: But Rabbi Eleazar is no simpleton, he's one of the leaders.

8. Efrat (R): He's no simpleton, he's a leader […].

9. Rinat: Yes […] but he's one of the people. He's not part of the government.

In this example, Sarah compares the text on Rabbi Eleazar Ben Shamua to the Chazalic legend about Kamtza and Bar Kamtza. She juxtaposes the two texts by way of contradiction. In the first, helping the Roman survivor eventually saved the Jewish people, whereas in the latter, "because of their disrespect […] the Jewish people were doomed" (Sarah, turn 1). In response to this comparison, Rinat (turn 4) says that perhaps the two texts together teach us that "peace is made among the people, among the simpletons and not up there, among the politicians", thereby connecting the text with present-day Israeli society. In turn 6, Rinat once again emphasizes the contribution of humane acts by simpletons, thereby perhaps suggesting that we should identify with the simple and humane act in the text. But at this point, Leah and Efrat (turns 7, 8) raise counterarguments, suggesting that Rabbi Eleazar is "one of the leaders", to which Rinat (turn 10) replies with grounded disagreement

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[3] *A Talmudic legend (Gitin, 55b) about the public humiliation of one Jew by the other, resulting eventually in the destruction of the Temple.*

characteristic of *havruta* conversations between women (Teomim-Ben Menachem & Livnat, 2018): "he's one of the people. He's not part of the government" (9).

The insights and disagreement in this conversation begin with the juxtaposition of the two texts. The idea starts from peace or its lack between two human beings that prevents or causes destruction, leading to the insights that it is the simple people that can make peace. The interlocutors come from diverse cultural backgrounds. Sarah (religious) suggests the second text and Rinat ("mixed") highlights the power of the simple people. It appears that Rinat expresses the desire to make the text more relevant to the teachers (and perhaps their students as well) by empowering the simpletons and their contribution to a better world. While elaborating on the comparison, Rinat uses words that are relevant to the current political reality in Israel, such as politicians, people, territories (turn 8 in Example 2). The text about Rabbi Eleazar and the survivor can thus contribute, in her view, to the personal empowerment of learners and help convey the educational message that we can all promote peace. Rinat's interlocutors do not quickly agree with her about this message and emphasize that the help was provided after all by a distinguished spiritual leader. Later on, in this conversation, Sarah suggests a connection to another Jewish source.

3.2 Example 2: "My creatures are drowning in the sea": The crossing of the Red Sea

Directly after the comparison with the legend about Kamtza and Bar Kamtza, comes this example, that relates to the legend about the Biblical Song of the Sea (Exodus 15) that was read in the synagogues that week. Moses sang that song after the Crossing of the Red Sea, in which the Egyptians drowned, and the Children of Israel made good their escape. According to the legend, God rebuked the Children of Israel for singing his praises while their enemies were drowning at sea, since all human beings were His creatures and the death of none should be cause for joy. This unique example was selected because the academic connection to the weekly Torah portion (*parasha*) read at the synagogue was exemplary of a typical Jewish tendency to related "naturally" to the weekly text. The following are excerpts from the conversation, related to the issue of the survivor's nudity:

1. Sarah: I just wanted to tell that […] in Jewish philosophy these things are very strongly related. We have just now read the Torah portion Beshalach, the Song of the Sea. And the legend reads: "My creatures are drowning in the sea, and you sing my praises?"

2. Leah: True.

3. Sarah: I mean, the Almighty tells the people, you are all the Creator's creatures, so…

4. Rinat: […] so how do you make the connection here? […]

5. Sarah: It means everyone is God's creature. So when I see a person who is such, he is actually made in God's image, so certainly I must let him cover himself. […]

6. Rinat: Yes. So this actually means that above all, there's our humanity, and all our petty accounts come later.

7. Leah: True.

8. Rinat: Only then do you have the territories and the nations.

For Sarah and Efrat, it highlights what they perceive as the Jewish view that one must respect everyone, including the enemy, since all humans are God's creatures. Rinat, who appears not to know the source, tries to understand: "so how do you make the connection here?" (turn 4). After Sarah's explanation (turn 5), she rephrases what she has learned from her friend: "above all, there's our humanity" (turn 6), and immediately afterwards she once again makes the connection to the present political situation "Only then do you have the territories and the nations" (turn 8).

Here, too, the attempt is made to connect the text to present-day realities and emphasize the responsibility each of us has for the other. The disagreement in the previous conversation, regarding whether helping the enemy is the responsibility of the leader or of the simple people now fades away thanks to the additional intertextual connection, resulting in the (implicit) insight that everyone is responsible for making peace. In making that connection, Rinat reinforces her ideological position according to which peace is the responsibility of us all.

Note that the conversation in this *havruta* (presented in Examples 1 and 2) was characterized by rapid turn-taking and high involvement of the participants in the conversation. Also, it included three religious participants, which explains the multiple connections to other Jewish sources.

3.3 Example 3: The discoverer of penicillin

The *havruta* study also raised connections to general literary, historical and geographical texts. The following unique connection is made to the story of Alexander Fleming, who discovered penicillin. The story of the discovery is presented in the following conversation:

1. Nurit (Traditional). […] It's like the story […] you have those stories on the internet of people who do good and it comes back to them, the story of the discoverer of penicillin. […]

2. Shir (Secular (S)). The what?

3. Nurit: […] He was a doctor, and his father saved some nobleman…, and the father of the one who discovered penicillin was a poor farmer… He passed by and saw a nobleman's chariot wronging so he jumped in himself […] risked his life and saved him. Now, the man told him, "What can I do for you? You saved my life!" So he told him, "Nothing, I did it for heaven's sake". Now he realized that he was poor, and… inquired about his identity and origins, and eventually found out that he has a son, an only son, and he secretly […] paid for that child's tuition. Eventually, that child became a scientist and he was the one who discovered penicillin. The circle finally closed when that nobleman once got to a hospital as an elderly man, and that guy saved him.

4. Shir: The value is in the giving.

5. Nurit: Exactly… I think that the first thing that can engage children here, like it happened to me automatically, when I immediately came up with that story […]. Where do we see giving not for the sake of receiving? And where does it meet us, where do we see it?

6. Shir: No, you can start […] by asking whether, if you saw someone on the street that you didn't' know and he asked you for help, and you know you would never get anything in return from him, would you help him?

7. Nurit: Ok, right.

Reding the text spontaneously leads Nurit to think about the discoverer of penicillin (turn 5). Fleming's story suggests parallels to the text under study: in both cases there is help without expectation of return, and in both the doer of the favor is eventually rewarded. The intertextuality here emphasizes the message of giving without return, helping the teachers think of ways to bring the issue closer to the child's world. The comparison to a text that is not a Jewish scripture and is familiar to the children from previous studies in Hebrew lessons can contribute to the engagement with the ancient Hebrew text despite the effort invested by the reader (Teomim-Ben Menachem & Elkad-Lehman, 2022).

3.4 Example 4: The Hippocratic Oath

The Hippocratic Oath was mentioned in two different *havruta* groups, one of which is discussed below. When studying about Rabbi Eleazar and the survivor, Vered and Nava came to think about the Hippocratic Oath, and later on in their conversation they wondered whether it was a religious commandment, or a normative commitment. as follows:

1. Nava (S, with Judaism background): […] in this case it's about helping, doesn't matter whom, you help him because he needed help.

2. Vered (S): […] it also reminds me of the Hippocratic Oath [in Hebrew, the Physician's Oath]. […] it's like when there's a terrorist attack and the there's a wounded terrorist, the doctors must also tend to the injured terrorist.

3. Nava: Right.

4. Vered: And it doesn't matter what he did. That's their duty.

5. Nava: Right.

6. Vered: Is it a commandment? Or is it a commitment?

7. Nava: […] I believe Maimonides wrote the Jewish Physician's Oath, it is also from our sources and all the physicians in the world use this thing, when in fact […] it kind of relies on our sources. It's obvious to us today that whoever is sick, no matter what his origin, whoever is injured, no matter what and why […] must be healed and treated regardless […] without condemning him. It's not our job to condemn those people, it's… heaven's job.

8. Vered: The court system, yes.

9.   Nava: The court system or God's. Depends how you look at it, OK?

10. Vered: Yes.

Nava has academic background in Judaism, and she is the one explaining the text to Vered. After Vered understands, and as she has attested about herself (in previous turns) that she is a "good student", she makes the association with the Hippocratic Oath, in the context that doctors must help every person, including enemies. She then immediately offers a present-day example: "it's like when there's a terrorist attack and the there's a wounded terrorist, the doctors must also tend […] (turn 2), And it doesn't matter what he did" (turn 4). In response, Nava says, "I believe Maimonides wrote the Hippocratic Oath, it is also from our sources" (turn 7), and in doing so, emphasizes precisely the Jewish sources.[4] Vered's mention of the intertextual source of the Hippocratic Oath and Nava's confirmation of the comparison bring Vered closer to the text and encourage her to play a more active conversational role in studying a text foreign to her. In the following turns, Vered explains her conclusions from the text in her own words, and becomes a more engaged partner, taking longer turns (whereas until that stage, the lengthy turns were mainly Nava's).

During the conversation, Nava uses Jewish terms such as *olam haba* ("world to come") and "in the hands of heaven". Vered does not understand these terms and she tries to "translate" them into words that fit her worldview. Thus, after Nava says, "whoever is injured, no matter what and why must be healed and treated regardless […] without condemning him. It's not our job to condemn those people, it's… heaven's job" (turn 7), Vered responds with another term, saying "the court system" (turn 8). Thus, they both agree on the basic idea, but use different terms consistent with their worldviews. Clearly, their different experience in studying Jewish sources leads them to use different terminologies, since, as suggested in the Introduction, each reader relies on their own knowledge world, culture and emotions (Elkad-Lehman, 2005; Elkad-Lehman & Greensfeld, 2011).

During the conversations, quite a few connections were made to recent events involving helping a stranger or an enemy, particularly in the Israeli political context. These included vaccinating Palestinians for COVID-19, a soldier helping a Palestinian child, a Jewish nurse feeding an Arab baby, helping Syrian refugees with medical supplies, and cases of inappropriate behavior associated with the reaction of the pilgrims in the legend, such as an Arab guy attacked after stumbling on a demonstration of ultra-Orthodox Jews, or "religious people who behave disrespectfully and tarnish the reputation of an entire group".

A second type of intertextual connections relevant to the Israeli day-to-day had to do with school life. For example, welcoming a new child into class, including and

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[4] *The Hippocratic Oath is traditionally attributed to Hippocrates. It was probably written between the fifth and third centuries BC. The Jewish tradition includes several versions of oaths or prayers said by physicians. Their authors include Asaph the Jews (Assaf HaRofe) and Maimonides.*

accepting all students in a class of "Muslims, Christians, and Armenians", and helping a fellow student even if you are not his friend. In one conversation, the text was associated with a school principal who helps asylum seekers in his school.

In three *havruta* groups, all teachers were secular and inexperienced in learning ancient Hebrew texts. In all, the text was associated with sexual abuse, harassment, or nudity as an issue—intertextual connections that generated resistance to the text and claims that it was irrelevant.

3.5 Example 5: Misleading of alienating intertextual connections

In the following example, nudity, which traditionally represents poverty, misery or a person lacking social status or religion or any identity (like animals), is accepted at face value and infuriates the participants.

1. Natalie (S): […] this story is inappropriate for the 21st century. You get it? You thought about a pedophile, I thought about someone who ran away from a mental institution. […]

2. Einat (S): All right but […] if I for example […] present a hypothetical situation for a child, OK? You're now on a boat, the boat has washed away to sea and now you have no clothes, what will you do? Will you go out of the water? […] Will you save yourself? […] So what would the child say? I don't know. I mean… Obviously, I'll save myself, but in any case, I'll look for something to…

3. Natalie: Cover myself.

4. Einat: I'll take […] maybe some flotsam from the water, I'll take something.

5. Natalie: Like in the movies—a leaf. A big one that covers.

6. Einat: A leaf. I mean […] couldn't he find anything to cover himself with?

In this conversation, nudity is perceived as attesting to the survivor's insanity (turn 1), and this misunderstanding leads to resistance to the text and to its cancellation ("cancel culture"). The teachers' expectations that the survivor find something to cover his body (turn 2) also suggests a misguided interpretation. In turn 5, Natalie suggests a "big leaf", thereby associating the text with a film probably shot in a tropical zone, where such a leaf may be found, as opposed to the Mediterranean coast of the legend. In the interview, Natalie explained why she found the text unsuitable for teaching:

> I did not relate to the text… To find someone naked… What do children need this for? Especially when adapting this to the little ones. Even the six-graders, God forbid. We're talking this year about sex education, and they're fainting. Try talking to them about someone naked. Inappropriate…

As mentioned, the nudity association was raised in two additional conversations among secular teachers.

4. DISCUSSION

This study examines the intertextual connections arising in the course of studying an ancient text in *havruta* and the processing of the reading emerging out of the connections suggested. When comparing the ancient text to current situations laden with power relations such as helping Palestinians with COVID-19 vaccinations, extending assistance to enemy countries, and providing medical treatment to terrorists, the helplessness of the Roman survivor in the legend and the rabbi's willingness to help him generate stories from the participants' personal temporal "horizons". Thus, in terms of Gadamer's (1996) theory, despite the differences between the ancient Jewish text and contemporary Jewish-Israeli culture, the ancient text produces an awakening, helping its readers reveal and reflect on their preconceptions and interpret the text in alignment with contemporary realities.

In response to the first research question, which intertextual connections are raised by teachers of diverse Jewish religiosities in their encounter with the ancient Hebrew text in a *havruta*, we demonstrated a variety of connections. These include connections to Jewish sources (Examples 1 & 2); connections to current affairs (the political situation in Israel, providing vaccines to the enemy), as well as connections to other general texts (Examples 3 & 4).

The intertextual connections suggested by the participating teachers were similar in their moral values. They helped them connect to the characters and associate the text. Regarding the teachers' religiosity and previous knowledge, we showed how, in the *havruta* groups where at least one teacher had a religious identity or previous experience in studying Jewish scriptures, the number of intertextual connections raised and turns involved in each were higher. We also showed that when their previous experience differed, this forced teachers to explain their connections, and thereby translate, interpret, or transform them into a new conceptual world leading to in-depth discourse and contributing to the knowledge of both interlocutors.

In response to the second research question, regarding the role of intertextual connections suggested by the teachers in the learning process, most of them brought the text closer to the participants, created interest and contributed to the processing of the text (Elkad-Lehman, 2005).

Juxtaposing two texts also strengthened the interaction between the readers (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993), as evidenced by the rapid turn-taking in the conversation, as well as by the number of turns around the intertextual connections, attesting to high interest and engagement (Sacks, 1987, 1992; Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). Thus, the intertextual connections facilitated a shared language among the teachers and between them and the text. Given its dialogical nature, intertextuality is always heteroglossic. It generates a new position towards texts: they are conceived in a dialogic process, in a historical context (its linguistic and cultural treasures), open to diverse and multivocal interpretations, and hermeneutically fluid. An interplay is created between meanings, voices and cultural understandings (Bloome & Hong, 2013).

In recent years, the status of ancient texts, and particularly Jewish traditional ones, has been in steep decline. In response to this concern, various committees have been established in Israel to suggest various ways to bring them closer to both teachers and students. Studying ancient Hebrew texts in *havruta* groups made up of teachers of different religiosities, as well as encouraging the teachers to suggest intertextual connections can contribute to that purpose by making the teachers more engaged in learning and teaching these texts. Although this is not the main focus or purpose of the present article, we believe that an intertextual approach to studying the traditional text may contribute to cancelling the cancel culture approach to the supposedly obsolete text. This finding supports Kristeva's (1968, 1980) claim that every text echoes the social context of its readers, and that the social text is essential for understanding the meaning of the text.

Note, however, that several groups also suggested misleading or alienating connections, such as associating the survivor's nudity with pedophilia or mental illness (Example 5). These connections made the characters seem alien, and increased the teachers' resistance to the text and made them feel that it was inappropriate for their students. The teachers focused on the reference to nudity per se, rather than as suggesting the character's need for help. This in turn diverted the focus from the conflict raised by the text—whether it is appropriate to help one's enemy—to another conflict—whether it is appropriate to teach the text to today's students. In these cases, the processing of the text was disrupted. Thus, the study indicates that the presence of participants of different identities, opinions or prior experience in learning ancient texts can help familiarize them with the ancient text and stimulate a conversation about it with high participant engagement.

4.1 Implications for research and practice

The study indicates that intertextual connections contribute to the processing of ancient texts. These connections help familiarize the participants with the texts, making the encounter with texts from a historically, socially and linguistically foreign world "friendlier". We therefore recommend cultivating teachers' intertextual thinking.

One way of doing so is to study in small and diverse groups and encourage teachers to suggest connections between the ancient and contemporary texts. In addition, learning the text with teachers with different identities before teaching it can help diversify the teachers' approaches to it. In this process, teachers raise a variety of intertextual connections, thereby expanding the discourse about the text and adding interest to the learning process. Note that this recommendation is inconsistent with the current structure of the Israeli education system, which segregates students of different ethnoreligious identities. Deliberate efforts to overcome that segregation by bringing teachers of diverse religiosities to study ancient text together can contribute to their familiarization and help create a

common educational language that can address present-day challenges in teaching those texts.

Intertextual connections may also encourage the teachers to offer a norm or a view that challenge the text by relating it to present-day issues and texts. According to Gadamer (1996), the hermeneutic study of ancient texts, involving intertextual connections, leads readers to examine their own preconceptions and revisit the way they relate to their society and culture. This way, the horizons of both teachers and students expand, enabling them to distinguish between productive and counterproductive preconceptions and accordingly, to decide what they can preserve from the ancient text and what they would rather reject (Holzer, 2017).

> No man is an island entire of itself; every man
>
> is a piece of the continent, a part of the main
>
> (John Donne)

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APPENDIX A: ECCLESIASTES RABBAH CHAPTER XI:1[5]

Rabbi Eleazar ben Shammua was walking by the sea, when he saw a ship, which was tossed about in the water, suddenly sink with all on board. He noticed a man sitting on a plank of the ship [carried] from wave to wave until he stepped ashore.

Being naked, he hid himself by the sea.

It happened to be the time for the Israelites to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the festival. He said to them, "I belong to the descendants of Esau, your brother; give me a little clothing wherewith to cover my nakedness because the sea stripped me bare and nothing was saved with me".

They retorted, "So may all your people be stripped bare!"

He raised his eyes and saw Rabbi Eleazar who was walking among them; he exclaimed, "I observe that you are an old and respected man of your people, and you know the respect due to your fellow creatures. So help me, and give me a garment wherewith to cover my nakedness because the sea stripped me bare".

Rabbi Eleazar ben Shammua was wearing seven robes; he took one off and gave it to him. He also led him to his house, provided him with food and drink, gave him two hundred *dinars*, drove him fourteen leagues, and treated him with great honor until he brought him to his home.

Sometime later the wicked emperor died, and this man was appointed king in his stead, and he decreed concerning that province that all the men were to be killed and all the women taken as spoil.

They said to Rabbi Eleazar ben Shammua, "Go and intercede for us".

He told them "You know that this government does nothing without being paid".

They said to him, "Here are four thousand *dinars*; take them and go and intercede for us".

He took them and went and stood by the gate of the royal palace. He said to [the guards] "Go, tell the king that a Jew is standing at the gate, and wishes to greet the king".

The king ordered him to be brought in. On beholding him the king descended from his throne and prostrated himself before him.

He asked him, "What is my master's business here, and why has my master troubled to come her?"

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[5] *Midrash Rabbah, Ecclesiastes, translated by A. Cohen, London: The Soncino Press, 1983. The attached text is based on Cohen's translation, with slight adaptations to make it more accessible to contemporary Hebrew readers.*

He replied, "That you should have mercy upon this province and annul this decree".

The king asked him, "Is there any falsehood written in the Torah"?

"No", was the reply; and he said to him, "Is it not written in your Torah, 'An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the assembly of the Lord (Deut. 23:4)?

What is the reason? Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way'" (Deut. 23:5).

It is also written, 'Thou shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is thy brother' (Deut. 23:8); and am I not a descendant of Esau, your brother, but they did not show me compassion! And whoever transgresses the *Torah* incurs the penalty of death".

Rabbi Eleazar ben Shammua replied to him, "Although they are guilty towards you, forgive them and have mercy upon them".

He said to him, "You know that this government does nothing without being paid".

He told him, "I have with me four thousand dinars; take them and have mercy upon the people".

He said to him, "These four thousand dinars are presented to you in exchange for the two hundred which you gave me, and the whole province will be spared for your sake in return for the food and drink with which you provided me.

Go also into my treasury and take seventy robes of honor in return for the robe you gave me, and go in peace to your people whom I forgive for your sake".

They applied to him the text, "Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days" (Ecclesiastes 11:1).